

• *God's people encounter hostility*

The people of Israel had been redeemed by the blood of the lamb. Now some people will have a hatred of God's people and will wish to destroy them^{□1}. But others wish to join the people of God (as in the next passage^{□2}). Some respond with hostility. Others are converted.

□1 17:8-16

□2 18:1-27

• *The temptation to become bitter*

First comes aggression. The Amalekites initiate an attack upon the people of God^{□1}. It was a painful experience for Israel. They were weary^{□2} and the Amalekites descended from Abraham and Isaac. It is always painful when people you might expect to be your supporters become your enemies. It requires a very cool spirit and a strong determination not to be bitter at such a time.

□1 17:8

□2 Deut 25:18

1. Moses faces the new enemy with a mixture of prayer and practicality

1. **Moses faces the new enemy with a mixture of prayer and practicality.** First of all he does what the situation requires. Israel have no choice but to defend themselves. Joshua – who is mentioned here for the first time – must choose suitable men and must go out to do battle with the Amalekites^{□1}.

□1 17:9a

Moses himself will take 'the staff of God'. He will go to the top of the hill and there he will hold the staff up before God^{□1}. It is clear that this is some kind of praying. The word 'pray' is not used but it is clear that this is what is happening. The staff is the same one that had been used many times before. It had been in Moses' hands when at God's first interview with Moses God said 'What is in your hand?'^{□2}.

□1 17:9b

□2 4:2

• *The staff of God*

• *'Now, Lord, do it again!'*

Now he holds it up before God. It is as if he is saying 'Lord this is the sign that I am the person you chose for this work. I was carrying this staff when you called me. I held out this staff when we crossed the Reed Sea. You used this staff in connection with many wonderful answers to our need. Now, Lord, do it again!'

• *Both prayer and practical action*

The important thing to notice is that **two things are happening here**. This conflict involves both practicality and prayer, fighting and faith. Some Christians are happy to take practical action when they are in trouble but they neglect to pray. Others want to pray but they do nothing practical. But it would have done no good to have Moses praying on the hill if there had been no Joshua fighting in the valley.

2. The battle and the praying both require persistence

2. **The battle and the praying both require persistence.** Joshua begins to fight the Amalekites; Moses, Aaron and Hur are praying before God on the mountain top^{□1}. Both the people in the valley and the people on the mountain soon discover that what they are doing will require persistence. The battle will go on a long time. As soon as Moses' praying begins to weaken the fighting begins to fail.

□1 17:10

• *And not grow weary*

Praying requires persistence. 'People ought always to pray and not grow weary'^{□1}.

□1 Luke 18:1

3. Our praying may need help

3. **Our praying may need help.** Moses begins to weary in his position as intercessor. The spirit is willing but his flesh is weak. Like the three disciples praying late at night in the garden at Gethsemane^{□1} he finds his physical tiredness overwhelms him. When he ceased to pray the battle began to go against the Israelites^{□2}. So Moses' assistants help him. They enable him to sit and they support his hands^{□3}. Moses stays in that posture until the victory is won^{□4}. Although Joshua and Hur are not literally praying, their actions represent a kind of prayer. It is as if they are identifying with Moses' plea for God's help.

□1 Matt 26:36-45

□2 17:11

□3 17:12

□4 17:13

• *Hard work, but easier with the help of others*

Intercession is hard work! No one need feel ashamed to find himself wearying in intercession. The flesh – the physical frame – is weak. Our bodies have weakness in them and the weakness of our physical nature affects us spiritually. But it helps if others come to aid and encourage us in intercession. It is easier to persist if others are with us.

4. The battle will be sustained

• 'Write it in the book'

• A continuing problem

• Never-ending conflicts – the church and the world, righteousness and sin

• The final victory is God's

• A picture of Jesus

4. **The battle will be sustained.** The people are warned that what has happened is not an isolated occurrence. It will occur again, The story is recorded. 'Write it in the book,' says Moses. Here is the origin of our first five books of the Bible. In the Hebrew it speaks of 'the' book not 'a book'. Evidently there is already a record being kept of what had been happening^{□1}. Our book of Exodus may have been edited at a later stage, but the process of writing it was started by Moses.

The record of the incident must be kept because the Amalekites will continue to be a problem to Israel, yet they must be utterly exterminated. Total extermination will be the ultimate penalty for the Amalekites' rebellion against God and their hatred of His people.¹ The Israelites must never compromise with those who wish to wipe them out of existence. Rather they are called to wipe the Amalekites out of existence. The Amalekites' hatred of Israel would continue^{□1}. Even Haman who tried to annihilate Israel descended from Agag, an Amalekite^{□2}. He was an Amalekite trying to annihilate Israel, whereas Israel had been commanded to annihilate the Amalekites.

The never-ending conflict between Israel and Amalek speaks of the never-ending conflict between the church and the world, between righteousness and sin. The battle will go on for a long time. Eventually 'Amalek' will be exterminated. Meanwhile the people of God must be ready for conflict.

There is one encouragement. Moses built an altar to remind everyone that the battle had been won by the Lord. He names the altar 'Yahweh Nissi', 'the Lord is my banner'. It was a reminder that the people had been able to see Moses' praying. He was like a banner held high for everyone to see. Similarly in days of future conflict Yahweh would be their banner, the One they looked to, to give them victory. God takes an oath^{□1}. 'Yahweh has sworn by his kingship'^{2□2}. Israel, whether as an ancient nation or as today's people of God, will always have to fight the world and its wickedness until the day comes when wickedness is finally exterminated.

The Christian can see Jesus here. He ever lives to make intercession until the battle is won.

□1
24:4, 7
34:27
Num 33:1-2
Deut 31:9,11

□1
Num 24:20
Deut 25:17-19
Josh 2:9-11
1 Sam 15:18

□2
1 Sam 15:32
Esth 3:1

□1 17:16
□2 17:16

Notes

1 The Hebrew word is machah; it always and invariably means 'wipe out', 'blot out', 'utterly destroy'. It was used of the punishment at the time of the flood (Genesis 6:7; 7:4, 23), of having one's name or memory blotted out (Exodus 17:14; 32:32, 33; Deuteronomy 25:6, 19; 29:20; Psalm 9:5; 69:28; 109:13), of the blotting out of sins in total forgiveness (Nehemiah 4:5; Psalm 51:1, 9; 109: 14; Isaiah 43:25; 44:22; Jeremiah 18:23) or blotting out in total forgetfulness of actions that have taken place (Nehemiah 13:14; Proverbs 6:33; Ezekiel 6:6), of wiping away curses so that they no longer exist (Numbers 5:23), of wiping a people out of existence (Deuteronomy 9:14; Judges 21:17; 2 Kings 14:27). And it can be used of wiping a dish clean so that no dirt is left (2 Kings 21:13) or wiping the mouth clean of food (Proverbs 30:20) or ending the reign of a king (Proverbs 31:3) or of the total ending of disgrace (Isaiah 25:8). Total annihilation or extermination is always involved.

2 The Hebrew is literally 'A hand is upon the throne of Yah'.



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