

Jehovah Nissi: The Lord is my Banner

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Anthony and Cleopatra, Batman and Robin, Tom and Jerry, Morecam and Wise, Sonny and Cher, Huntley and Palmer, Richard and Liz.

! Normal service will be commencing shortly as we get into the new year and the burden or the privilege of leading and preaching will be spread out amongst more people in our membership and beyond.

From next week onwards. My name is Richard, not Liz, and I'm part of the leadership here and it's my privilege to be preaching this morning.

Today we are finishing our series, you'll say at last, on the names of God in the Old Testament, which we paused over Christmas while we looked at some of the names given to Jesus.

This morning we're going to look at Jehovah Nissi and although technically Nissi means banner, we're going to look at how this represents something more than just a physical sign under which to gather and can be thought of as a place of refuge.

[1 : 09] The derivation of the word Nissi was a bit more complicated than some of the other names of God we've looked at. So instead of going through its derivation, which I found confusing, I'll simply state the conclusion of the derivation that the word Nissi is in grammatical terms a possessive, singular and relational word.

In this way, it implies personal allegiance, covenant identity and ongoing dependence. So more literally, God my banner, rather than God is a banner and brings in that idea of refuge that it is sometimes translated as in other parts of the Bible.

So I just want to start by summarising the passage that we have just had read to us. And hopefully that will help us to see some practical applications in our own lives as we move forward through the sermon, both as individuals but also as a church.

In this passage, there are essentially two activities going on. There is the obvious activity of Joshua leading the army, fighting against the Amalekites.

And then we have the parallel activity going on of Moses praying, supported on one side by Aaron and on the other side by Hur.

[2 : 43] And the first thing I want to do is to look at the different major players in this scenario. Well, they're the only players that are named and look at the different functions and roles that they have within this period of the battle.

Joshua had previously been commissioned by Moses to lead the militia or the army. Moses to lead the militia or the army. And therefore, it's quite obvious that he should be the main man chosen to lead the actual battle going on on the ground and engaging the Amalekites directly in combat. Moses himself, we know, was the main leader of the Israelites, having been appointed and anointed by God to lead them out of Egypt.

And although he didn't ultimately lead them into the promised land, he was the leader in their 40 years in the desert. And he was clearly, not obviously from this passage, but from other things that we read in Exodus, the conduit between God and his people, the Israelites.

Aaron, we also know, had been consecrated previously as the first high priest and was therefore the most significant religious leader. Available to the Israelites at the time.

[4 : 02] Although we also know that his sons were also consecrated as priests at the same time as he was. But he was the first high priest. And then we have her.

Not a lot is known about him. He is not a priest and he is not a soldier. About the only thing we know about him is that when Moses went up Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights, her was appointed alongside Aaron in Moses' place to lead the Israelites to help settle disputes.

And if you like, was much more of a civil leader or you might think of him as some sort of chief administrator. So we've got four people in this story with four quite different roles and responsibilities.

And we see, and we're told in the passage, that as the battle wages back and forth, Joshua and the Israelites have greater control and success in the events, depending on the level of prayer, effectively, that Moses is able to engage in.

Exemplified by how high he can lift his hands in prayer up on the mountain or the hillside. And we see that as he tires in prayer and the hands are lowered down, the battle goes worse for the Israelites.

[5 : 33] But as Aaron and Hur lift up Moses' hands in prayer towards God, so the battle turns in favour of the Israelites. We're also told that very nicely, Moses is allowed to rest by sitting on a stone.

Although that doesn't sound very comfortable to me. Although in this passage we see that the very definite physical battle against people of flesh and blood is only ultimately won, because it is backed up fully with prayer, we may still see a parallel in the New Testament with a passage in Ephesians, where Paul tells us that although our battle is not against flesh and blood, it is against the spiritual forces of evil, the rulers, authorities and dark powers in the unseen world, requiring spiritual weapons like God's armour, prayer and faith, not physical might.

A reminder that if we need to or if we want to do anything of any worth, with any effect, that we should be steeped in prayer at all times, both before and especially during the activities that we are involved in.

And as I pointed out, this Old Testament passage, different people were involved in different ways, depending on their skills and abilities and responsibilities.

But those who prayed were those who were spiritual leaders, civil leaders and administrative leaders. And those involved in the direct battle were those with military skills.

[7 : 19] In the same way, as a church, we may think of ourselves with our individual gifts and abilities as different parts of the body. But every part of the body needs to be backed up with prayer.

And even if you are involved in something that you might consider more practical than spiritual, or maybe in a more relational role with people from outside of the church, or actively engaging in some evangelical way, we should still find that we are steeping all we do in prayer.

And similarly, as Marina has prayed, with our struggles maybe at work, or with the principles and the powers of the world that work in different ways, we can see that everything we do should be backed up by prayer.

But how does the idea of God being our banner fit into all of this? And hopefully, by the end of the sermon, you'll get a better idea of how that carries across.

In essence, a banner is something under which people gather together. It is a rallying place, a place where people who are like-minded meet together to share, to learn, to encourage.

[8 : 40] It also identifies you as being different to those who gather under a different banner. And also, a banner is generally something that can be seen from a distance.

So people from afar off who want to gather under that banner can see where it is and go to it. Or conversely, those who want to avoid it can steer clear of it.

I would argue from this, we can see that how you act and behave, what you do and say and what you believe should reflect the title of the banner under which you are standing.

