

Exploring the Nature of God (God, Our Strength)

Introduction:

- I. By now you know that in this series of lessons in which we are examining the nature of God, we are doing so based on names that God was called in the scriptures. So far we have looked at the name Elohim in a lesson entitled God, Our Creator. We should have learned from that lesson that our God is a great God, able to create the heavens and the earth just by the power of his word. We have look at the name Yahweh, God's personal name, in a lesson entitled God, Our Father. We should have learned from that lesson that we, as children of God, sustain both a special relationship with God and also a special responsibility towards God. Finally, we look at the name Yahweh Yireh, in lesson entitled God, Our Provider. We should have learn from that lesson that no matter what our needs may be, God sees them and is willing and able to provide for us. All of these names teach us something about the nature of our God. Our God is a great and powerful God, but at the same time He is an accessible God who loves and provides for His people.

- II. Well, let's turn our attention to another name that God is called in a lesson entitled "God, Our Strength." This time, we turn your attention to the book of Exodus.

Ex 17:15

Moses built an altar there and named it Yahweh-nissi (which means "the Lord is my banner"). NLT

Now obviously we need to observe the background to this text in Exodus 17. It takes place about two months after the Israelites made their exodus from Egypt. They are, of course heading toward the land of promise. They have made their way through the Wilderness of Sin and have camped at Rephidim. But here we find an unexpected event transpiring (**Ex. 17:8**).

This attack was unprovoked and unscrupulous and would begin years of animosity between the two nations. Who were these Amalekites anyway? They were actually Israel's cousins. The Amalekites were descendants of Esau. Now we all remember the history between Esau and his brother Jacob, don't we? Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a mere morsel of meat, and Jacob in turn deceived his father Isaac into giving him Esau's blessing. Esau was so angry that he vowed to kill Jacob, but with the passing of time his forgave his brother. However, his descendants, it would appear, held a grudge and this could very well have been the reason for their treatment of Israel at Rephidim and through the years.

But regardless of motivation, the Amalekites were devious and unprincipled in their attacks at Rephidim. They attacked the Israelites from behind, killing or capturing the weak and feeble of Israel, which would include the tired and sick and the aged among them that lagged behind on the journey. These were not tested soldiers that were being attacked, they were civilians simply trying to keep up. Because of this, God decreed that Amalek should be exterminated.

Deut 25:17-19

"Remember 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.

1 Sam 15:2-3

Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. 3Now 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.'

One of the first lessons we learn from Ex. 17 is that when you mess with God's people, you are going to make God mad. To fight with the people of God is to fight with God Himself, and that, ladies and gentlemen, is a fight you cannot win. But returning to our text in Ex. 17, we find the response to these attacks by Moses (**Ex. 17:9**). Let me ask you, if you were Joshua, would you have thought that this was a good plan? I'm thinking not so much. If I am Joshua, I'm thinking there is something wrong with this picture. I go into the battlefield against a bigger, stronger and more experienced foe and you Moses go to a hilltop to watch. If I'm Joshua I'm saying to Moses, "I want your job." But Joshua is a better man than most and he doesn't hesitate in carrying out the battle plan (**Ex. 17:10**). Joshua doesn't complain because he has faith in God and in Moses, God's servant. You see, there is a reason that Moses mentioned the staff of God to Joshua. That staff was more than just a stick. It was a symbol of God's divine power. Joshua knew that Moses wasn't going to that hilltop alone, he was going with the power of God in his hand. It would be, not just Moses overseeing this battle, it would be God monitoring the situation. That would mean assured victory. Now, let's read the rest (**Ex. 17:11-16**).

Well, this is Israel's first taste of warfare as a nation, but it certainly would not be the last. God's people are in constant conflict with forces around them. And while our conflicts today are different from those that the Israelites of old had to face, there are some transferable principles that can be gleaned from passages such as Exodus 17 that find God's people in battle. Consider with me the following lessons that we should always remember.

Lesson:

I. The Amalekites Are Coming (ver. 8).

I said a moment ago that God's people are in constant conflict with the forces around them. Such is still the case today, only we engage in spiritual warfare rather than physical.

2 Cor 10:3-4

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) KJV

Eph 6:12

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. KJV

Going back to our text where the Israelites were attacked at Rephidim, it is interesting that the name Rephidim comes from a Hebrew word that means “rests or resting places” (Brown-Driver-Briggs). Indeed the Israelites were getting a little rest at Rephidim. At first there was no water and as usual the Jews started to complain, but God, being our Provider, made provision for them by bringing forth water out of a rock. So now the Israelites have all they need. Things are going good. They have manna and quail to eat and water to drink, but then we read the opening words of our text. Listen to them again: “Then Amalek came...”

Someone has said that the Amalekites are representatives of all evil forces that oppose God and His people. No, we don't fight against real Amalekites today for in keeping his word, God has eradicated them from the face of the earth. But we do fight against what the Amalekites represented. They represented those who hate and fight against the people of God. They represented those who have no fear of God. In short, they represented evil and one thing we don't have a shortage of today is evil and evil-doers. Brethren, we constantly at war with the devil and his angels and we need to know it. Look at the rest of Ex. 17:8. It says that Amalek came and “fought with Israel...” Hebrew scholars tell us that the word *fought* is in the imperfect tense, meaning repeated action and telling us that the Amalekites were attacking Israel over and over again. Such is still the case because Amalek continues to be constant in her attacks against the people God. Paul knew this is gives us warning.

