



## Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text  
Exodus 17:8-16

Topic  
Aaron and Hur accompany Moses to a hilltop  
where they help support his raised hands from falling

Title  
*"I Lift High With a Little Help From My Friends"*

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Brad Pitt revealed in a 2017 interview that he had a Christian upbringing. He was first involved in a Baptist church that he called "cleaner, stricter, by-the-book" Christianity. When he reached high school, he said, "my folks jumped to a more charismatic movement, which got into speaking in tongues and raising your hands."

No, he's not a believer. In a 2015 interview he said he was "probably 20% atheist and 80% agnostic. I don't think anyone really knows. You'll either find out or not when you get there, and until then there's no point in thinking about it."

Sadly, when you get there, it's too late.

Raising your hands in church seems to be associated more with charismatics than it does conservatives. For their part, charismatics often portray it as being more spiritual.

Of course, there are many different ways in which you can raise your hands in church. Christian comedian Tim Hawkins has a routine where he demonstrates ten hand-raising styles. It's pretty funny, and I don't want to ruin it for you, so let me just show you the first and last.

1. Once you get your hands out of your pockets, he calls this initial stage, *Carry the TV*.
2. He progresses through various other postures, each getting increasingly more 'spiritual,' all the way to what he calls *Mufassa*.

The prominent feature in our verses is Moses lifting his hands on the hilltop. Let's read, beginning in verse eight:

Exo 17:8 Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

Exo 17:9 And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand."

Exo 17:10 So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

Exo 17:11 And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

Moses' raised hands on the *high ground* were critical to victory on the *battle ground*.

But I think we must quickly add that the battle ground was no less important. Joshua's sword was equally necessary for the win.

There were thus two separate but equally important and necessary fronts on which victory depended.

I suggest the same is true in our walk with the Lord. I'll therefore organize my comments around two points: #1 You Are To Maintain The High Ground, and #2 You Are To Gain On The Battleground.

### #1 You Are To Maintain The High Ground

This passage is almost universally taught as an example and an encouragement to intercessory prayer. Here's a representative quote: "This amazing passage shows us that life or death for Israel depended on the prayers of one man. Moses prayed as we should pray - with passion, believing that life and death - perhaps eternally - depended on prayer."

It may therefore surprise you to hear me say this: **These verses are *not* about intercessory prayer.**

I don't say that lightly, or for the sake of being contrary. It's just that the words themselves don't indicate Moses was praying.

Take a moment and look for any word in this passage that indicates Moses was praying. **You won't find one.**

We read that he ascended a hill, and that he raised his hands, and we assume he went to pray. The text itself tells a different story.

Exo 17:8 Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

The Amalekites were a tribe first mentioned during the time of Abraham. Genesis chapter thirty-six refers to the descendants of Amalek, the son of Eliphaz and grandson of Jacob's brother Esau as Amalekites.

It might help if I told you that, during the time of Esther, when the Jews were subject to Persia, that Haman was an Amalekite. It's a little confusing because he's called an Agagite; but that's because he is a descendant of the Amalekite King Agag. He was an Amalekite in Agag's line.

Haman hated the Jews and tried to have all the Jews in Persia annihilated by order of King Xerxes. He was unaware that Queen Esther was Jewish. God used Queen Esther to save the Jews from genocide. Haman, his sons, and the rest of Israel's enemies were annihilated instead - hung from the gallows he had prepared.

Haman is typical of the Amalekites - they were a people bent on the destruction of Israel.

Our verse tells us that the Amalekites "came and fought with Israel." Israel wasn't in Amalekite territory. Israel hadn't happened upon them in their journey. The Amalekites went out of their way to attack God's people. They "came" on a mission to kill them.

Exo 17:9 And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand."

We're going to skip-over Joshua for now; he will be our second point. We're sticking with Moses.

Moses said he'd go on top of a "hill with the rod of God" in his hand.

- He didn't ascend a mountain to be alone with God. Far from it; he was seeking a vantage point from which to see the battle, and to be seen as the battle was waged. In a moment we'll see that he took two men with him; not exactly standard procedure if you want to be alone interceding.
- He didn't go up the hill empty-handed. He took with him the shepherd's rod that had been instrumental thus far in bringing the ten plagues; and in parting the Red Sea; and in bringing water from the rock. Moses was going to do something with the rod.

Exo 17:10 So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

Aaron was Moses' older brother. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Hur was the husband of Miriam, Moses' sister. This same Hur will later be left with Aaron to supervise the people while Moses was on Mount Sinai.

Exo 17:11 And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

Read carefully. Moses "held up his **hand**," *not* his **hands**. It's strictly singular in the original. Moses was therefore *not* in the posture of having both his hands raised. He was, in fact, holding out the rod in his hand.

I mentioned the several other times that we've seen Moses hold out the rod: in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and at Horeb. In any of those instances do we think he was involved in intercessory prayer?

No; and neither was he interceding in prayer here. He was simply obeying a leading God evidently gave him about how to engage the Amalekites. He was to go on a hilltop and hold out the rod.

We're going to see (v12) that the battle went on until the going down of the sun. During that exhausting day, Moses' arm grew weary holding the rod up in his hand. When the rod was lowered, the battle turned against Israel.

I'm sure Moses switched from hand-to-hand. But as hour-after-hour went by, his physical strength waned. Even alternating hands became too much for his 80 year old frame.

Apparently Moses was no Amar Bharati. He had one arm raised to honor the god Shiva for over forty years. Of course, the muscles were severely atrophied, coupled with a loss of circulation and permanent nerve damage in the arm. Any attempt to use it normally would destroy it. The arm's connection to the rest of the body is the only thing that has preserved it from necrosis.

Exo 17:12 But Moses' hands became heavy; so 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 the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

At some point, his legs gave out and standing became too much for Moses, so Aaron and Hur found a suitable rock upon which he could sit for the rest of the day.

Then Aaron and Hur stepped in - one on one side, one on the other - to help Moses keep the rod in his alternating hands lifted high.

Aaron and Hur are typically discussed as a picture of believers coming alongside other believers to support them in prayer. As far as the text, *they did not pray at all*. If anything, they are an example of coming alongside to offer *practical help - physical help*.

I'm not saying that Moses, Aaron and Hur didn't pray while they were engaged in all this activity. I'm saying that all this activity tells us that intercessory prayer isn't the main application.

If this isn't about intercessory prayer, what is it about? **It's about seeing your battles from the high ground with the resources and the authority that God has given you as a believer in Jesus Christ.**

Two passages found in the Book of Ephesians help us understand the application that I'm suggesting:

- Eph 2:6 [God has] raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
- Eph 1:3 [And] has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

That describes Moses and Company, does it not? Seated in a high place, with God's spiritual resource - the rod.

It describes us, too:

- In some spiritual, yet very real sense, every Christian is already understood as being seated in Heaven with Jesus. We could say that we have the high ground.
- And in some spiritual, yet very real sense, every Christian has at his or her disposal “every spiritual” resource Heaven has to offer.

Moses, on high ground with the one resource available to him, is thus a picture of your position in Jesus Christ, and of the resources He can equip you with.

From that vantage point, and with those advantages, you can be assured of ultimate victory in your battles.

What about Moses’ weariness, and getting help from Aaron and Hur?

First of all, we are still in our earthly, inglorious bodies. We grow faint; we grow weary.

- Even with faith and hope and love at our disposal, we tire.
- Even with prayer and the Bible at our disposal, we tire.
- Even with God the Holy Spirit living in us, as His temple, we tire.

Second of all, the fellowship of believers is another resource available to us in our fainting and weariness. There are a great number of “one another” verses in the Bible, to encourage us to encourage others.

Too often the following lyric proves true:



*To dwell above with saints we love,  
Oh, that will be glory.  
But to dwell below with saints we know,  
Well, that's another story.*

Ideally the body of Jesus on the earth is a great resource to lift us up when we are down. We all need to get better at it.

So that, I think, is what this story is about. It is about us maintaining a heavenly vantage point in our earthly battles... And drawing only from heavenly resources as we fight those battles.

- When we maintain a heavenly vantage point and draw from heavenly resources, we prevail.
- When we don't, the enemy prevails.

I should qualify that. By "prevail" I don't mean things always go our way. "You can't always get what you want."

What you **can** always 'get,' since it is a gift, is grace from God that is sufficient to get you through each day as you await the return of the Lord.

Seated in Heaven, with Jesus, you believe that His grace is sufficient - despite outward blessings or buffeting.

Sometimes it can be a struggle to get through the next hour, or even the next minute. But His grace is always sufficient.

Moses had the rod. It was a tremendous resource.

You and I have so much more than the rod of God in our hands. We have the Spirit of God in our hearts.

## #2 You Are To Gain On The Battle Ground

At the end of *The Return of the King*, the dark lord, Sauron, discovered too late that the battle for Middle Earth was being fought on two fronts. While Aragorn and company openly marched on the Black Gate, Frodo and Sam were deep inside Mordor, secretly seeking to destroy the one ring of power.

Moses, on the hill, was one front. Joshua, on the field of battle, was a second front.

- Without Moses' raised hand, there could be no victory.
- But without Joshua's drawn sword, there could be no victory, either.

Exo 17:8 Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

Deuteronomy 25:17&18 fills out the story: "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God."

It was a case of dirty deeds done dirty - attacking the weak stragglers. Something had to be done to protect the weak.

Exo 17:9 And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand."

Hello, General. Just like that, Joshua was appointed to head the Israeli Defense Forces.

This is our introduction to Joshua. He is going to have an important role among God's people during their wilderness journey; he is going to succeed Moses as their leader and take them into the promised land; and he is to have a Bible book named after him. Yet we know virtually nothing about him at this point.

At the Red Sea God told them to, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord... the Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (14:13). There would be no standing still this time.

It is so important we continually seek God for His methods. He seems to love throwing us curve balls and change-ups.

