

Exodus 17:8-16

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, I'd like to just extend my greetings to you. I know that we've moved from the air-conditioned cafeteria back to the non-air-conditioned auditorium, but you're going to make it. You're going to make it. It's good to have you here.
- It was April of last year. I found myself in England, Leicestershire to be more precise, and I was conducting a couple of weeks of seminars with a few other speakers for about 180 pastors on preaching.
- Simon Gathercole, who teaches New Testament at Cambridge, was one of the other presenters as well, and we just had a great week together.
- During one of the afternoons, though, we had a little free time, and I didn't really know what to do in Middle England, but I wanted to do something. And so we rounded up a few other attendees and loaded in a couple of cars and made our way to Naseby Field, the historic battleground of England's first civil war.
- A decisive battle fought in June of 1645 between King Charles and the Royalist Army and those who were testing his kingly supreme authority, an army raised by Parliament itself.
- [1 : 3 9] You might be familiar with the name Cromwell, one of the generals among others. And so we made our way there and walked out literally into the midst of this field where there was an obelisk, which we knew was the monument that marked the spot.
- It was farmland. And when we got there, I noticed that, Turney, we stood on a particular vantage point of the battlefield that was unequaled.
- The field itself was about two miles across, and it placed us on a ridge and then this gentle, grassy slope all the way down, bottoming out like a bowl, and then up again a couple of miles away on the other side.
- And as we stood there, I read the plaque, and then about eight or nine of us who were there, I said, so who can tell me anything more about the battle? A number of the pastors that were there had attended college at Oxford or Cambridge, and some of them had been historians in their undergraduate years.
- And it was very enjoyable for me just to stand and listen as one man began to recount his memory of class and what took place. And then almost seamlessly, he'd go for three or four minutes, and then another one would self-correct him and then carry the story forward.
- [3 : 1 0] And they pointed out all the different areas from which the battle came, and indeed, I stood there mesmerized. For on that day, I then asked, what were the implications of the battle?
- And they said, well, among other things, we could look back to the Magna Carta, which begins to limit kingly authority, but here in 1645, there are the seabeds of what become the American Revolution much later, where people rose and limited the power of the king.
- In our text today, the God of Israel, who has proclaimed himself to be of absolute and eternal rule, has his power tested.

The protagonist there is Amalek, and interestingly, in the original tongue, it just uses his name throughout.

What do we know of Amalek or the Amalekites who would test whether or not the God of Israel has supreme rule in the world?

[4 : 35] Well, we know very little of them. They are mentioned in the book of Genesis, I believe, 14, where they were said to dwell in Kadesh.

Now, we are today in the midst of that Sinai Peninsula. That's where this text takes place, and we're at the lower end of it, and Kadesh is here above it, and evidently they came down, it says, and fought Israel at Rephidim.

And so this Bedouin nomadic peoples, that's about all we could know of them, were in the lower ranges and in the pastures, and had determined that the land would not sustain both Israel in its wilderness wanderings and themselves, and so they took it upon themselves to attack.

The tactics of Amalek are not listed here. It just says they fought with Israel. When I was a child, we had these, I suppose it's politically incorrect, I don't even know if they sell them anymore, these little plastic soldier sets.

And we would line one of them up on one side of the room, and another one on the other side of the room, and just like Naseby Field, you know, straight on, head on battle, and we would roll marbles across the floor to try to knock their men over, and whoever had the last man standing won.

[6 : 19] And it always ended in chaos because we were hiding some of our men behind things that were impenetrable, unless you threw a basketball at it. But that's the way we went.

That's not the tactics here. Do not envision this as some kind of frontal assault, Israel and Amalek.

Deuteronomy, you might take a look there, gives you a little interpretive clue as to their battle plan that would test the sovereign rule of the God of Israel.

Deuteronomy 25, 17 reads this way, Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God.

So the tactics were not to unwind the entire people group. It was to come up from behind, much like Cromwell's men learned how to ensnare the king's army and folding in from the rear guard.

[7 : 38] And so what's really happening is there are a people of God that are in the midst of a wilderness, and they're quite tired, and somebody begins to pick them off from the rear.

