



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V24 N21

May 22, 2022

WAY OUT

"Hands Toward Heaven"

Exodus 17:8-16

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Prayer

I pray to God to know him, to lay my request before him, and to find direction for my daily life.

"Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. 17 I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. 18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; 19 but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. 20 Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!"

Psalm 66:16-20



How do God's people access his power?

Exodus 17:8-16 describes the Israelites' first encounter with a fighting foe after leaving Egypt—the first of many they will face before successfully taking the Promised Land. The Amalekites are poised to prevent God's people from arriving at Sinai and Canaan. If they succeed, the Exodus may just as well have never happened. That said, the battle itself, as well as its outcome, are harbingers of conflicts to come. Joshua, whose appearance foreshadows the many military encounters the Israelites will have later, is mentioned for the first time here. According to verses 11-12, the outcome of the battle is rather strangely determined by Moses' ability to keep his arms raised during the skirmish. These verses read: "As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning." The text does not explain the significance of Moses' raised arms, staff in hand.

Does he raise them in prayer? This is most often assumed to be the case, but the text makes no mention of prayer. It's true that raising one's hands is a common posture for prayer. In Exodus 9:29, Moses tells Pharaoh, "When I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to the LORD. The thunder will stop and there will be no more hail, so you may know that the earth is the LORD's." But on this occasion, prayer is neither explicitly mentioned, nor does Moses actually say anything to God, as he frequently does in similarly desperate circumstances.

Does he raise them to draw attention to his staff? On other occasions, Moses uses his staff, called the "staff of God" (4:20; 17:9), to perform signs (see 4:17; 7:9-15, 17-20; 8:5, 16-17; 10:13; 14:16). Through Moses' staff God works great acts to bring Israel out of Egypt, not the least of which is the parting of the

Red Sea. The defeat of the Amalekites is yet another act of deliverance by the God of the Exodus using Moses' staff. That said, Moses' staff is clearly no magic wand; it's merely a tool in God's hand, a tool God chooses to use to demonstrate his might and power. As one commentator explains: "Moses lifted his hands, in symbol of the power of Yahweh upon the fighting men of Israel, surely, but in some miraculous way Moses' upraised hands became also conductors of that power . . . About Yahweh's consequential involvement in the battle, an involvement closely linked to Moses' raised or lowered hands, there can be no doubt" (John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3, *Exodus*, 236).

Another commentator suggests both significances are valid. He writes: "Moses' actions suggest that he was engaging in *intercessory prayer*, although any reference to prayer is absent in the text. The emphasis is on the staff that Moses held in his hand, the *instrument of God's power*" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Exodus, 2022 ed., 158, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/exodus.pdf). In reality, prayer involves more than saying words to God either out loud or in one's mind. Moses' holding the staff of God above his head with both hands amounted to an expression of Israel's total dependence on the power of God to defeat the Amalekites, and as such, amounted to prayer of trust.

Other suggestions can be rejected out of hand. Moses is not performing a magic trick, neither is he simply encouraging the troops. Nowhere do we find him using magic on behalf of God's people, and a psychological explanation seems hardly adequate to account for the fact that "Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword" (17:13).



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Read Exodus 17:8-16

8 *The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. 9 Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."*

10 *So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. 11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. 12 When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up – one on one side, one on the other – so that his hands remained steady till sunset. 13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.*

14 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven."*

15 *Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. 16 He said, "Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the LORD, the LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation."*

