

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

Moses urged the Israelites to remember to wipe out the Amalekites when they are settled in the Promised Land. This was in response to the brutality the Amalekites showed when they attacked the Israelites during the exodus from Egypt.

In this final section of the chapter, Moses encouraged the people to *remember what Amalek did to them along the way when they came out from Egypt* (v. 17). This refers to an incident that happened early in the Exodus. Found in Exodus 17:8–16, it refers to a flagrant attack made against Israel by a nomadic people known as “the Amalekites,” a tribe which can be tracked back to Amalek, son of Eliphaz, the son of Esau and his concubine Timna (Genesis 36:12).

The Amalekites were a nomadic tribe that lived south of Canaan in the wilderness area of the northern Sinai Peninsula known as the Negev (Numbers 13:29). The Amalekites (distant cousins of the Israelites) were always hostile to Israel, as the numerous biblical references make clear (Exodus 17:8–15; Judges 10:12; 1 Samuel 15:2; Judges 6:3; 7:12; 2 Samuel 8:12). The term *Amalek* here is not a man’s name but the name of a tribe. So, it may be rendered as “the people of Amalek” or simply “the Amalekites.”

Then Moses told the Israelites what to *remember*. He described how the Amalekites *met them along the way and attacked among them all the stragglers at their rear when they were faint and weary* (v. 18). The term *straggler* (Heb. “hāshal,” “shattered”, used only here in the Old Testament) refers to those who lagged behind and become separated from the main body of Israelites because they were *faint and weary*. Because those people were weak and tired, they were an easy target for the Amalekites to attack.

These cowardly acts on the part of the Amalekites showed that they *did not fear God*. They were a pagan people who had no reverence for the God who rescued Israel out of Egypt. Their plan was to destroy God’s people completely, but God’s plan prevailed. God allowed His people to have victory over the Amalekites, and as a result *overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword* (Ex. 17:13).

But the LORD's statement in Exodus 17:14 ("I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven") had not been forgotten. The task fell to the generation who would enter and inhabit the Promised Land. Therefore, Moses told them that it would *come about when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance to possess* (v. 19). Once the LORD had fulfilled His promises to His people, they in turn were obligated to obey Him and *blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven*. It was the will of the LORD to eliminate the Amalekites from the earth. To stress the importance of this, Moses told the Israelites that they *must not forget*.

This command was not fulfilled until far into the future. Because the Israelites did not blot out the Amalekites, the people of Amalek continued their hostility and their cruelty against Israel during the period of the Judges (Judges 3:13, 6:3 – 5, 33; 10:12). Saul defeated them but did not completely eliminate them (1 Samuel 15; 28:18). David fought against them (2 Samuel 1:1) but did not destroy them. They finally disappeared from history around the time of Hezekiah (1 Chronicles 4:43).

It is worth reflection and is important not to confuse the tenth commandment to "not envy" with the need to execute justice. What these ideas have in common is seeking the best for others in the community. God gave the Amorites (the Canaanites) four generations to repent, prior to pronouncing judgment upon them by the hand of Israel (Genesis 15:16). Their elimination was necessary in order to replace their culture of the strong exploiting the weak (Leviticus 18) with a self-governing culture of loving one another (Leviticus 19:18). While Israel was not to envy, they were to remember to faithfully carry out prescribed acts of justice as God had prescribed.

Biblical Text:

¹⁷ Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, ¹⁸ how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. ¹⁹ Therefore it shall come about when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget.