

"Battle with the Amalekites"

Exodus 17:8-16

Baxter Exum (#977)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
July 6, 2008

Four Lakes Church of Christ



Introduction:

This morning I would like for us to study a passage from the Old Testament that contains a number of "firsts." It is a rather dramatic passage, as it includes the very first battle that was ever fought by the nation of Israel. It also contains the very first reference to a young man by the name of Joshua. It describes the first real organized conflict with the Amalekites, an enemy of God's people for many, many years. And in a rather interesting little piece of bonus information, the passage we are about to consider this morning also contains the very first reference to writing, as Moses is commanded to write down what happens on this occasion—and so it is also the first reference to the writing of Scripture...in Scripture!

The passage is found in **Exodus 17**. **»PPT»** I would encourage you to turn with me there. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on page 116. By way of background, we should try to remember that the Israelites had just been freed from more than 400 years of slavery in Egypt. They had crossed over the Red Sea on dry ground, they had seen the bodies of the Egyptian soldiers wash up on the seashore, they had been fed with manna from heaven, and in the first part of **Exodus 17** they had been given water from the rock.

And so this morning as we look together at what is written by Moses in the second half **Exodus 17**, I would like for us to consider several ideas that will hopefully be able to change the way that we think and live—even today. If you will, please look with me at **Exodus 17:8-16**...

- 8 Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim.***
- 9 So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."***
- 10 Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.***
- 11 So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed.***
- 12 But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set.***
- 13 So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.***

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.

¹⁵ Moses built an altar and named it The LORD is My Banner;

¹⁶ and he said, "The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation."

And again, as we look back at this paragraph of Scripture, I would like for us to answer the question, **"So what?"** Or in other words: **Why did God tell Moses to write this down for our benefit close to 3,500 years later?**

I. One of the first things we notice is that Israel was facing A PRESSING CONCERN. They were facing A VERY REAL ENEMY. »PPT»

And again, as we look back at the first half of this chapter, we find that God had just provided these people water from the rock. They were out there in the wilderness—somewhere between 2-3 million people—they were thirsty, and God provided water from the rock. So they were incredibly blessed. Things were going well, but right after this incredible blessing, we find that they are challenged by the Amalekites.

From looking at the Scriptures, we find that God's people have had a long history with the Amalekites. We are not told everything here in this passage, but as Moses is getting ready to die, he looks back on his life, and he gives us a few more details about what happened with the Amalekites that led up to the battle here in **Exodus 17**. The passage is found in **Deuteronomy 25:17-19**. Looking back on his life, this is what Moses said, ***"Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget."***

And so we find that the Amalekites would sneak up behind God's people—they would "pick off" those who were old and tired—they would not attack from the front, but they would come in from behind. They would sneak up from the back. The key is found in **verse 18**, where we find that the Amalekites ***"...did not fear God."*** They had no respect for God, and so they did not care for God's people. They were brutal—they did not fight fair.

We know from the Scriptures that the Amalekites were descendants of Esau. It seems that Jacob and Esau were always fighting, and apparently the rivalry continued through the generations. You might remember many years later how God told King Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites. The account is found in **1 Samuel 15**. Apparently not long after Saul is made king, the prophet Samuel came with a message—in the opening words of **1 Samuel 15**, ***"Then Samuel said to Saul, 'The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now***

therefore, listen to the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."

After the battle was over, we remember Samuel is upset that Saul did not obey. Saul said, **"I have carried out the command of the Lord,"** but Samuel replied, **"What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"** Saul had saved some of the spoils of war and had disobeyed God's direct command to kill everything. And for this reason, God rejected Saul as king, which eventually led to David taking over. The Amalekites were serious enemies and were not to be messed with.

Even later, we find in the book of Esther that the Israelites were being harassed and threatened by a man named Haman. Haman was a descendant of Esau. And so once again, the Amalekites were abusing the people of God.

