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The Amalekites Came and Attacked the Israelites at Rephidim **17: 8-16**

The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim DIG: Read this section and compare it to First Samuel 15:32-33. God's desire was to completely destroy the Amalekites. Explain Samuel's words: As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women. Read Hebrews 10:5-9, 7:23-25 and First Samuel 14:20-26. King Sha'ul lost his throne and his dynasty because he feared annihilating Amalek's throne. What throne will Messiah and His martyrs inherit, when God establishes His throne?

REFLECT: When and how have you needed your faith propped up? What battle has God won in your life lately? What would you name *your* altar? God is my _____? How hard is it for you to relinquish *every area* of your life to God? What part(s) of your life do you think you are still in control of? What does He think about that (see Revelation 3:15)?

This section is very similar to the previous one. Both are based **at Rephidim** and both involve a great test. **The staff of God** played a significant role and He intervened to save His people in both instances. The major difference was that after leaving **Egypt** the adversity experienced by **the Israelites** had been against an inanimate foe, a lack of food and water. But then **Isra'el** discovered that perhaps there were worse enemies than even hunger and thirst; they were confronted with a human enemy. This was the first battle against a human enemy since their deliverance from bondage.

We learn that **Amalek** declared war on **Isra'el**. But who was **Amalek**? In **Genesis 36:12** we are told that **Amalek** was the son of a man named **Eliphaz**, therefore **Amalek** was the grandson of Esau (**Genesis 36:12**), and the great-grandson of Isaac. Yet in spite of this, his descendants, **the Amalekites, came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim (17:8)**. They were a tribal group living in Sinai and southwest Canaan as early as the patriarchal period (**Genesis 14:7**). Moved by suspicion, jealousy and fear, they were determined to prevent the passage of **the Israelites** through what they perceived to be their territory. So

they opposed the purpose and plan of **God**. Some believe that they were fighting over control of the Kadesh Oasis, a very important caravan center. However, the exact location of the battle is unknown. Probably the most that can be said is that **the Amalekites** attacked **Isra'el** because they felt threatened with regard to their control of oasis and caravan routes.³¹⁸ No doubt they felt they could easily defeat this newly freed slave rabble without supplies or knowledge of the country. For indeed **the Israelites** were an ill-equipped, ill-disciplined and inexperienced mob going out against a well-equipped and experienced foe. But **the Amalekites** did not know the power of **God**.³¹⁹

The manner of **their** attack was a sort of harassing, guerilla warfare against **Isra'el**. **Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind. They had no fear of God (Deuteronomy 25:17-18).** As a result of this sneak attack, **Isra'el** was to counterattack.

We see here for the first time a man named **Joshua**, whose original name was Hoshea (**Numbers 13:6**). Later, **Moses** would change his name from Hoshea, which means *savior*, to **Joshua**, which means *The Lord is salvation*. It is interesting to note that **Joshua** translated from the Greek into English means *Jesus*. **Joshua** became the personal aid to **Moshe (Exodus 24:13, 33:11; Joshua 1:1)**, and would later bring **Isra'el** into the Promised Land of Canaan. One is immediately impressed with the faith and obedience of **Joshua (17:10)**. He was about forty-five years old at the time. Without question or objection **he** organized the relatively untrained and unseasoned soldiers of **Isra'el** and **fought the Amalekites**.

Isra'el did not leave immediately as they had done when they left **Egypt**. At that time, the people merely watched as **God** crushed **their** enemy. But here **they** would defend themselves. Remarkably, there appeared to be no fear of confusion among **the Israelites** in such a crisis. **Moses** calmly ordered **Joshua** son of Nun: **Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in both my hands and raise it up when I pray (17:9)**. The use of the word **tomorrow** reminds us of the plagues of **Egypt (8:10, 8:23, 8:29, 9:5, 9:18, and 10:4)**.