So Moses responds. If that's the tactics of Amalek, then you see the strategy of Israel.

Verse 9. So Moses said to Joshua, Choose for us men and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.

The tactics of Israel when the rule of their God is challenged by enemies in the world is twofold. To put men on the field and to put Moses on a hill.

Particularly with his staff, he says, in his hands. So he rises to what must be some kind of adjacent hill there in the vicinity of Mount Sinai, visible over the whole field of battle toward the rear now of all the people's encampment, and they begin to pursue Amalek.

[9 : 02] The staff, indeed, we've already seen, represented the very hand of God. It was, you might say, the visible emblem of the presence and power of God.

It was, simply by way of analogy, it's the ark before the ark. It's the temple before the temple. It's the spirit before we understand the spirit.

And this staff, then, which was raised and parted the Nile, and this staff, which was raised and parted the sea, becomes the visible emblem of the power of God and His rule.

And so then, the strategy is implemented. Verse 10. So Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

Now, this is a wonderful point here because the narrator's voice really begins to take over and it begins to describe the day, a description is given and for the reader, it's almost as if we get a complete bird's eye view of the events.

[10 : 28] Take a look at it. I just want to read it again. Now, this is so, not imaginatively retold, but this retelling kindles the imagination and it takes you to the field itself.

Now, you and I are on an adjacent hill. So, Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

Whenever Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side and the other on the other side, so his hands were steady until the going down of the sun and Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

I mean, it's hard to fire your mind more quickly than those few verses. This is a classic scene. It's all full-out engagement.

It's memorable. The battle twists and turns on the rising and falling of Moses' hands.

[11 : 55] Now, what are we to make of this? Well, the commentators conjecture their way through. Some thinking it could be a sign of, you know, charge, like you're going into the battlefield and, you know, charge, and as long as the charge sign is in the air, we're good, but the lowering of the hands was kind of retreat.

Eh, it's got some strengths, mostly minuses. Some think of it as an oath, that it represents, you know, this kind of magical-like power of curse that's being placed, and as long as the curse is upon Amalek, the good guy wins, but when the curse is no longer in effect, it's because the power's not moving forward.

I mean, Hollywood would do great with that one, I'm sure. Many call it just flat-out intercession, that prayer is what made the difference. They refer to Davidic Psalms like Psalm 63, where the posture of prayer was with the arms raised, and then even references in the New Testament.

It's kind of like, this reminds me of connections in the Bible, where holy men lift up their hands in prayer, and as long as the people or the leaders are praying, then good things happen, but when we stop praying, bad things happen.

All these things are put forward. I'm not voting for any of them. Simply this. The staff, as I've said, is the visual emblem that represents the person, presence, and power of the Lord.

[13 : 45] His hand. It actually becomes, in a sense, a figure of speech. The Lord's right hand is His power. And it was by His right hand or His power that He would lead His people out.

We've seen it that way in the text, and that's why I'm thinking that this is perhaps the way we ought to view it. Just think back to Exodus 3, when Moses was called by God to lead the people out, verses 19 and 20, talks about Him going up.

So it says in verse 20, So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with the wonders. Or you think of it in chapter 7, again, where He stretches out His hand over the Nile with the staff there.

Or you think of it even in this wonderful song. Do you remember just a few weeks ago? Exodus 15. Take a look at verse 6. Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power.

Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy. I mean, this hand imagery is actually the emblematic symbol of the song of salvation. So you'll see it again in verse 9 there at the end.

[15 : 04] I will draw My sword. My hand shall destroy them. Verse 12. You stretched out Your right hand. The earth swallowed them.

Again, this verse 16 substitutes hand by way of concept, though. The greatness of Your arm. By that greatness, they are still as stone.

And then the song itself actually ends. You'll bring them and plant them on Your own mountain, the place, O Lord, which You've made Your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established.

So what's happening on the mountain is simply this. It's a visual demonstration for the people of God, a teaching instrument that they would carry forward in the future generations.

That they are delivered from their enemies by the presence and power of Almighty God. That when Almighty God's power is tested, He will not succumb to a democratized sense of authority.