So that people can see what the banner says, look at you, and see that the two things actually match up. And that it makes sense that from your behaviours and talk and life that you should be standing under that banner.

And although the banner in this illustration cannot itself do anything to help with that, it does identify you as a member of a particular group with the implications, as I've said, that those within the group can be of help and support and encouragement for you and of like-mind, belief and action.

[9 : 59] With this in mind, let us look at what God, being our banner, should mean to us. And again, I would say that just as Moses, Aaron and her and Joshua had different roles, we should remember our identity is not just as individuals but as different parts of the body of Christ.

And not every person should be doing exactly the same thing. If they were all engaged in fighting, no one would be praying. If they were all praying, no one would be engaged in the actual fighting.

But they were all doing what God had called them to do and what fitted in with their gifts and abilities. In the same way, we should be doing things that fit with our gifts and abilities and not what don't.

So what are some of the fundamentals that would allow us to stand under God's banner legitimately? In other words, what would enable us to be identified to him and to others as Christian?

and I had to be careful here not to stray to a banner that has a secondary or different heading on it such as Baptist or Evangelical or Reformed or Protestant or Catholic but to stick to a banner that says God is my banner.

[11 : 23] I thought a good place to start with that would be Peter's response to the crowd at Pentecost because they said what must we do then to be saved?

And standing under God's banner implies that you have been saved by him. And Peter said repent be baptised and you will receive the Holy Spirit.

So a change of attitude and mind and orientation. A response a bodily response in being baptised and a promise from God that you will receive the Holy Spirit.

And I was reminded of my own sermon last week the anointing of the Holy Spirit is for a purpose and not something that just sits inside us resting like a ship inside a bottle pretty to look at but not at all functional or of any use.

The Holy Spirit is there for a purpose an active purpose. And as we work out those purposes people will see that the banner of God that we stand under is a true standing.

[12 : 37] In other words that the Holy Spirit can be seen in our actions in our words and in our relationships with each other but also in our relationships with the world in such a way that Jesus has taught us.

Ways like do we love our enemies? Do we pray for those that persecute us? Do we forgive those that hurt us? Do we feed and clothe the hungry and poor?

Do we speak the word of God's love and forgiveness? forgiveness? Can we be seen to be bearing fruit of love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self-control?

can we be seen in how we perform good deeds to be a light to the world and in how we stand against abuse of power and corruption and stand against injustice in small and big things can we be seen as salt in the world?

So those may be some of the commitments and expectations of us if we want to say we are under God's banner but God doesn't just expect it all from us the word I used earlier on was covenant responsibility and the covenant is always first initiated and fulfilled by God I've got three readings all from the Old Testament which I'll quickly run through and then draw some conclusions from those from Psalm 60 you have shown your people desperate times you have given us wine that makes us stagger but for those who fear you you have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow save us and help us with your right hand that those you love may be delivered a slightly longer passage from Isaiah 11 a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse from his roots a branch will bear fruit the spirit of the

[14 : 58] Lord will rest on him he will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears but with righteousness he will judge the needy with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness to sash around his waist in that day the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples the nations will rally to him and his resting place will be glorious he will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth and finally a shorter verse passage from Song of Solomon also known as Song of Songs like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men

I delight to sit in his shade and his fruit is sweet to my taste let him lead me to the banquet hall and let his banner over me be love and I think these three passages together assert that it's not all about us standing under the banner but God does his part in those things that we cannot do for ourselves I think these three passages together give us a comprehensive view of God as our banner being equivalent to God as our refuge in that they illustrate the aspects of protection identity gathering and love that the word Nisi implies and had been talked about earlier in the psalm we see God as refuge hope and deliverer in Isaiah we see him as universal king and resting place in Song of Solomon we see him as one who loves his people and whose people are defined by relationship

with him the challenge then is that if we are not under God's banner then we are by definition outside God's kingdom and outside of his protection but none of us has to choose blindly whether or not to move under the protection of God the cost of moving and changing our allegiance from the world to God is spelt out in John's gospel chapter 12 we have Jesus recorded saying now my soul is troubled and what shall I say father save me from this hour no it was for this very reason I came to this hour father glorify your name then a voice came from heaven I have glorified it and will glorify it again the crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered others said an angel had spoken to him Jesus said this voice was to your benefit not mine now is the time for judgment on this world now the prince of this world will be driven out and I when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself he said this to show the kind of death he was going to die so that raising up of Jesus in death that raising up of a banner under which to draw closer to him and when we see Jesus lifted on the cross as our sacrifice we also read reports of his resurrection and ascension to demonstrate his power over death and Jesus himself did not shy away from telling hard truths he tells us that will be battles with powers and principalities that we will need to be ready to lay down our lives to deny our own ambitions to make his priorities our priorities to be building and working for his kingdom and not our own but for his part he has promised never to leave us or forsake us when we don't know what to say he will give us the words to speak when we feel we have no strength or power left he will move in us and through us by his holy spirit and if we go back to our original passage we must remember to play the part that God has assigned for us and not to try and do something different the part that will fit with our gifts and abilities and calling and personality and that everything we do and everything that other people do for us in the church should be covered and rooted in prayer and not prayer where we stand alone but prayer where we stand together with and supported by others and in this way I trust that we will know through experience God as our banner and God as our refuge Amen