We come back to the question, **"So what?"** What do we learn from this? We learn that God's people had enemies. We learn that God's people continue to have enemies! God's people will always have enemies! We live in a world where our faith is under attack. The weak and the stragglers are being picked off from behind—even today! All of us as Christians have a common enemy. We are in a common struggle. The ongoing battle is summarized by Paul in **Ephesians 6:12**, **"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."**

Sometimes Satan will attack straight on, but more often he comes in from behind. He picks us off from the rear. He goes after those who are struggling with their faith. He gets us in a moment of weakness. He comes in when we are tired and stressed out. He gets us when we are overwhelmed with our finances. He gets us when we are lonely. He works on us just a little bit at a time. We slack off in our daily study of God's word. We do not pray as often as we used to. We start missing the assemblies with God's people. And before we know it, we have fallen—we have been picked off from behind!

First of all, then, we learn from **Exodus 17** that just like God's people from many years ago, we also face an enemy, and we need to be aware that the threat is very real. We need to be ready for it.

II. As we look back at what happened with the Amalekites, we also notice, however, that WE DO NOT FIGHT ALONE. »PPT»

In **verse 9**, we find the first reference to Joshua in the entire Bible. Moses picks Joshua to go round up some men to fight the Amalekites. But Moses does not just delegate—Moses heads up to a place where he can watch the battle. He goes up with Aaron and Hur, and as they are up there, they discover that when Moses lifts up his

hands holding the staff of God, the Israelites win, but when he lowers his hands they start to lose. When it finally clicks, Aaron and Hur get Moses set up on a rock, and they support his hands. And so just as Joshua did not fight alone, so also Moses did not hold his hands up alone. His arms got tired, and so Aaron and Hur were able to help him do what needed to be done.

Back in elementary school, I remember those exercises where we had to hold our hands straight out and do the little circles and then the big circles, and back and forth—torture! It was so hard! We can hardly imagine holding our hands up all day long.

As Christians, I think most of us can understand what was going on here! Satan attacks us day after day. The stress of living is almost unbearable. The temptations keep on coming. And to make it through the day, we need the support and encouragement of our Christian friends. We need someone to bring in a rock for us to sit on. We need someone to hold up our arms when we are too tired to keep on going.

Earlier this week, I had one chance to check e-mail—literally, only ten minutes when I could rush over to a building on the Reserve that had a wireless network. The way the network was set up, I could only check messages—I could not send anything. But among the hundred or so messages, I saw one from one of our members. It was short, but the message said, **“Just a note today to say I’m praying for you all and hope the camp session goes real well.”** That was about it, but that was exactly what we needed! What an encouragement that was—to be surrounded by mosquitoes, and cold showers, and screaming children—and to know that someone was praying! All of us need that kind of support from time to time, because we cannot face the challenges of life on our own.

And when the support is offered, let us accept it! When the load is too heavy to bear alone, we should allow others to step in and help. Today, the temptation is to think, **“No, my problem is too private—this is something that I can handle on my own.”** Or maybe we think to ourselves, **“Sure, I can let someone help me with this situation, but it would take more time for me to teach them what needs to be done than it would to just do it on my own.”** Or maybe we might be tempted to think that by allowing someone to help with some special project that we are giving up some kind of turf—some kind of control. But did you notice that there is no competition here—that there is no rivalry between Moses, and Aaron, and Hur (up on the mountain), and with Joshua (down on the battlefield)? No one’s power is threatened, but these men are working together against a common enemy. And the same is true today: We do not fight alone, but we are to share the load.

This is the purpose of the Lord’s church. As the Bible says in **Hebrews 10:24-25**, ***“...let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”*** One major purpose for coming together on the first day of every week is to encourage one another to keep on keeping on.

Certainly we are reminded of our responsibility a little later in the book of Hebrews as the author says in **Hebrews 12:12-13**, ***"Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed."*** As Christians, we are to lift one another up. We are to strengthen the hands that are weak and strengthen the knees that are feeble. As Paul explained to the elders of the church in Ephesus in **Acts 20:35**, ***"In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"***

We could also consider what Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:2**, ***"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."*** And in a passage that we will be studying soon on Wednesday evening, **Romans 15:1**, ***"Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves."***

Over and over again, the Bible tells us that we are to encourage one another. We are facing a pressing concern. Like the Amalekites, Satan is a very real enemy. And yet as we also learn from **Exodus 17**, we do not fight alone. We are in this together.

