

Series: **Exodus: Seeing God in the Journey**
Title: **The Amalekites: Winning the Battle with the Priest and with Purity**
Text: **Exodus 17:8-16**

Outline of Exodus

God Frees You from Bondage Ex. 1:1-12:16

- Plagues and release

God Fights Your Battles Ex. 12:17-15:21; 17:8-16

- Red Sea
- Amalekites (This week)

God Furnishes Your Bounty Ex. 15:22- Ex. 18

- Water
- Manna
- Quail

God Frames Your Devotion Ex. 19-40

- Covenants
- Laws
- Tabernacle
- Priests
- Worship

Exodus 17:1

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord...

Exodus 17:8-13

Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." 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 hand, 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.

The Amalekites attack the Israelites
Joshua to choose men

- Not all the armed forces

Aaron and Hur

- Priest
- Purity

Standing and seated

Arms lifted – Victory in reliance

Exodus 17:14-16

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 the memory of 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."

Deut. 25:19

God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.

1 Sam. 15:3

Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."

Who is Amalek?

Grandson of Esau (Gen 36:12)

- Esau despised Birthright and Blessing
 - **Gen 25:32** – *Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"*

Son of a concubine

- Eliphaz with Timna, the concubine, have a son – Amelek
 - Daughter of Seir the Horite - **Gen 36:22** – *The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna.*
 - Mt Seir – southeast of Israel
 - Seir of the Horites before Esau (Edom) came into the land.
 - A great man of renown – yet his daughter is a concubine and not a wife.

1st among nations

Numbers 24:20

Then he looked on Amalek and took up his discourse and said, "Amalek was the first among the nations, but its end is utter destruction."

- Southwest region below Canaan
 - Yet aligns with and absorbs much of the land that was of the sons of Ishmael
 - Ishmael
 - The son of another concubine
 - No birthrights, no blessings
 - May very well hold a grudge of Jacob's usurping his grandfather's blessing and birthright
 - Expand through the Negev and the Sanai peninsula and into Arabia
 - Other tribes were subsets of the Amalekites

The Amalekites in History

- History sees these Amalekites as the second phase of a ruling class of the Hyksos who ruled the lower Nile region of Egypt up till the Exodus and for another 200 years after.

Hyksos = Foreign kings / shepherd kings - "Ruler of a foreign land"

- Velikovsky implies, in Ages In Chaos, that “Amu” was specifically the Egyptian name for the so-called Hyksos; we read on p. 2 that ancient Egypt saw a “... period of chaos, exploited by certain invaders known as Amu in Egyptian and called Hyksos by authors writing in Greek.”
- Monotheistic
- Early Hyksos Sojourn 1706-1491
 - Yaqub-har –
 - Yisra-El, the one who struggles with the divine angel. Yakubher is the Aramean name for Jacob. Egyptian Pharaoh Yaqub-Har was a Hyksos ruler and reigned from 1.655 to 1.646 BC.
 - Joseph
 - And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.
 - Joseph hid his Hebrew identity by marrying an Egyptian wife and changing his name. Joseph ruled Egypt as the top vizier of pharaoh Ahmose I who reigned from 1,570 to 1,546 BC and who negotiated the peace agreement allowing the Hyksos to settle in Canaan.
 - Governors
- 1491 – rulers
- 1446 – Exodus and invasion
- 1434 – Taking of Thebes and begin of overall Hyksos rule of Egypt
- 1063 – Hyksos defeated at Kedesh and expelled from Avaris
 - Avaris – the Hyksos capital

Jewish and Arab traditions provide two different motivations for the enmity of the Amalekites towards the Israelites.

- On the Jewish side, the Targum Pseudo-Yonathan (which Velikovsky used repeatedly for its “historical” content under the name, Targum Yerushalmi) provides this motivation, here highlighted in boldface (Exodus 7:8):

“And Amalek came from the land of the south and leaped on that night a thousand and six hundred miles; and on account of the **disagreement which had been between Esau and Jakob**, he came and waged war with Israel in Rephidim, and took and killed (some of the) men of the house of Dan; for the cloud [which concealed the Israelites] did not embrace them [the Danites], because of the strange worship that was among them.”