Israel had been subjected by the Egyptians for around four hundred years. They were farmers and brick makers. They were definitely not soldiers.

Krav Maga had not been developed as a fighting style. We're not even sure where they got swords. Perhaps from the Egyptian soldiers that were drowned in the unparting of the Red Sea.

I can think of a lot of movies that portray the hero turning common farmers into skilled soldiers over a period of time. Kevin Costner's *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* has a long sequence in which you see the training of his farmer-army in Sherwood Forest.

Joshua had just hours to choose a few good men and go to battle against a seasoned and stealthy enemy.

There are some occupations where you don't want folks to get on-the-job training. Soldiering is one of those.

Christian soldiering is **all** on-the-job training. You get saved and immediately you are thrust into a battle on several fronts. You've got armor, but it might be months or years before you read about it in Ephesians. Meanwhile the world, the flesh, and the devil come right at you.

But you find that "He that is in you" is greater than all your enemies. You gain ground by simple trust in the few promises and verses you do know.

Exo 17:10 So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

I said that this is where we are first introduced to Joshua. What a great introduction. "Ladies and gentlemen, I introduce Joshua - who did as Moses said to him." In other words, Joshua was a servant.

Job descriptions can come in handy in certain industries. Not so much in Christian ministry. Your job description is simply "servant." You do what needs doing. If you can't figure out what that is, then you don't have a job.

Sure, that is over-simplifying things. But I've noticed a trend among churches to over-complicate things by mimicking the world with detailed job descriptions. Too often a super-specific job description keeps you *from* serving.

They "fought with Amalek." That's a sanitized summary. This was brutal, hack-and-slash, eyeball-to-eyeball sword fighting. One expert said, "Swords, spears and axes are tools for maiming and slaughter. The purpose of getting an army into the field was to hack, cut and stab the enemy into oblivion."

Then he added this: “Troops that have never been in action or have not been used to such spectacles, are greatly shocked at the sight of the wounded and the dying; and the impressions of fear they receive dispose them rather to fly than to fight.”

Joshua and his few chosen men showed incredible courage. It's too bad his efforts are often overlooked because we concentrate on Moses, thinking his part to be inherently more spiritual.

You notice that Moses skipped diplomacy. The Amalekites could not be reasoned with, or appeased. They were like those in the Middle East today who call for the annihilation of Israel.

As recently as 2015, Iran's Brigadier General said the only way to deal with Israel “is full annihilation and destruction of the Zionist regime.”

Exo 17:11 And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

By “Amalek prevailed” I can only assume that Israelites were killed. As far as Joshua was concerned, defeat was a real possibility.

If your battle is not going well, take a look at your high ground.

It isn't only weariness and fainting on the high ground that can result in loss. Often the resources of the high ground are replaced by a dependence upon natural, fleshly weapons. Christians and churches adopt the ways of the world. Having begun in the Spirit, they try to go forward in the flesh.

A.W. Tozer once said, "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95% of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95% of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference."

Exo 17:12 But Moses' hands became heavy; so 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 the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.  
Exo 17:13 So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

One commentator put it like this:

The two actions... are [equally] important: it is as important that Joshua fights with the sword as that Moses should [raise his hand]. Neither would be effective without the other. The battle does not depend ultimately on Joshua's skill as a swordsman; but neither is it won apart from Joshua's engagement. Similarly, Moses' [raised hand] is nothing without the practical service of Joshua, who remains dependent on Moses, even although he cannot see him or hear him beyond the din of battle.

Exo 17:14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."

Do you like to journal? I don't, so I won't say too much. People who journal swear by it. They call it life changing.

Moses was a journaler. I think it was less about him, though, and more about the works of God.

The Amalekites would be around for a long time, harassing Israel. Ultimately they would be blotted out of remembrance. As far as I know, there are no living descendants of the Amalekites.

Many commentators suggest that the Amalekites illustrate our flesh - which constantly battles against the spirit and must be struggled against until completely conquered (Galatians 5:17).

Exo 17:15 And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD-Is-My-Banner;

Exo 17:16 for he said, "Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

An altar usually means sacrifice, but this may have been more of a memorial.

“Banner” can be translated *lifted high*. Moses thus commemorated the method God used to defeat the Amalekites - the hand lifted high holding the rod.

The war with Amalek would go on for centuries - but their ultimate defeat was never in doubt.

Amalek-like enemies abound as long as we are on this earth, and they may prevail against you for a time, but ultimately they will suffer total defeat as you are raised or raptured into your glorious new body.

The high ground and the battle ground are two fronts in your walk with the Lord. You can't neglect either; and neither is more important than the other.

Notice nothing is said of Joshua getting tired - even though he wielded a sword all day. That's because he was really fighting with the resources of the high ground.

The battle ground is where you engage your enemies with the resources of the high ground. When you are attuned to what God has provided you, spiritually, you will run (or fight) and not grow weary.

Brad Pitt described himself as “probably 20% atheist and 80% agnostic.” That adds up to 100% lost.

If you are not a believer, **you need to raise your hands... *In surrender to Jesus.***