

[endurance]

:: exodus 17.8-16 ::

*Who is this King of Glory?
The Lord Strong and Mighty,
The Lord mighty in battle.
Psalm 24.8*

We're taking a few weeks to look at some of the specific battle records given to us in the Bible so that we can learn from them and apply them to our day to day walk with Christ here on the earth.

Since the fights of the Scriptures are so varied and unpredictable, our purpose is to see how the Lord directed, how the people responded and what the result was. As we glean out spiritual insight into the Lord's planning and strategy we can become battle ready men of God who will stand victorious.

Last week we studied the Battle at Jericho and found that the key to victory there was **discipline**.

Today we'll see the Battle at Rephidim and learn that another key to spiritual victory is **endurance**.

*"A fight is not won by one punch or kick. Either learn to endure or hire a bodyguard."
Bruce Lee*

We are a very regimented society. We schedule and we clock our time at work or in the gym. We are a calendared, time-slot-oriented kind of people. That's our culture.

But it is good for us to remember that struggle and difficulty, trial and temptation, spiritual conflict and suffering, those things don't operate on a schedule. They are always on the prowl and they're indiscriminate of who you are or what is going on in your life. We're not always expecting these things when they show up to battle against us, and so we find that a key to victorious Christian living is *endurance*.

In Exodus chapter 17 we have a great example of this. Starting in verse 8 we read:

Exodus 17.8 - Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim.

The Israelites are hanging out in the desert on their way to Mount Sinai when the Amalekite army comes and attacks them.

Now, Bible scholars are quick to tell you that Amalek is a picture of our flesh, the old sin nature in our lives. We know that from this section, which we'll see in a few minutes, but also because of their heritage.

Amalek was the grandson of Esau, the carnal, fleshly son of Isaac. Esau was not a man of the Spirit but a man of the flesh, and here we're encountering his descendants, which is a good indication of why we see the Amalekite army as a picture of the sin nature.

So they show up here in this desert region and fight with the Israelites.

The word 'fight' there has its roots in the phrase 'to feed on'. Despite our best hopes to live at peace with our old, sin nature, it is an enemy that we can not coexist with. The sin nature is hungry and if we allow it any food, it will then start feeding on our lives altogether. It fights against us by feeding on our relationships and our thoughts and our speech and our choices. The sin nature seeks to devour, like the Amalekites in Exodus 17, and the Devil in 1 Peter chapter 5.

Exodus 17.9 - So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."

A couple of things here.

First, I think it is interesting that they didn't rush to battle the moment they were engaged. Moses takes time to deliberate and plan and strategize. And what this tells me is that we *always* have time for spiritual deliberation. We *always* have time for a moment of prayer or pause to consider the ways of God, to hear *His* battle plan.

When we start immediately reacting to our conflicts or struggles without considering the heart and the plan of God, that is when we get into trouble. Moses took time to deliberate and consider before answering this attack, and he was wise for doing so.

Second, there really isn't anything too shrewd in this plan. In fact, it's very straight forward. They were to go out and fight.

The ace up their sleeve, however, was the Staff of God in the hand of Moses.

That word staff, or 'rod' as your Bibles might say, can be translated as 'branch.' That word reminds us of:

Jeremiah 23.5 - "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth."

In fact, Jeremiah, Zechariah and Isaiah all speak of Jesus Christ as the *Branch* of God.

Here we are reminded that in any conflict we come armed not just with the Bible, not just with spiritual gifting, but with *God Himself*, through Jesus Christ, the Commander of the Armies of the Lord, whose power and presence is more than enough for victory in our lives. Remember that when God is for you, when He is *with* you, who can be against you!

Exodus 17.10 - So Joshua did as Moses told him, and **fought** with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

Now wait a minute. What's the deal? Think for a moment on what it would've been like to be one of these Israeli soldiers. A very short time ago you were slaves, construction workers who made mud bricks and palaces and pyramids. You're not soldiers. In fact, there had never been an Israeli army. Abraham had gone into battle once, but that was it and for the last 400 years the people had been slaves.

Not only that, but a few days before this battle they had seen the armies of Egypt supernaturally consumed by the Red Sea as God sent the water crashing down upon them. They didn't have to lift a finger!

And now, a new enemy has reared itself, and you're telling me we actually have to fight?!?

Though they were engaging with God on their side, complete with His power and presence, they still had to personally contend with their enemies, they still had to go down and battle with them, hand to hand, blade to blade.

Our spiritual lives are hands on. Our contention with the sin nature is to be active, not passive. We're never retired from the Lord's service or from the battle with the flesh until the moment we leave this earth and are united with Christ in our glorified bodies. That's when our retirement, as it were, begins.

As a culture, we are looking forward to our earthly retirement. We love our holidays and vacations and days off. And those things are good. But, we can't let this retirement thinking seep into our spiritual mindset. We're never retired as Christians, we're never to be off-duty or in some sort of ceasefire with our old sin nature.