El-Mas’ûdî’s Historical Encyclopædia entitled *Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*, translated from the Arabic by Aloys Sprenger, M.D. (1841), Vol. 1, page 97.

- “Masudi’s account places the battle in the same general region as I suggested in the previous section, as opposed to its usual location in the Sinai Peninsula; and it depicts the Amalekites as the current inhabitants of the land, with a settled “kingdom” or “dominion” much like the Canaanites and other pre-Israelite tribes in the accounts of Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua. This accords with the Amalekites being Edomite descendants of Esau, rather than very recent immigrants.”

The Amalekites in the Bible

The battle at Rephidim – Begins God’s hatred of them

- a. **Deut. 25:17-19** – ¹⁷Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ Therefore when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.

- b. The attack on God's people -
 - i. When they are faint and weak
 - ii. Hitting you from behind
 - iii. Do not fear God
 - iv. Blot them out!

Battle After report of the spies

- c. Unsanctioned Battle
 - i. The Amalekite forces which dwelt "in the land of the Negeb," were too strong to conquer, despite the pleadings of Caleb and Joshua to the contrary (Num 13:25-33; 14:38). Israel rebelled.
 - ii. When God in judgment withdrew His hand of blessing and ordered them to go back into the wilderness (14:1-25), the people again disobeyed God, and with their own feeble effort attacked the Amalekites. They were completely defeated and chased as far as Hormah (near Arad and Ziklag) (Num 14:39-45; Josh 12:14; 15:30).
 - iii. The reason for the Lord's concern about disobedient Israel's encountering Amalek and other enemies without His special power was that the Amalekites who dwelt in both the hill country and in the valleys of S Canaan and the Negeb, were effective fighters in both areas (Num 14:25, 44, 45).
- d. Balaam' final oracle – **Num. 24:20** –
 - i. "Amalek was the first among the nations, but its end is utter destruction."
- e. The time of wandering, of Joshua, and of Judges in the period of the Hyksos-Amalekite rule over Egypt. In harmony with this revised scheme the Amalekites must have been regarded at that time as the mightiest among the nations.

In the period of the Judges

- f. Ehud - Eglon, the king of Moab, collected the forces of the Amalekites and the Ammonites and defeated Israel – Judges 3:13
- g. Gideon – **Judges 6:3-4**
 - i. ³ Whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. ⁴ They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey.
- h. In their song (Judg 5:14): Deborah (who was from Ephraim, 4:5) and Barak speak of how Ephraim had shown strength in rooting out those of the Amalekites who were in its midst (cf. Judg 12:15 and remarks earlier).
- i. "into the valley," although that v. indicates in a footnote that the Heb. and Gr. read "in Amalek." Judges 6:3, 33; 7:12 depict the Amalekites joining forces with the Midianites (who seem to have wandered in the area of Sinai [Exod 4:19] and wilderness E of Paran [1 Kings 11:18]; and also in the territory E of Gilead [Judg 8:4-12]), and making camel raids against the agriculture communities of Israel as far S as Gaza (6:3, 4). When these peoples came with considerable forces and camped in the Valley of Jezreel (6:33), Gideon and his 300 men, under the direction of the Lord, routed and killed many of them (7:19-23).

In the time of Saul

- j. According to 1 Samuel 14:47, 48 the king had fought against this enemy. However, in 1 Samuel 15:2 this people were still flourishing. In the light of Amalek's past harassment of Israel the Lord commanded Saul to exterminate this enemy (1 Sam 15:1-3). The king attacked and conquered this foe with their city called Amalek (1 Sam 15:4-7)
- k. Contrary to God's command, Saul kept alive the Amalekite king and the best of their livestock (vv. 8, 9). For Saul's failure to fulfill completely the divine command, Samuel announced to the monarch the Lord's rejection of him as king (1 Sam 15:10-23)
- l. Saul then made a statement of repentance and obtained some public reconciliation with the prophet Samuel, following which the prophet then killed Agag, the Amalekite king (15:24-33).