[16 : 14] He won't share it with us. And He won't share it with any. He demonstrates Himself in the text to have full, monarchical rule.

Absolute. Never ending. And vindicated at this very juncture. I think it's important to see that.

And I think it's something that verses 14 and following in the text I think almost then makes sense when you actually see what's the impact of this rising and falling of hands.

Just take a look at it. What does the text make of this? Then the Lord said to Moses, Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua that I will utterly blot out of the memory of the Amalek from under heaven.

And Moses built an altar and called the name of it The Lord is My Banner saying a hand upon the throne of the Lord. The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

[17 : 26] The Lord is My Banner that His hand the whole monument itself the obelisk on the field the plaque is an indication that God's power is what delivers God's people and that He will not succumb to a democratized sharing of what He intends to accomplish.

Well, England had its civil war and we had ours. Gettysburg there's an account given by a nurse concerning the first regiment who's actually from the state of Michigan a regiment from Detroit that first made entrance on the field and her recounting involves what's known as the color bearer.

It was considered an honor and a privilege to carry your regiment's colors into battle. Now, this regiment didn't have their own colors so they were just given the state flag.

That's what they had. And a private would carry it next to the one leading the charge and it became in the fog of war the rallying point.

If you got separated on the battlefield and you were trying to regroup to your side your regiment the flag above you the banner that flew was what you would make your way to.

[19 : 19] Yet, to carry the banner was almost a martyrdom like sign of death because you were always at the lead and the enemy would always take you out.

and this nurse recounts the movement on the field of Gettysburg nine different individuals who carried this flag 490 some into battle 300 some fall on the field and by the time they finally get back this flag is tattered and as legend has it they cut it up and gave a memento to the men who survived.

But the point is that you can envision the banner as what our text is indicating that the Lord has flown His colors and He will retain the victory and He will bring it to fruition.

And in the text there were two takeaways. One, notice, was for Joshua in particular. The takeaway was an application to the next leader. That Joshua was to have this thing written down and it was to be recited to him.

So that the one who was waging war on behalf of God's people seeking their deliverance would remember where the victory really lies.

[20 : 47] Not in the strength of horse or chariot but in the one who trusts in the Lord. That the Lord is the one who's actually accomplishing this even though people are dying on the field in defense of it.

They're giving everything they have. They're being overwhelmed with the opposition and that there's a subtle reminder to Joshua that the Lord, His banner, is the one that accomplishes it.

His right arm will see it all the way through. The other takeaway, of course, is for the people. God will continue to do for them what you have seen him do.

He is going to wage war against these enemies until they're gone entirely. He's going to win today, but they're going to return and he's going to win.

And so Amalek comes up again in Joshua 3 and 6. Amalek comes up in 1 Samuel 15 where Saul has his great victory. Amalek is finally put to rest by David in 1 Samuel 30 and the reminder for the people is this.

[21 : 58] The God who saves you will continue to save you though all hell break loose against you. God's power is unlike any earthly king. I think of how this is handled by the psalmist.

Why do the nations rage and the people's plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves. The rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed saying, let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

Notice, let us live the way we want and we will undo the absolute power of the God of Israel. And he who sits in the heavens, where there's a vantage point on the battlefield, laughs and the Lord holds them in derision.

And he says, as for me, I have set my king on Mount Zion. In the New Testament, this entire scene, while it receives no direct interplay, the themes that are on display in Exodus 17 are on display with mocking jest when an itinerant preacher who claimed that the hand of the Lord was upon him to save and rescue and lift up the weary, was now standing as if at the time of execution.

[23 : 58] And in Matthew's account of it, we read that the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters and they gathered the whole battalion before him and they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and they put a reed in his right hand.

Not even a staff. A mockery that this one would have any power to accomplish the will of God in the world.

And kneeling before him, they mocked him saying, Hail, king of the Jews and they stripped him of his robe and they put his clothes on him and led him away and they crucified him.

I would submit to you that that ironic moment of failure on the field of battle was accomplished by the almighty everlasting wisdom and hand of God to defeat the enemy from in front and behind.