Eph 6:10-12

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. NKJV

Let me ask you, have you put on the armor of God? Do you realize that every day we find ourselves as Christians in some kind of battle. Through the years many, many Christians have lost the battle for their souls and have become spiritual casualties in this warfare in which we are engaged because they have forgotten that they were in a battle and so they failed to put on the armor of God. Pay attention to me now: The Amalekites are coming. They look different and they dress differently; they sound different and they talk differently but their character is still the same. They have no fear of God in their hearts. Just who are these modern day Amalekites anyway?

- **They are those who are enemies of the church.** Listen to me: anything that stunts the growth of the church, denies the sufficiency of the church or tries in any way to replace the church is a modern day Amalekite. And make no mistake about it, brethren, the Amalekites are coming. It might come in the form of denominationalism. It might come in the form of liberalism. It might come in the form of institutionalism, but brethren, the Amalekites are coming. It might dress up like a college. It might dress up like a publishing company. It might dress up like a good old fashion local church, but there is one thing of which we can be sure, the Amalekites are coming. We are not talking about the descendants of Esau. We are talking about enemies of the church who attack her in many different forms or fashions, and we know that they are coming. In fact, let me change my terminology a little bit. The Amalekites aren't just coming, they are already here. They have

attacked us from the rear just like the Amalekites of old. They have captured our weak and feeble and they have carried away some of our children. The question is what are we going to do about it? Well, I'll tell you what we must do about in just a few minutes, but right now I want us to put it in our minds that the Amalekites are coming and so we must defend the church.

- **They are those who are enemies of the gospel.** The gospel, ladies and gentlemen, is the power of God unto salvation. Paul said,

Rom 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

But there are those who would distort the gospel and remove its saving power by adding to it or taking away from it. There are those who would deprive the gospel of its purifying power by using it to promote lasciviousness. There are those who would deny the gospel of its converting power by using something else with which to win souls to Christ. Who are the "those" about whom we are talking? They are modern day Amalekites and we know that they are coming. They are fake teachers who spare not the flock. They are false teachers who speak perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves. They are free-thinking teachers who corrupt the gospel by mixing it with their own ideas and philosophies. They are Amalekites and we know they are coming.

- **They are those who are enemies of God.** This certainly would include the renowned atheists of our day. Men like Richard Dawkins, author of the book, "*The God Delusion*," and Christopher Hitchens, who wrote the book, "*God Is Not Great*." It would obviously encompass men like Ted Turner, the media mogul famous for his anti-Christian rhetoric such as, "*Christianity is a religion of losers*," But the enemies of God that surround us involve more than the hardcore atheist and Bible-haters of this world. It would include and encompass anyone who doesn't give God the proper respect and reverence that He deserves. This would include scientists who deny that the universe was created by God. It would include liberal theologians who deny the authenticity of the scriptures. It would include denominational leaders who take votes and pass laws that would tolerate within their churches the sin of homosexuality. These are all Amalekites that are on the attack and whether they all realize it or not they are enemies of God.

Now, there are certainly other foes that we face as Christians. Some come in the form of demonic dispositions rather than people. Dispositions such as bitterness, envy and strife. Sometimes the biggest enemy a man faces is self. Listen to me: The greatest Amalekite that we might ever face and fight against is the man that we see in the mirror. We must wrestle all the time with the lust of the flesh and the desire to please self. But the point of it all is this. The Amalekites are coming and so we better get ready for the battle. This moves us to our next point.

II. We Must Be Willing to Fight (vers. 9-10).

Listen: the Israelites were under attack. They could not afford to be passive. They could not just ignore what was happening to them. They had to fight or be destroyed. As local

churches and individual Christians, we are in the same position. As we have observed the Amalekites are coming and indeed have already arrived. We are being attacked. The church is being attacked. The Word of God is being attacked. Even God Himself is being attacked and so we must be willing to fight.

When it comes to attacks against the church, what must we do. It is actually rather simple. We must uphold the church of Christ by preaching the truth in an uncompromising fashion (**2 Tim. 4:1-5**). We must have a strong jealousy for the church, knowing that Jesus died for her and redeemed her with His own blood. The church, ladies and gentlemen, is a part of the eternal purpose of God and we must be willing to fight for her regardless of the personal sacrifice involved. Listen to me: when Christians take a soft approach towards denominationalism, the church is weakened and Amalek begins to win the battle. We must be sure and we must be clear in our preaching. Denominationalism is unscriptural and anti-scriptural. Every denominational church is manmade and unauthorized by the God of heaven. Every denominational church started at the wrong time, in the wrong place and by the wrong person. Oh I know that they have the majority, but so did the Amalekites of old. I know that they are in an advantageous positions, but so were the Amalekites of old. I know that they are bigger and stronger than we are, but so were Amalekites of old. Still, Moses and the people of God prevailed for the Bible says that, "*Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.*" And we can, no we will prevail too, but first we must be willing to fight. We must fight to keep the church pure from denominational influences. We must fight to keep the church free from unscriptural and liberal practices. We must fight to keep the church unpolluted from the tendency to compromise. Brethren, if there is one thing we learn from Ex. 17 is that we must be willing to fight. And remember, it is not just the church under attack, the precious gospel of Christ is being attacked too. What must we do? We must fight.

Jude 3

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. KJV

Phil 1:15-17

Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: 16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: 17 But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. KJV

Yes, like Joshua and the other Israelites, we can't avoid the fight. It might not be something we enjoy, war rarely is. We might enjoy times of peace much more. That's only natural. But the truth is, the enemy, I mean the ultimate enemy of God and man, that is, the devil, is going to bring the battle to us. So we must fight.

1 Tim 6:12

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

2 Tim 4:7

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

III. We Are Not Alone (vers. 11-16).

There are several things that become apparent when reading this great text of Ex. 17.

A) God Is with Us in Our Battles.

God was clearly with the Israelites in the battles at Rephidim and God is with us in our battles too. How do we know that God is with us. We know because He promised not to leave us.

Heb 13:5

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. KJV

Can we believe God? Of course we can for God cannot lie (**Heb. 6:18**). But not only do we have God's words, we have God's actions. We have Jesus, the greatest testimony of God's love for us and the greatest proof that God will never leave us (**Rom. 8:31-32**). Jesus, ladies and gentlemen, is our proof that God is for us and with us. Listen to me: Jesus is our Yahweh-Nissi. Jesus is our banner and every time we look to Him, we know that God is still with us (**Heb. 12:2**). When the battle gets hot and the fighting gets fierce, we need to look unto Jesus. Why? Because He reminds us that God is still with us. When trials and tribulations invade our life and we are tired and torn by bumps and bruises that come along with living, we need to look unto Jesus. Why? Because He reminds us that God is still with us. When we are faced with a choice to stand up for God or sit down and be quiet, we need to look unto Jesus. Why? Because Jesus is the author and finisher, the founder and perfecter of our faith and He reminds us that God is still with us. You see, Jesus is our banner. He is the flag of our faith and a flag is most important when a person is in trouble. Picture yourself in physical warfare. You are in a battle and the moment is filled with chaos and confusion; the battlefield is thick with smoke and the cries of war are all around you and you feel like quitting because you are tired and weak and no longer sure that the battle can be won. But then you see the flag and you know that all is not lost and so you keep on fighting. That's the power of a flag. Listen to me: Jesus is our flag and as long as our flag is flying we know that we must keep on fighting. And we will. Why? Because our flag tells us that God is still with us. This has always been a source of encouragement for God's people (**Acts 4:13**). Listen: do you know why there are too many who grow faint-hearted in Christ and stop fighting the good fight? It's because they forget that they are not fighting alone and so they lose courage. It is imperative, then, that we always remember that we are not alone. But, there is something else that we must realize along with God being with us and it leads us to our next point.

B) God Is Our Strength.

We must be sure in all of our battles of life, that we know from where the strength for our victories comes. The same group of Israelites who gained victory over the Amalekites at Rephidim, forgot the source of their strength when it was time to enter the land of promise (**Num. 13:26-33**). Let's remember, ladies and gentlemen, that no matter what we face in life, God is with us and He is our strength that enables us to overcome. You see, ladies and gentlemen, one thing

has never changed among the people of God, from the inception of the Israelites as a nation to the introduction of the church of Christ on the day of Pentecost, even to this very moment—in times of conflict, God is our Strength. When the Amalekites try to destroy us, God is our Strength. When false teachers try to lead us astray, God is our Strength. When humanists try to shift our focus, God is our Strength. When denominationalism tries to divide us, God is our Strength. No matter the site, setting or situation, God is our Strength. No matter the form, fashion or figure involved in our conflict, God is our strength. This was certainly something that Moses was cognizant about when he named the altar that he built Yahweh-Nissi. Moses realized that no matter the conflict, we must always look to God for strength to help in times of need and this is something that we must realize too.

C) Human Assistance Is Sometimes Needed.

God always allows man to be involved in his own salvation. Have you ever noticed that. Consider our text one more time (**vers. 12-13**). God could have held up Moses' arms miraculously, couldn't He have? But He didn't. Instead he arranged it so that his brethren gave him the help that he needed. God is still arranging for us to help each other. And the truth is we all need each other's help. There is not a person here who is so great that he or she doesn't need the help of brethren once in a while. We need each other's support. We need each other's prayers. We need each other's encouragement. We need each other's warnings and word of rebuke sometimes.

Heb 10:24-25

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

This is why the early Christians spent so much time together. They realized that they needed each other (**Acts 2:44-46**). Let's take advantage of one another in Christ and use each other as pillars of assistance and strength.

Conclusion:

God is our strength and through the person of Jesus we can indeed overcome any battle in life. Let's always remember the famous words of Paul:

Phil 4:13

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.