

Message #32

Exodus 17:8-16

A young lady came home one evening from a date and looked very sad and dejected. Her father saw how sad she looked and asked, "Honey what is the matter, why are you so sad?" The daughter said, "Because the boy I just went out with asked me to marry him." The father said, "Well why are you so sad about that?" She said, "Because I cannot say yes to him because he does not believe in hell." The father thought for a moment and then without thinking said, "Well go ahead and tell him you will eventually marry him because in the next few months you and your mother can convince him there really is a hell." I would not call that great leadership counsel, nor would I call that great Biblical counsel. God's Word specifically says we are not to be unequally yoked.

Moses was a great leader for God. He always presented the straight truth of God's Word. We may recall he never actually wanted to be Israel's leader. He did not apply for the job, God called him into the job and he did exactly what God wanted him to do and told him to do.

Moses was the man God had chosen to lead His people out of Egypt. God did some amazing things with Moses. He performed the plagues with Moses. He parted the Red Sea with Moses. He provided water and manna and then water again using Moses. He led the nation Israel by using Moses.

Now one of the problems Israel had was that she was always upset with Moses. People would murmur and complain against him and all he was doing was telling them the truth of God and leading them in the ways of God.

Now the people had not quite realized just how powerful a man Moses was in regard to God and them. They did not realize how much they needed Moses. But they were about to learn that and God would teach them this in a conflict with Amalek. The lesson Israel would learn was this point:

GOD LED ISRAEL INTO A CONFLICT WITH AN ENEMY TO SHOW HER THAT HE WILL GIVE VICTORY TO HIS PEOPLE, BUT HIS VICTORY DOES NOT COME WITHOUT THE PRESENCE OF HIS CHOSEN LEADER.

Israel needed to learn a lesson. We get victory as long as Moses is with us; but if he is not with us, we lose. God wanted His people to understand that He will give His people victory, but they need His chosen leader to have that victory. Without God's appointed leader, they could not have the complete victory they needed.

Now there are eight historical realities brought out:

REALITY #1 – Amalek came to fight against Israel at Rephidim. **17:8**

Now let's think about this move of Amalek for a moment. According to Josephus, the name of the Hebrews was "everywhere renowned" and all people were becoming afraid (*The Complete Works of Josephus*, p. 67). Word had spread about what God did to the Egyptians, so this is not one of Amalek's brighter moves. In all reality, God is sovereign over this move of Amalek because He is about to teach Israel an important lesson. So as threatening and as ridiculous as this move seems to be, God is still sovereign.

Nothing in our life including negative, hostile warfare is apart from God's sovereign purposes and plans. God is always on His throne and He is always overseeing everything that is happening. We may be threatened in every way, but God is still sovereign.

Now we aren't sure what caused this move of Amalek. We do know that Amalek was the grandson of Esau (Gen. 36:12). There was always a struggle between Jacob and Esau. The rivalry between Jacob and Esau that began clear back in the mid part of the book of Genesis apparently eventually escalated to an all-out war here in Exodus.

Now the Amalekites had formed themselves into a nomadic group that made a living in part by attacking other people and looting them (Judges 3:13). They were like land pirates. They were specifically known for their use of camels in their attacks. They trained camels and used them to intimidate their enemies (Judges 6:3-5; 7:12; I Sam. 15:3). In a short distance, a camel can run up to 45 miles an hour and outrun a horse and they can also travel a great distance without water. They can cross wilderness areas and deserts, which makes it possible for attacks and getaways.

Now typically they lived in the northern desert region of the Sinai Peninsula. Rephidim was located deep in the south, not too far from Mt. Sinai. So the Amalekites are far from home and probably thought this will be an easy picking.

REALITY #2 – Moses commands Joshua to choose men to go fight the Amalekites. **17:9a**

Now clearly the will of God here is to fight. Moses did not say let's just love these Amalekites because they are confused. He did not say let's just be kind to them and win them over to our side. What he said was we are going to fight. God, at times, expects His people to fight.

This is the first time Joshua appears in Exodus. In fact, this is the first time Joshua shows up in the Bible. He was younger than Moses and apparently had good military leadership skills. It is clear from Exodus 33:11 that Joshua became very special to Moses.

Now the challenge that Moses gives Joshua is that he needs to choose some good fighting men. This is not a challenge to keep numbers small, it is a challenge to find men who can fight and are not afraid to fight. Apparently Joshua had just a few hours to find these guys because the fight, according to Moses, was to take place "tomorrow."

There are some men you want at your side when you go to war because you know these are men who will fight. They will stand for what is right and fight for what is right. They are not cowardly. They have a warrior spirit to them. Joshua's job was to find those men who could fight and would fight.

REALITY #3 – Moses would position himself on top of a hill with the staff of God in his hand. **17:9b**

We may assume that Moses is following the leading of God in this. He never just took this staff and started doing magic tricks. God had obviously directed Moses in this first Israelite warfare issue.