In the time of David

- m. Taking captive the inhabitants including David's two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail
 - i. David's initial encounter with the Amalekites, in the OT record, took place during the time of his association with Achish, king of Gath, when the young Israelite made raids in the S against the Amalekites and others (1 Sam 27:8). Later Amalek raided the Negeb and, in David's absence, completely conquered Ziklag, taking captive the inhabitants including David's two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail (1 Sam 30:1-6). Then the future king, through the help of an abandoned Egyptian servant of an Amalekite (30:11-15), found the Amalekite camp, defeated the enemy, and recovered his wives and possessions (30:16-20).
- n. Next, the Amalekite who claimed he had finished killing Saul...
 - i. (cf. 1 Sam 31:3-5; 2 Sam 1:4-10) ...was killed by David because he had slain "the Lord's anointed" king (1:14-16), and also had confessed he was an Amalekite (1:8, 13). This demonstrates again Israel's strong antipathy to Amalek. The psalmist (Ps 83:7) lists Amalek with the avowed enemies of Israel. A summary of David's conquests of Amalek is given in 2 Samuel 8:12 and 1 Chronicles 18:11.

Amalek in later Biblical history

- o. The time of Hezekiah (c. 700 b.c.) and only as a remnant whom some of the Simeonites defeated at Mount Seir (i.e., Edom; Gen 32:3; 1 Chron 4:41-43).
- p. The last Amalekite that we here about is Haman, who is said to be descended from Agag (an unspecified Amalekite king). Haman, in the book of Esther, launches a plan to destroy all the Jews in Persia (a scheme thwarted by Esther and her uncle, Mordecai). Esther 3:1, 10 8:3, 5 9:24.

They Attack the Blessing and Birthright of God

They Attack the People of God

They Attack the Plan of God's Promise

They Attack from behind

They Attack when you're weak

They Attack your needs and desires

The Amalekites and Spiritual Implications

The Corruption of Sin and the Judgment of God

God's hatred of these people

God's demand that they be completely wiped out
Isn't this Indefensible?

Doesn't that shock you? Doesn't that alarm you?

- If we read or preach this, and don't experience shock at the story, then we are far more disconnected from our wider culture, and indeed from many of the Christians among us who find it disturbing and have trouble explaining why God would do that, than we think.
- If we read or preach this, and don't experience shock at the story, then we are far more disconnected from our wider culture, and indeed from many of the Christians among us, than we think

For make no mistake, **this passage is used repeatedly to discount the idea that God could exist** and, just as significantly, why anyone who believes in the God of the Bible can excuse his actions here.

Believe me, I've checked. Even lots of Christians have serious trouble with this. I have trouble with this. Only those with a heart of stone could not.

I have read articles for why God does this, replete with suggestions that just as Moses and Joshua were ordered to allow people to surrender before destroying them, (Deut 20:10) so Saul would have been too.

Except, God doesn't give him that option.

He's commanded to destroy everything. And no amount of modern apologetics does anything except convince the already convinced, and results in long swathes of angry comments below the line from people who are affronted that anyone in the 21st century can either defend this or believe in a God who does it.

So what to do?

Here's how I am tackling this philosophically, theologically, biblical-theologically and pastorally.

A Philosophical Response: The World Sets the Rules

When it comes to a passage such as this I am with Canadian Catholic philosopher, Charles Taylor.

- He believes that modern day apologetics cedes ground from the get-go to the secular world and its imminent frame by allowing it to set the rules of play.

You'd never allow an opposing team to set the rules of the game by which you must play. Yet we do that in apologetics all of the time, where we are told, "Now given God doesn't exist, it's up to you to prove he does and the first thing you need to do is to show why the evidence portraying him as a tyrant isn't the case, which you can't because it's obvious by what it says that he is."