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "Amalekites" in vv. 8, 9, 10, 11, 16.
- Circle "tomorrow" in v. 9.
- Box "So" indicating *result* in vv. 10, 13.
- Circle "Hur" in vv. 10, 12.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 11.
- Underline "held up" and "lowered" in v. 11, and "remained steady" in v. 12.
- Circle "write" in v. 14.
- Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 14.
- Bracket "completely blot out" in v. 14.
- Highlight v. 15.
- Underline "throne of the LORD" in v. 16.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. The Amalekites attack the Israelites at Rephidim. How does Deuteronomy 25:17-18 describe that attack?
 2. The Amalekites are a long-term thorn in Israel's flesh. Explain (see Nu 13:26-29; 14:36-45; Jdg 3:13-14 [Ehud]; 6:3-4, 33; 7:12 [Gideon]; 1Sa 14:48; 15:2-3 [Saul]).
 3. Joshua's defeat of the Amalekites is a harbinger of things to come. How so?
 4. Moses strategically positions himself with the "staff of God" in hand. Explain the significance of the staff.
 5. As long as he is holding up his hands, the Israelites are winning. Explain the significance of his raised hands.
 6. Moses is to write what happened "on a scroll" (v. 14). Why is the defeat of the Amalekites worth remembering?
 7. Explain why Joshua would need to *hear* what is written on the scroll (v. 14).
 8. Moses built a *memorial* altar. Explain the significance of its name.
 9. On one hand, the LORD "will completely blot out the name of Amalek" (v. 14), but on the other, "the LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation" (v. 16). How do you reconcile these statements?
 10. **Discussion:** There's a lesson to be learned here. Talk about it.
-

Commentary On The Text

Exodus 17:8-16 records the Israelites' first encounter with a hostile force less than three months after leaving Egypt. *The NET Bible* summarizes the passage this way: "The first part of the story reports the attack and the preparation for the battle (8,9). The second part describes the battle and its outcome (10-13). The final section is the preservation of this event in the memory of Israel (14-16)" (24sn on Ex 17:8). The Amalekites, a nomadic people living in the Negev south of Canaan and in the Sinai, apparently view the Israelites as unwelcome competitors for natural resources, and so they attack them at Rephidim (v. 8). One commentator speculates: "If this is Wadi Refayid (as both the name, and also the stage-list in Numbers 33:12-14 suggest), then the anxiety of the Amalekites is understandable. They want to drive Israel from the fertile oasis of Wadi Feiran, the best land in the peninsula, lying nearby . . . It is a puzzle, however, to see how Israel could have been short of water in such a place as Rephidim unless, as Driver suggests, they were camped in the desert, short of the oasis itself, or, with other editors, they were camped past the oasis, and between it and Sinai" (R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, TOTC, 133). In any case, the Amalekites evidently dogged the Israelites from the time they crossed the Red Sea, picking off stragglers along the way (Dt 25:17-18). When they threaten an all-out attack, Moses commissions Joshua to put an end to it. Joshua's appearance here foreshadows the many military encounters Israel will face during the Conquest. Since he will be leading Israel's army when that time comes, it's only right for him to receive a fitting introduction now.

With Moses up above, the "staff of God" in hand, and Joshua down below, his recruits beside him engaged in battle, something astounding occurs. As long as Moses holds his hand up, the Israelites prevail in battle. Whenever he's fatigued and drops them, the Amalekites gain the upper hand. So to ensure he retains the proper posture, Aaron and Hur come alongside to hold his hands up—"one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset" (v. 12). As a result, Joshua overcomes the Amalekite army with the sword (v. 13).

The interpretation of this text rides on the significance of Moses holding up the staff of God his hands. One commentator explains this best: "To understand the meaning of this sign, it must be borne in mind that, although ver. 11 merely speaks of the raising and dropping of the hand (in the singular), yet, according to ver. 12, both hands were supported by Aaron and Hur, who stood one on either side, so that Moses did not hold up his hands alternatively, but grasped the staff with both his hands, and held it up with the two. The lifting up of the hands has been regarded almost with unvarying unanimity by Targumists, Rabbins, Fathers, Reformers, and nearly all the more modern commentators, as the sign or attitude of prayer . . . The lifting up of the staff secured to the warriors the strength needed to obtain the