There are famous stories from World War I where British, French and German forces left the trenches for a celebration of Christmas together. They had a temporary ceasefire to sing carols, play soccer and even exchange gifts before returning to the trenches and the conflict between the nations.

Spiritually speaking, we can't live that way. When we give any license to the flesh, it will spread like fire to the other parts of our lives and it will consume that which is of greatest value. Thus, we need to have great endurance in our lifelong service here on the earth. We see this demonstrated in the next verses:

Exodus 17:11-13 - 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, while 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 going down of the sun. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

Lot of great stuff here.

First, let's think about this from the soldier's point of view.

You are down on the battlefield in the first war of your life. And you come up against this fierce, aggressive army, and you have to fight them **all day**. From sun up to sun down, swinging your sword, pushing against them, watching your footing, dodging blows and weapons and traps, all without a Christmas truce. No lunch break. No water break. Just a full day of constant warfare. Sometimes you're driven back, sometimes you're gaining ground, but it is just a constant battle, hour after hour.

This was what you were presented with that day as a soldier. And this is a picture for us of our life here on the earth, specifically our struggle against the sin nature. Do we have the spiritual endurance to survive this sort of scenario? God has provided it, but are we prepared?

*"If God sends us on strong paths, we are provided strong shoes."
Corrie TenBoom*

At the end of the day these soldiers overwhelmed the Amalekite army because God fought with them and empowered them for victory. The word there could be translated as they "prostrated them".

Reminds us of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 27:

1 Corinthians 9.27 -But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

We are to buffet ourselves. That verse from Paul is a boxing reference. We're to beat down our body, our flesh, so as to overwhelm it with the power of God. If we're not doing that, then we're in trouble. We're going to lose ground in our spiritual life. You can't feed the flesh. You can't ceasefire with the flesh. You can't be at peace with the flesh. This is a lifelong war that we need to endure, as we see at the end of our passage:

Exodus 17.16b - The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

God is very clear in this analogy to us as soldiers in His service. Endurance is necessary here on the earth to live a life that is holy and acceptable before the Lord.

As we close, I do want to make a couple of comments about Moses' part in the battle, because I think we can also glean some practical insight for our daily lives.

We are pretty familiar with this passage, we've heard it many times before. But what can we learn from Moses on the hill?

First, we need to remember that our lives are essentially spiritual. The work that you do, the situations you find yourself in are predominately spiritual, as God places you in them to learn more about Him, share your faith in Him or glorify Him through your behavior.

Moses saw the battle, but understood that everything they were doing was contingent upon the Lord's leading and power in their midst. He knew God was with them and in control and that He would be active in the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Second, Moses was up on the hill, holding the Rod of God in his hand. When it was up, Israel was prevailing, when it was down, Amalek was prevailing.

In Strongs' Concordance, that phrase 'lowered his hand' is defined as 'to let down, to settle, to withdraw.' We settle from time to time. We're like italian dressing. We've got all these components, largely oil, which symbolizes the Holy Spirit in the Bible, and we get shaken up. When we're stirred up, we're full of spice and savor and usefulness. But then, after awhile, we become settled. Those components of our lives aren't as mingled together. We've withdrawn perhaps from the Church or from our personal devotions or prayer lives. We don't really bring the Holy Spirit to work with us or to the gym with us or on the internet with us. And we become settled. And when we settle, when we withdraw from God and from the Church, Amalek starts to prevail in our lives.

What are the practical ways to keep this from happening? We saw last week that discipline is important, but we also see a couple of things from Moses.

First, he sat down on a rock. We need to rest in God. We need to have confidence and contentment in God. That may take a while to learn, but it's something we need to work on.

Second, we need to surround ourselves with men of God who can help us in our battles. Moses brought Aaron and Hur with him up to the hilltop and they were essential in this victory, because when Moses became weary, they were there to support him in what was right. They were not there to give him lip-service or just tell him, "hey, take a break, it's been a long day," but to stay dedicated to what needed to be done, to say, "we're going to finish this out together, we're going to *win* this battle."

We need to surround ourselves with guys like this and we need to *be* guys like this to the Christian men around us. Men who can endure with our friends and support them, not in quitting, but in finishing out the fight, finishing out the race that they have begun.

Endurance. It is a key to our victory in Christ.

It's not a pleasant thing to endure. But you know, when we think about what it costs verses what we gain, the difficulty doesn't seem to matter much.

It is hard to win a battle. It is hard to climb a mountain. It is hard to lose weight or to run a marathon or to carry our cross. But the benefits of endurance, the rewards of coming through, having endured the struggle, makes all the difficulty melt away.

We are enduring for the final victory, the final prize, the final reward, where we stand in front of Jesus, having been used to help our fellow brothers, to bring people from darkness to light, having shared in His sufferings and His trials and being there, faithful, qualified soldiers, who fought the good fight, who finished the race, who endured as men before our living God.