The fact that **God** ordered **His people** to fight **their** enemies on the field of battle has often dismayed the readers of the Bible. Many have charged **God** with being cruel and bloodthirsty, while others have tried to dissociate what they believe to be the wrath of **Ha'Shem** in the TaNaKh from the love **ADONAI** in the B'rit Chadashah. But **ADONAI's** love appears often in the TaNaKh (in **Deuteronomy** and **Hosea**, for example) and **His**

wrath is found often in the B'rit Chadashah (in **Revelation**, for example). The same holy **God** always loves sinners at the same time that **He** always hates their sins. When people persist in rebelling against **Him**, **He** punishes them and if they eventually pass the point of no return, they bring about their own doom and destruction. Willful, unrepentant, sinful conduct - like that of **Amenhotep II** of **Egypt**, for example - always brings divine judgment, whether the agent of the judgment is impersonal (such as during Noah's flood or against Sodom and Gomorrah) or personal (such as during the conquest of Canaan in the book of **Joshua**).

While **God** is **gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love and faithfulness (34:6)**, **He does not leave the guilty unpunished (34:7)**. **He** sometimes uses the battlefield as an arena of judgment against those who, like **the Amalekites**, were persistent in their refusal to fear **Him (Deuteronomy 25:18)**.³²⁰

Moses was so old at this point, that **he** could not physically lead **his people** into battle. But that didn't matter because **prayer** would win the battle. In **his hands Moshe** held **the staff of God**, through which **His** power had brought the plagues of **Egypt** and water from the rock at **Rephidim**. **So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moshe, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill (17:10)**. As in the case of **Joshua** in **verse 9**, here the person of **Hur** is first introduced. **He** would later become an important judicial figure in early **Isra'el (24:14)**. **He** was probably from the tribe of Judah and was the grandfather of Bezalel, the leader in the construction of the Tabernacle (**31:2, 35:30, 38:22**).³²¹ **The rabbis teach that he was either the husband, or the son of Miriam, the sister of Moses.**

The key to the battle lay in the **hands** of **Moshe**. **As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning (17:11)**. While **Moshe's hands** were upheld in intercession, **Isra'el** gained the victory. As usual, **their** help came from above. When in bondage in **Egypt** **they** could have looked over the whole earth and there was not one nation to help **them**. But when **they** looked up and cried out to **God**, **He** delivered **them**. When **they** were trapped by Pharaoh's army at **the Red Sea**, help also came from above. It was the same at Marah, Elim, the Desert of Sin, and it would be the same here **at Rephidim**. **God** was evidently trying to teach **them** the lesson that **He** would have all **His** children learn. In this new life with **Him** we are to depend totally and completely upon **Him** *for everything*.

*When a bitter experience comes to us in this life, go to **God** for comfort. As sweet as human sympathy may be, it is only **God** who can wipe away tears and heal broken hearts. When*

*your soul is faint and hungry, do not seek the safety of anything this world has to offer, but feed upon the true **Bread** from heaven. And when you are thirsty, drink only of **the Living Water**.*³²²



If Isra'el was to defeat **the Amalekites**, **Moshe** needed help. **When Moses' arms grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his arms up - one on one side, and one on the other side - so that his arms remained steady till sunset (17:12).** The basic meaning for the Hebrew word **steady** is *faithful, trustworthy or true*. Normally, it is used in a moral sense and this is the only time in the Bible where it relates to something physical.

So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword (17:13); yet, this was not a victory of total destruction. The verb **overcame** means *to weaken or disable*. There is a play on words between the noun *halas*, and the noun used in **Deuteronomy 25:18** to describe the stragglers who were **weary and worn out**, or *hannehesalim*, being picked off by **the Amalekite army**. Therefore, **Joshua** made *weak and disabled* those who prayed upon the weak and disabled.³²³

With the battle over, we have the remembrance of **Amalek**. **Then ADONAI said to Moses His servant: Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven (17:14).** This is the first mention of writing as related to Scripture and official Hebrew records. **Moshe** evidently kept a diary of **Isra'el's** journey through the desert as implied in **Numbers 33:2**. **Moses' major role in writing the first five books of the Bible is emphasized over and over (Exodus 24:4, 34:27-28; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 28:58, 29:20-21 and 27, 30:10, 31:9, 19 and 22).** **Scrolls** of the kind used by **Moshe** were long, narrow sheets of leather or papyrus on which scribes wrote with pen