Indeed, the apostles certainly took the emphasis of our text, the hand of the Lord, and applied it in Acts 4 where they quote Psalm 2, why are the Gentiles raging and the rulers gathering?

[25 : 29] And then they say, For truly in this city they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and plan predestined to take place.

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness while you stretch out your hand to heal. people, they understand by apostolic method in preaching that this ironic death of Christ, hands out stretched, is the powerful presence of a God who can save.

Now, what you do with that is what you're going to do with that. That's the way they took it. And in light of it, as a man, a frail life, I would say to you, do not resist the hand of the Lord, lest you fall into the hands of an angry God.

God. That's what the scriptures teach overall, that he sits at the right hand of the Father and will execute judgment on anybody who takes a swing at the rear flank.

And what our text is indicating is you can't out-punch God. God, so it's time to desist your war with the heavens.

[27 : 23] Lay down your arms and receive by way of unconditional surrender his terms for peace.

If you've never done that, I encourage you to do it. For as the scriptures say, he will come again to rule with a rod of iron.

Don't resist the hand of the Lord. Secondly, expect resistance if you're walking with the Lord. I mean, this text we've got way back here in Exodus ought to dismiss this ignorant, imaginative, contemporary telling that if you take up with God, your days will be without any downward trajectory.

I mean, let's put that away. Expect resistance. The people have just been saved by God and now they are attacked. That's just the way it works.

I don't know how we arrive at an opening of the Bible from the beginning to the end to begin to proclaim that take up with God and you're on this ascending trajectory.

[28 : 52] What book are we reading? Expect resistance. The text actually shows that it's that what Israel encountered in the wilderness is what we should encounter from the world.

It's paradigmatic. I mean, one of the major motifs in the overall record of the scriptures as they look back on these events is the motif of wilderness.

And they pick up on this entire time period to indicate by way of comparison life for those who have desisted from war and given themselves to Christ.

Christ. So that what Israel encountered is what we expect. So I ask you, what is it today that spiritually assails you along the way?

What enemy continues to attack your rear flank as you seek to walk in Christ? What things are picking you off that you feel are jeopardizing the future inheritance which is yours and what are you to do about it?

[30 : 21] Well, one thing I would say you need to do about it is be assured all is not lost. You weren't brought home by your own hand anyway.

So remember, I guess, if we're tracking with our words, you resist him, you don't resist the Lord, expect resistance from the world, be resolute by way of reminder that the battle is the Lord, that there is a banner, there is a place that a victory was won that cannot separate you from its own effects.

So many of us need that. Take courage in other words. And then finally I would just say rest. Just rest.

It's all been done. Praise God, you don't have to do anything. That's what the Lord's table signifies in some sense.

It's the table of rest. It's the table of, wow, what did you do in church today? Oh, I was so glad when I finally realized I didn't have to do a thing in church today.

[31 : 49] I just had to receive what had been done for me on that day. That's the purpose of this meal, to celebrate the fact that Jesus, like Joshua, won the battle, and quite frankly, you and I weren't even on the field.

I doubt he called us by name to be one of the few that waged war on the rear guard. We just sat there and waited for the sun to go down, and it did go down. down, and he did go forth, and he does give life, and this is your life.

Our heavenly father, we come now to the point of application where we do nothing other than stand and wait and receive these visible emblems that are the sign of your presence and power.

And so I pray, Lord, that for all those who are in faith, they would be strengthened as they taste what you have done. In Jesus' name, amen.

Paul writes, for I received from the Lord what I delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body, which is for you, do this in remembrance of me.

[33 : 22] In the same way also he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

We're going to have two lines down the middle aisle. Go back to your seat on the outside aisle. There are receptacles for your cup. And I would just say, taste and see that the Lord is good.

And he who has started a work in you will bring it to completion. If you don't know Christ, if you're still waging war, well then just sit for a moment before you go back to your battlefield and let those who are trusting in Christ to win their victory celebrate this meal with thanksgiving.

we thank you for respecting that and honoring your own individual place before God. May he have mercy on us all.

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