

Exodus 17:8-20:21

Amalek Attacks Israel and Is Defeated



Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose some men for us and go out; 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. 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 sun set. And Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the sword.

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua: I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.' And Moses built an altar and called it, The Lord is my banner. He said, 'A hand upon the banner of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.'

Jethro's Advice

Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt. After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro took her back, along with her two sons. The name of one was Gershom (for he said, 'I have been an alien in a foreign land'), and the name of the other, Eliezer (for he said, 'The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh'). Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came into the wilderness where Moses was encamped at the mountain of God, bringing Moses' sons and wife to him. He sent word to Moses, 'I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons.' Moses went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed down and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent. Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had beset them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them. Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the Lord had done to Israel, in delivering them from the Egyptians.

Jethro said, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from the Egyptians, when they dealt arrogantly with them.' And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt-offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, 'What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people

stand around you from morning until evening?’ Moses said to his father-in-law, ‘Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God.’ Moses’ father-in-law said to him, ‘What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace.’

So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men from all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people, as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. And they judged the people at all times; hard cases they brought to Moses, but any minor case they decided themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went off to his own country.

The Israelites Reach Mount Sinai

At the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.’

So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. The people all answered as one: ‘Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord. Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after.’

The People Consecrated

When Moses had told the words of the people to the Lord, the Lord said to Moses: ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and prepare for the third day, because on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, “Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to

death. No hand shall touch them, but they shall be stoned or shot with arrows; whether animal or human being, they shall not live.” When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain.’ So Moses went down from the mountain to the people. He consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, ‘Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman.’

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. When the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down and warn the people not to break through to the Lord to look; otherwise many of them will perish. Even the priests who approach the Lord must consecrate themselves or the Lord will break out against them.’ Moses said to the Lord, ‘The people are not permitted to come up to Mount Sinai; for you yourself warned us, saying, “Set limits around the mountain and keep it holy.”’ The Lord said to him, ‘Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you; but do not let either the priests or the people break through to come up to the Lord; otherwise he will break out against them.’ So Moses went down to the people and told them.

The Ten Commandments

Then God spoke all these words:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.' Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.' Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

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Questions for Discussion

After someone reads a portion of the above selection, prayerfully consider the following questions. Allow fifteen minutes or so for this pre-meeting Bible study.

1. What did you hear? Did anything surprise you?
2. How does what you heard apply to you?
3. How will what you've learned from this scripture affect your work together?