victory, from the fact that by means of the staff Moses brought down this strength from above, i.e., from the Almighty God in heaven; not indeed by a merely spiritless and unthinking elevation of the staff, but by the power of his prayer, which was embodied in the lifting up of his hands with the staff, and was so far strengthened thereby, that God had chosen and already employed this staff as the medium of the saving manifestation of His almighty power. There is no other way in which we can explain the effect produced upon the battle by the raising and dropping . . . of the staff in his hands . . . God had not promised him miraculous help for the conflict with the Amalekites, and for this reason he lifted up his hands with the staff in prayer to God, that he might thereby secure the assistance of Jehovah for His struggling people. At length he became exhausted, and with the falling of his hands and the staff he held, the flow of divine power ceased, so that it was necessary to support his arms, that they might be kept firmly directed upwards . . . until the enemy was entirely subdued" (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch*, 2:79, 80, 81).

Such a momentous victory is well worth remembering, so the LORD instructs Moses to keep a written record of it and to make sure that Joshua *hears* what is written. What's more, Moses sets up a memorial altar, naming it "The LORD is my Banner," indicating the LORD is the one who fights for Israel. As Israel's future military leader, Joshua needs to have confidence in the LORD's ability and intention to deliver Israel's enemies into his hands. So prior to entering Canaan forty years later, God assures him: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them" (Jos 1:2-6).

The *upper* story dominates this narrative. On the way to Sinai, the LORD must prepare his people for their journey to Canaan. As travelers through uncharted territory need to learn to trust and obey their guide, the Israelites need to learn to trust and obey their LORD through the wilderness. So during their initial training, he tests their obedience (cf. 15:25; 16:4), their trust (cf. 15:24; 16:3; 17:2-3), and their courage (cf. 17:8) before reaching Sinai. The *upper* story implies the *lower* story. The Israelites need to learn the essential spiritual skills they will need to make it to Canaan. Unfortunately, the generation that left Egypt does not and dies in the wilderness (Nu 14:20-24).

Word Studies/Notes

v. 8 *Amalekites*

Cf. Nu 13:29;

14:40-45. "The Amalekites were the descendants of Amalek, the grandson of Esau (Edom, Ge 36:16). Their home was in southern Canaan (Nu 13:29). According to Deuteronomy 25:17-18, they attacked Israel when they were 'weary and worn out' and cut off their stragglers without mercy. For this attack they were known as the 'first among the nations' to wage war against God's people (Nu 24:20); thus, according to God's promise in Genesis 12:3, their memory was to be blotted out from under heaven (cf. Nu 24:20; Dt 25:19). This promise was partially fulfilled during the time of Saul (1Sa 15) and Hezekiah (1Ch 4:43). But it was not until the death of Haman the Agagite (Est 7:10) and his descendants (Est 9:7-10) that the last of the Amalekites was destroyed" (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 279). "They apparently were attempting to dislodge the Israelites from this pleasant oasis and to secure their territory from intrusion" (John D. Hannah, "Exodus," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 135). "The Amalekites were undoubtedly attempting to protect their own territory as well as gaining control of the oasis area which had now been occupied by the Israelites" (John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, 185).

v. 9 *tomorrow*

"Tomorrow" is

often used in the book of Exodus to refer to the time God will punish Israel's enemies (cf. 8:23,29; 9:5, 18; 10:4) or when something important will happen (cf. 16:23). Used here it signifies God is about to intervene on Israel's behalf.

v. 10 *Hur*

"Hur was appar-

ently the son of Caleb (1 Chron. 2:19). This Caleb was not the well-known Caleb of later fame in the Books of Numbers and Joshua. Hur was possibly the grandfather of Bezalel, the architect of the tabernacle (31:2, et al.). Josephus said Hur was the husband of Miriam. In any case, Hur was an important man in Israel (cf. 24:14)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Exodus," 2022 ed., 157, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/exodus.pdf). His mention here anticipates the construction of the tabernacle (chaps. 25-40).

v. 11 *held up* . . .