III. Before we close, though, there is one more very important idea that I would like for us to consider, and that is, as we face our issues together, GOD IS OUR SPONSOR. ▶PPT▶

We look at this paragraph of Scripture, and we have to ask ourselves the question: What in the world does Moses think he's doing? As I started looking into the research for this morning's lesson, I kept finding sermons on the importance of prayer. But when I compared what people were saying to what is actually found in the Scriptures here, I could not find a single reference to prayer anywhere in this passage! But when we look at **verse 9**, we start to understand what was really going on here. In **verse 9**, we find that Moses went up on the mountain for the purpose of holding the staff of God in his hand.

What was the big deal about the staff of God? Well, the staff was basically just a big stick that Moses used as a shepherd. You might remember, though, that when God called Moses out of Midian to go to Pharaoh, God allowed Moses to do some amazing things with that stick! You might remember that the staff turned into a snake, and then it turned back into a staff.

Several chapters later, we come to **Exodus 9:22-23**, ***"Now the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.' Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all***

the land of Egypt since it became a nation." We see something similar with a number of the other plagues—Moses stretched out his hands toward heaven, and something bad happened to the enemies of God's people! Shortly after that, Moses would lift his staff and the people would walk through the Red Sea on dry ground. And even just a few verses earlier in this chapter, Moses was told to take his staff and strike the rock, and water flowed out of the rock. And so when Moses did something with that stick, something amazing happened.

The staff, therefore, was a symbol of God's power. And when we come to **verse 15**, we make an interesting connection. As Moses built an altar to commemorate this great victory, he named it, **"The Lord is my Banner."** The word banner refers to a standard (basically a flag pole) that would be carried into battle.

From what I have read, ancient armies (before the days of radios and GPS units) would rally around a tall pole, and the standard bearer would lead the army into battle. Apparently, the standard bearer was not armed, and if he were to be injured, someone else would drop their own weapon and would take up the banner. The banner was almost like an advertisement—**"This is who we are! This is who we are fighting for!"**

Right before we left for camp, I went to the very first car race that I have ever seen in my entire life. I am so thankful for Abe Burns, because if Abe had not been with me, I would have had no clue whatsoever about what was going on down there at the races. But one thing I noticed is that the cars all had sponsors. I guess I was rooting for the Culver's car—mainly because I had seen it at Culver's a few weeks ago—a beautiful Toyota Corolla, but also because I thought that if it won it might make my own car feel a little bit better. But those cars all had signs painted on them. I assume that those companies were sponsors for the driver, that they were sponsors for the car, that they provided funding for the work that was being done.

And so perhaps in a similar way, Moses was going up on top of that hill as a way of saying, **"God is our sponsor! This is who we are! And for those of you who have been picking us off from behind, we want you to know exactly who it is who is about to defeat you!"** It is almost as if Moses was saying, **"We are going to beat you with this stick! This is the staff of God."** In my own mind, I picture the raising of the flag over Iwo Jima. The standard continues to be important even now. It is significant to raise a flag. The banner indicates ownership—it indicates a relationship.

And so as we face our problems and situations today, maybe we can remember that God continues to be our sponsor. God is our Banner. He is our owner. And God has promised to be with us.

Conclusion & Invitation:

I hope that this morning's lesson has been some kind of encouragement for us:

- We have learned that (just like the ancient Israelites) we are also facing a pressing concern—almost on a daily basis, we are challenged with sin, and discouragement. Satan is a real enemy, and Satan wants us to fail.
- Secondly, however, we do not fight alone. And just as Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands, so also we have the ability to encourage one another in the church. We face our challenges together.
- And then finally, through it all we are able to say that God is our sponsor. Or as Moses said, the Lord is our banner. We represent the Lord, and the Lord will ultimately be responsible for our victory.

As we close, we would like to explain that God made victory over sin possible by sending His only Son as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Jesus died, He was buried, and He was raised up on the third day. In the same way, we are called by God to die. That is, we are to turn away from all forms of sin. We are to be buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins. And at that point we are then raised up to live a brand new life. If you would like to accept God's offer, you can let us know as we stand and sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org