This information presented a couple of key points to Joshua. First, you need me overseeing this; second, we need the power of God to win this. This “staff” was one that God had done some great things with and He could in this war.

REALITY #4 – Moses oversees the battle between Israel and the Amalekites. **17:10-11**

Now we are not sure which hill Moses ascended because there are many hills in the Rephidim area; but Moses went to the top of some key hill along with Aaron and Hur. Now this is the first mention of this man named “Hur.”

Josephus claims this is the husband of Miriam (*Ibid.*, p. 68). The inspired Scriptures do not say that, but it is possible. Either this is Josephus speculating about his identity or it was some Jewish tradition.

But according to **verse 10**, Joshua brought the fighting men together down in the valley and Moses and Aaron and Hur were on top of the hill. By being on top of this hill, not only could Joshua see them, but the entire nation could see them too.

We do not want to go into any battle without the blessings and presence of God, because without that the end is certain failure.

According to **verse 11**, when Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and when Moses lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. **Now the point of this is as long as the staff of God was held up high, there was victory, but when the staff of God was lowered, there was defeat.**

I think there is a great principle here for us. As long as the Word of God is held up high, which Word elevates God, there will be victory; but when the Word of God is lowered there will be defeat.

REALITY #5 – Moses hands were heavy and he could not hold up the staff. **17:12**

Moses is a man over 80-years-old and he could not hold up his hands forever. Any human being knows this point. You cannot possibly hold your hands up above your head indefinitely even if you don't have anything in your hands. So Aaron and Hur took a stone and moved it so that Moses could sit down and they propped up his hands until the sun set. What they probably did was each cradle one of his arms by locking their fingers together.

Now it was Moses hands that had to be lifted up. Aaron's hands would not give victory. Hur's hands would not give victory. It had to be the hands of Moses. God was showing these men and the military and the entire nation that you do not have victory without My chosen leader.

REALITY #6 – God gave Joshua and Israel victory over the Amalekites. **17:13**

By the time the sun went down, God had given Israel a total and complete victory over the Amalekites. It is interesting to observe that the text gives military credit to Joshua. This is perfectly consistent with the point of the context. God gives victories but He uses certain people to gain those victories.

Often times a military leader gets credit for victory. Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr., was the four-star general credited with the victory that destroyed the Iraqi Army and liberated Kuwait in 1991. General Douglas MacArthur was the five-star general that was credited with the victory that beat the Japanese in 1945. These men did serve their countries honorably.

But Joshua is named because he is God's general. His victory was due to his connection to God.

REALITY #7 – God commands Moses to write prophetic truth in a book. **17:14**

God wanted truth written and truth communicated to Joshua about the fact that God promises He will utterly wipe out the Amalekites. Now it is clear that Moses is the writer of what God wanted. In fact, C. I. Scofield said this verse proves that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Bible, a point that was never questioned until the 1700's (Exodus 17:14 note, *Moses As Author*, p. 112).

Now there has been a debate over whether or not Moses wrote a specific book containing this data or whether this is referring to what is stated here in the inspired book of Exodus.

The noun "book" is articular in Hebrew, which leads me to conclude this is the inspired written Scripture.

Joshua was going to wear many hats in God's history. He was a leader and a warrior. He was to take in truth about God and one of the things he was responsible to remember was that God prophetically promised in writing that He would utterly destroy the Amalekites.

Joshua himself would die before this happened. It would be Saul and David that would ultimately “decimate Amalek.” They would be the ones who would finish this assignment and fulfill this prophecy.

Now this is a key prediction against a foreign nation. Foreign nations, as they relate to Israel, would be very wise to take a look at this prediction because it did literally come true. When God makes a prophetic prediction about nations, those predictions will come true.

There is a scary prediction that is made near the end of the O.T. about the nations. In Haggai 2:6-9 God predicts that there will be a time in history when He will shake the heavens, earth, sea and dry land and “all the nations” to the point that they will take their wealth to Israel. In that same book God promises to “overthrow the thrones of the kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations” and He will kill all national powers against Israel (Haggai 2:22).

Nations would be very wise to become Israel’s friend, because God promises serious consequences to one who is Israel’s enemy.

REALITY #8 – Moses built an altar to the LORD and named the altar he built. **17:15-16**

Moses was so moved by this victory that he wanted to commemorate it by building something for God. He was the leader through whom God had given victory and he had a heart that wanted to build something as a memorial to God.

He decided to build an altar in a great expression of thanksgiving. Moses decided to name this altar–“Jehovah is my Banner” or “Jehovah is my Signal Pole.” The point is Jehovah is the one who gave this victory.

The signal pole was a statement that God would destroy the Amalekites who waged war with Israel. It would take a couple of generations, but God would do exactly what He promised He would do.

Isn’t it interesting that **verse 16** says, “the LORD will have war.” God’s people need to understand this about God; He is a warrior and He expects His people to be good soldiers in the war He wants fought.