(**Isaiah 8:1**) and ink (**Jeremiah 36:18**), sometimes on both sides (**Ezekiel 2:10; Revelation 5:1**). Because **they** were clumsy to read and difficult to store, soon after the time of **Christ** the **scroll** gave way to the book format still used today.³²⁴

Moshe built an altar and called it ADONAI Nissi, or ADONAI is my Banner (17:15). Other altars were built elsewhere in the TaNaKh. For example, Jacob built **an altar** at Shechem and he called it **El Elohe Isra'el**, literally meaning **God, the God of Isra'el (Genesis 33:20)**. These altars were not built for sacrifice, but to remember some event that had happened there. The Hebrew word often translated **banner** is really a standard or signal-pole. In ancient times, it bore an emblem, symbol or **banner** on its top. It was used as a rallying point, and was often placed upon a high **hill** to be seen by all (**Numbers 21:4-9**). It was an object of hope for the people. Therefore, the appearance of **Moses** on **top of the hill** with the staff of **God** in his hand acted much like a **banner**.

Commenting on the reason for **Isra'el's** victory, **Moshe** said: **For my hands, with the power of God in my staff, were lifted up to the throne of the Lord, and ADONAI will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation (17:16)**. Therefore, **the Amalekites** would be a thorn in the side of **Isra'el** for generations to come. One year later, **the Amalekites** joined forces with the Canaanites at Kadesh-Barnea to defeat **the Israelites (Numbers 14:45)**. Balaam would later prophesy: **Amalek was the first among the nations, but he will come to ruin at last (Numbers 24:20)**. **The Amalekites were the first among the nations** to attack **Isra'el** after the deliverance from **Egypt**, and they later subjugated **the Israelites** in the period of the judges (**Judges 3:13, 6:3-6, 7:12**).

Haftarah b'Shallach: Shof'tim (Judges) 4:4-5:31 (A), 5:1-31 (S)
(See the commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah)

Sisra, captain of the army of Canaanite **King Yavin**, oppressed **Isra'el** for **twenty years**. Like **Pharaoh**, he had a huge force of **900 iron chariots (Judges 4:2-3)**. In both cases, **the chariots** bogged down while pursuing **Isra'el** and **the armies panicked (Judges 4:15; Exodus 14:24-25)**. Once again, **ADONAI** gave the marching orders and the entire army was destroyed (**Judges 4:7 and 16; Exodus 14:15 and 28**). What has changed this time is that **the Israelite** army is fighting and the battle takes place in **the Land** of Promise. When the Canaanites were routed, it was **Debrah** and **Barak** who **sang the song** of rejoicing (**Judges 5**). Curiously, **the song** ends with a depiction of **Sisra's mother**. She rationalizes, "Of course! They're collecting and dividing the spoil" (**Judges 5:28-30**). She waits, wistfully confident and completely unaware that **God** has hardened **Sisra, her** Canaanite **son**, for final judgment (**Judges 4:9**).³²⁵

B'rit Chadashah suggested readings for Parashah B'shallach: Luke 2:22-24; Yochanan (John) 6:25-35, 19:31-37; First Corinthians 10:1-13; Second Corinthians 8:1-15 and Revelation 15:1-4

ADONAI, God of heaven's angelic armies, has begun His reign (Revelation 19:6)! The huge crowd without number continues: For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb and His Bride (19:7). The angel of God tells the birds of the air to prepare to gorge themselves on the flesh of kings, generals, important men, horses and riders from all the nations (Revelation 19:18). Once more, ADONAI summons the forces of the deep to serve His purposes. The lake of fire that burns with sulfur engulfs the beast and the false prophet, while the birds gorge on the slain armies that foolishly tried to fight the God of the universe (19:20-21). The Adversary himself, along with all evil, is chained and thrown into the Abyss for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2-3). Martyrs and those who risked their lives will at that time triumph over death. They will rule with Messiah over the nations of the earth in a peaceful theocracy lasting a thousand years. We look forward to the return of King Messiah to establish His peace plan!³²⁶