

Exodus 17:8-16

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The Amalekites attacked the Israelites while they were at Rephadim. Moses ordered Joshua to take an army to repel the attack, while he stood on a hill overlooking the battle with the staff of God. When he raised the staff into the air, the Israelites prevailed, and if he lowered the staff, the Amalekites got the better of the Israelites. When Moses' arms got tired, his assistants propped up his arms until sunset, allowing Joshua to win the battle. The LORD then instructed Moses to write the account of the battle as a memorial to the fact that He would eliminate the Amalekites from the earth. Moses in turn built an altar to the LORD.

The second part of [Exodus 17](#) (8 – 16) describes another event that occurred while the Israelites were at Rephidim. Seemingly out of nowhere, *Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim*. “Amalek” was the grandson of Esau ([Genesis 36:12](#); [1 Chronicles 1:36](#)), making them relatives of the Israelites. They lived a nomadic lifestyle in an area generally southwest of the land of Canaan. They “fought against Israel” probably because they felt threatened by them. They probably heard of their deliverance at the Red Sea and could have been aware that the LORD promised Canaan to Jacob, Esau’s brother.

In response to this aggression, *Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”* This is the first mention of Joshua in the Scriptures. Moses chose him to lead a contingent of Israelite warriors to defend the people. He also promised to observe the battle *on the top of the hill*. Moses brought with him “the staff of God,” the same staff he used to strike the rock that had just provided water (17:5 – 6). This would give the warriors confidence, knowing that the power of God was with them. And it happened as Moses said—*Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.*

During the battle, an interesting thing happened. Moses’ assistants noticed that *when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed*. Presumably, when Moses held his hand up, the staff was in his hand.

The problem was that *Moses' hands were heavy*. That is, Moses' "hands" (probably his whole body also) became tired. Moses was around eighty years old when this happened. Their solution to the problem was twofold. First, *they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it*. This would relieve that stress on his legs. Second, *Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other*. Hur is also mentioned in [Exodus 24:14](#), associated with Aaron once again. The "Hur" mentioned in [Exodus 31:2](#), [35:20](#), and [38:22](#) may or may not be the same person as the one in this passage. These two supported Moses' hands so that *his hands were steady until the sun set*.

The word translated *steady* (Heb. "emunah") comes from the word that means "faithfulness." It has been translated "faithfulness," "firmness," and "steadfastness" in other places ([Psalms 36:5](#); [Habakuk 2:4](#)). Moses' hands were "faithful" in staying raised to bless the Israelites. This is the first of 49 occurrences of "emunah" in the Old Testament. Moses holding up his arms provided a tangible sign that the LORD was faithful to Israel and would give them the victory over their enemies. It would show them that the victory is the LORD's, not theirs ([Proverbs 21:31](#)).

This picture also illustrates the importance of teamwork. God's faithfulness worked through Moses, who required the help of Joshua and Hur. In the New Testament, Paul illustrates teamwork by comparing believers in Jesus to a human body, where all the body parts do as they were created, working together, which shows how faithful servants of God ought to cooperate ([Rom 12:4](#); [1 Cor 12:12](#)).

The result was victory! Because Moses' hands holding God's staff were supported so that they faithfully remained lifted up, *Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword*. The phrase "with the edge of the sword" implies that it was a complete victory ([Joshua 6:21](#)) with no quarter given. The victory came through human obedience (Joshua and his army going out to confront the enemy) and divine power (Moses holding up the staff of God).

The LORD wanted His people to remember this victory over their enemies. So, in verses 14 – 16, *the Lord said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua."* This is the first time the LORD has been mentioned in this passage. Either there was a conversation between the LORD and Moses that was not recorded, or Moses, through the LORD's prior teaching, knew what to do. Also, this is the first time in Scripture where someone is told to write anything.

Moses was also instructed to pass it to Joshua, the next generation of leadership, and Joshua would then pass it on to the next generation. It was to be an everlasting memorial of the LORD's victory on the behalf of His people. It was a reminder that the people could fight and win when they walked with the LORD.

In [Exodus 13:7](#), the LORD avoided taking Israel by the way of the Philistines (by the sea), even though it was near. The reason was that "the people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." God intended for Israel to learn to fight. First God fought for them ([Exodus 14:14](#)). Now God upholds them while they fight.

God tells them to write the event down because He wants them to remember that they fought and won. Later, these same warriors will refuse to fight, and lose the opportunity to possess their inheritance in the Promised Land as a result. That privilege will fall to the next generation, who is willing to fight. This is an important biblical principle. God intends for His people to be willing to fight courageously and obediently. [Ephesians 6](#) pictures believers as rising each day and putting on their spiritual centurion uniform and going out into a spiritual battle to fight with the sword of truth.

The LORD wanted Israel to remember that He has resolved to *utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven*. This probably means that the LORD would wipe the Amalekites off the face of the earth and prevent them from having any lasting legacy. In addition to writing the LORD's message, *Moses built an altar and named it The Lord is My Banner*. Many people have built altars to the LORD before now (Noah – [Genesis 8:20](#); Abraham – [Genesis 12:7](#); Isaac – [Genesis 26:25](#); Jacob – [Genesis 35:7](#)). The altar (like others in Scripture) is given a name. This one is named *The Lord is My Banner*. The word for *Banner* is from the verb "to be high" or "to be raised." Like the staff of God being raised for victory in battle, the LORD was to be raised for the purpose of praising Him and acknowledging Him as their God. The LORD was their protector.

Concluding the statement for the memorial, Moses said, "*The Lord has sworn; the Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation.*" Verse 16 is quite difficult in Hebrew. Literally, the Hebrew text reads "for a hand upon the throne of Yah." But the word for "throne" is not usually spelled like it is here and has led to many views on its meaning. Does it really mean "throne"? Another question is whose hand is in view here, Moses' or the LORD's? It probably means that Moses, as the LORD's representative to Israel, (symbolically) puts his hand on the LORD's throne to swear that He will

wage war against the Amalekites for a long time. Indeed, the Amalekites were not completely destroyed until David defeated them ([1 Samuel 30](#)).

To sum up, the events recorded in chapter 17 were meant to show that the LORD was not only their Provider (providing water) but also their Protector (defeating the Amalekites). It is interesting to see how the LORD repeatedly demonstrated His three roles (Deliverer, Provider, and Protector) to His people just prior to entering into a covenant relationship with them.

Biblical Text:

⁸Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. ⁹So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” ¹⁰Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. ¹²But Moses’ hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. ¹³So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

¹⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” ¹⁵Moses built an altar and named it The Lord is My Banner; ¹⁶and he said, “The Lord has sworn; the Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation.”