Ever won that one? I thought not. The secular frame can be intimidating, but starting from a position that God IS and therefore not having to explain why one should believe he exists on the basis of his likeability is not on the table. Besides, that we should believe in a God only on the basis of him affirming what we agree with at all times is, in Tim Keller's memorable statement, leaves us with a Stepford god.

Hebrews 11:6 puts the spanner in the works of the apologetic task here by saying that people who come to God only do so on the basis that they must believe that he is, and not only that, but that this “is-ness” has a moral quality in that it rewards those who seek him.

A Theological Response: God’s attributes are indivisible.

We are not God and that we are hopelessly compartmentalized when it comes to our attributes

- (partly to do with our being creature not Creator, and partly due to our fallen nature which desires to compartmentalize our own attributes for reasons such as self-justification when we are not behaving in one area of our lives as we claim is our standard in another).

God’s attributes are indivisible.

- He is not a “pie-chart” God in which each slice of the pie is an attribute. His love, mercy, justice, holiness, etc. are total and totalizing.
- They are held in perfect harmony (not in tension) and each informs the other exactly in the way it should.
- Once again an apologetic argument that cedes this ground at the start won’t get far.

A Biblical-Theology Response: The Context of the Bible

For me this is the crux of the matter. As we put the situation into the context of the Scripture, what do we find?

Not the biggest genocide story in the Bible.

- That honour is held by the Flood narrative. Indeed in that story God gets his own hands dirty, so to speak, and dispenses with an intermediary such as Saul, and wipes out mankind himself.
- Surprising therefore that you can go to a toy store and buy a Noah’s Ark toy, but not one of the Amalekite slaughter.
- Of course the reason is that we have “fairy-taled” the life out of what is a shocking story of judgment.
- But even there is a link with the 1Samuel story of Saul’s failure, as the same term to describe God’s regret at creating humankind is used of God’s grievance at having made Saul king.

Always attacking God’s people and plan

- And narrowing in on the salvation narrative of which this is part of, this genocide is not the first interaction between Israel and the Amalekites.
- There have been others—all violent, and all instigated by the Amalekites.
- As we have covered

Viewed as an existential threat

- (And this hinges on the previous point) the Amalekites are viewed as an existential threat, not simply to Israel, but to the covenant promises of God; that he will bless the whole world through his chosen people.
- The Amalekites are not simply threatening a people group with their determination to wipe out Israel, but they are a threat to the salvation plan of God for all other nations.

- As descendants of Esau they had despised the covenant themselves and now were determined that none others could have access to what they had rejected.
- This existential threat motif is ramped up even more when we realize that Haman, the advisor to King Xerxes in the book of Esther is an Agagite (the name given to the royal leaders of the Amalekites, including the Amalekite king in 1Samuel15). And which people does Haman hate with a murderous hatred to the point he organizes a genocide against them? Israel of course. Only when Esther steps in is Israel saved, proving that sometimes the best man for the job is a woman.
- Simply put, the Amalekites are like the bad Terminator in Terminator II – you’ve got to finish the job or he’ll re-form and keep coming after you.

The flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the elimination of the Amalekite

Is there a bigger genocide story than that in the Bible? Well, there’s an even bigger.

The final judgment

- It’s the final judgment battle in the book of Revelation in which the blood of the judgment battle is described as coming up to the horse’s bridle.
- That’s a lot of blood. What we find, counter-intuitively, is that the Old Testament doesn’t contain all the big judgment stories, and the New Testament none of them or a decreasing amount, but rather the NT ramps up judgment.
- In fact Paul with his pen in Romans 3:21-26 and in his proclamation in Acts 17 in Athens, indicates that “in the past” (meaning OT salvation past), God overlooked/passed over sins, but has now, in Christ announced that he is going to “wink at sin” no longer and it is far more in his judgment firing line now than it ever was back in the Old Testament prior to Christ.
- The judgment stories in the Old Testament are eschatological judgment “intrusions”: judgment events that break into history at certain times as precursors to the final judgment of sin.
 - God models his final day, eschatological judgment, to humanity at certain critical points: the Flood, this Amalekite narrative, etc.
- But Jesus uses such a framework at times too.
 - He says in Luke 13 that the collapse of the Siloam tower that killed 18 people (although not an act of judgment in and of itself for specific sin), nevertheless points to a pattern of final day judgment for all of those who do not repent.
 - And the era of the New Testament church experiences this too in Acts 5 and the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit.