Moses holds the

staff of God when he holds up his hands. "The war effort and Moses' holding up his hands go side by side until the victory is won and commemorated. Many have used this as an example of intercessory prayer - but the passage makes no such mention. In Exodus so far the staff of God is the token of the

power of God; when Moses used it, God demonstrated his power. To use the staff of God was to say that God did it; to fight without the staff was to face defeat. Using the staff of God was a way of submitting to and depending on the power of God in all areas of life" (*The NET Bible*, 24sn on Ex 17:8). Nevertheless, raised hands is a common nonverbal expression of prayer (cf. Ex 9:29). Perhaps the significance of Moses' action entails both. Holding the staff of God above his head with both hands is most likely a prayerful expression of Israel's total dependence on the power of God. In its note on Ex 17:11, *The NIV Study Bible* calls it "a symbol of appeal to God for help and enablement (see note on 9:29; see also 9:22; 10:12; 14:16)."

v. 14 *write*

"This is the first

of five instances in the Pentateuch where we read that Moses wrote down something at the LORD's command: 'Write this in a book as a memorial.' (v. 14; cf. 24:4, 7; 34:27; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 31:9, 24). Clearly Moses could write, which some critics of the Bible have questioned" (Constable, 161). "The purpose in this instance was to record the 'sacred war' or 'ban' against Amalek, finally executed in Saul's day (1 Sa. 15), after which we scarcely hear of Amalek again. Perhaps the 'book' mentioned was the lost 'Book of the Wars of YHWH', to which reference is made elsewhere (Nu 21: 14)" (R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, TOTC, 137).

v. 15 *altar*

"The altar that

Moses built (v. 15) commemorated God's victory, as well as His self-revelation as the One who would provide victory for Israel against her enemies. The 'banner' was a flag that the victor could raise over his defeated foe. 'The LORD is My Banner' was the name of the altar, not a name for God. The altar was used to worship Yahweh, whom Moses now identified with this symbol of Israel's victory" (Constable, 162).

v. 16 *throne of the LORD*

"The battle be-

tween Yahweh and Amalek will continue across the generations because the Amalekites have raised a hand against Yahweh's throne, that is, they have challenged his sovereignty by attacking his people" (John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3, *Exodus*, 237).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Just as the Israelites needed to trust in the power of God accessed through prayer,
God's people today need to do the same.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

I have long hair and braid it a lot during the heat of summer. As I'm wrapping and twisting my hair into submission, I wonder what it would have been like for Moses. Honestly, I can barely hold my arms up to get one good braid in and generally need to stop for a rest before I attack the other side of my head. When Moses' arms got tired, did he have to ask Aaron and Hur to step in and help? I want to believe they were so in tune with their friend they just knew. They could see by the look on his face, or they recognized his weary demeanor and knew unequivocally that he needed help. I imagine they were creative in their problem solving and knew exactly what to do to support their friend. We all need a few good friends that can read the look on our face and take over, especially in parenting. I'm so thankful for the lovely group of friends that surrounded me during my early parenting season. When exhaustion took over and my patience ran thin, they could see it on my face and knew it was time to step in to help. They had a full measure of grace where I was skimming the bottom of the barrel. The beauty of these friends is that they did it all for the glory of God. They were fully aware of the frustration and anger simmering and rescued me before I exploded in an ungodly way. Who are your friends that will hold your hands when weariness takes over? Tell them today how much you appreciate them!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Exodus 17:8-16.

1. What problem did the Israelites have?
2. What happened when Moses had his hands raised? What about when they were lowered?
3. How did Aaron and Hur help Moses?

What Do You Think?

What is a banner used for? Why is a banner important?

What Do You Do?

Think about what is important to your family. Using household items, create a family banner.

CORE COMPETENCY: Biblical Community

I spend time with other Christians to help with God's work.

MEMORY VERSE: Philippians 4:19

"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for 12 years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Central Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

© 2022 Central Bible Church.

Material researched, written and supervised by Dr. Tom Bulick. All Scripture referenced from the New International Version unless otherwise noted. This resource is freely distributed and may be copied without permission.



**CENTRAL
BIBLE CHURCH**

8001 Anderson Boulevard
Fort Worth, Texas 76120
817-274-1315
wearecentral.org