A Pastoral Response: The Cross is the Answer

Of course, this intrusion theology is fulfilled by the ultimate eschatological judgment intrusion—the cross of Christ.

- There on the cross Jesus takes the force of God’s judgment upon Himself, despite His obedience to God and our disobedience.
- He takes in the present the curse of what was coming our way in the future. In so doing he creates an eschatological future for us that is not of coming judgment, but of the salvation that God had promised for the nations to Abraham back in Genesis 12 and 15.
- And did you notice what God did through this Christ—this King? This King, unlike Saul, was an obedient King.

- This King, unlike Saul, exhausted the judgment of God that the king required for those opposed to God's salvation. But how did it happen? By God exhausting his judgment upon the King, His Son, and not on us. God in Christ took on the sword of judgment.
- That's the gospel right there!
 - And it's right there that we as Christians seeking to defend the gospel against those who hate it, or even those who are genuinely curious, can confidently say that our God would never speak to us like he spoke to Saul through Samuel, demanding genocidal vengeance on anyone.
- It's not possible because it's no longer required. We are, because of Christ, currently in the eschatological period of amnesty awaiting that final judgment. The Son is God's final word to us, so that's the point we need to make to people. That, of course, won't make people affirm God's justice and rightness for what he did to the Amalekites, but there is a theological reason for that that no amount of apologetics will suffice for or cover: their hatred of God in spite of his love for them.

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We Want to See Justice Served

Everyone has a deep desire to see

- To those who have been thumbing their nose at what is good, right and true.
 - Everyone has a desire for the right to be done, and everyone recognizes that there is a constant thwarting of the right through the injustice of others.
- Justice doesn't just naturally rise to the surface; it is fought for, hard.
- None of us is under any illusion that the fight for justice in this world is anything less than a fight.
- And the bigger the issue that requires justice the bigger, and often bloodier, the fight.

We Must Take Sin Seriously

- **We need to see that what we view as unjust treatment is inextricably linked towards our inability to take sin seriously enough, both the sin of others and our own sin.**
 - Why should we expect someone who is not Christian to take the sin of the Amalekites so seriously that they could see how God would be just in wiping them out, if we don't take our own sin that seriously?
- This passage tells us that God takes sin so seriously that he cannot allow it to continue.
- And the price he pays for that himself is the death of his Son on the cross.

We must put our own sin to death.

- A sin that is a major threat to us cannot be given any oxygen for it will (like Terminator II's bad boy) regroup and attack us again. It must be killed.
- The fact is Saul did not fully kill the Amalekites; neither did his successor, King David—even though he was the proto-type of the coming King.
- And look what happened! Haman cropped up with a genocide plot of his own. When it comes to sin, it's a case of kill or be killed. Simple as that.

Jesus takes our Judgment

- Is the truly obedient King who takes the force of his own judgment blow against sin.
- For me that's the point of the extinction judgment text, despite its tensions.

The Priest and the Purity win the Battle.

- Sin Attacks the Blessing and Birthright of God.
- Sin Attacks the People of God.
- Sin Attacks the Plan of God's Promise.
- Sin Attacks from behind (your past).
- Sin Attacks when you're weak.
- Sin Attack your needs and desires.

Remember the Key Figure and Aim of Exodus

The key Figure is God.

The Key Aim is that he will receive glory.

One goal and one goal only: for people to give God the glory due to His Name.

The glory is going somewhere, let's make no mistake.

- And unless you're giving glory to God, you're giving it to something or someone else.
- I want us to end the sermon glorifying God despite ourselves and exclaiming with Paul, who deals with equally deep mysteries in

Romans 11:33-36

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

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