

THE FIFTH CRISIS OF ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS — WARFARE: VICTORY THROUGH PREVAILING PRAYER EXODUS 17:08–16

Introduction

Crisis — what do we do when some crisis stares us in the face? No crisis is more threatening and frightening than war — a war that is launched right at one's back door. This is what now happened to Israel, but the focus is not upon the war. The focus is upon the thing that brought about the victory: prevailing prayer — the intercession, the crying out to God. Victory against the enemies of life comes from the LORD and from the LORD alone. When the enemies of life attack us, our duty is to go before the LORD and cry out to Him for victory. This is the lesson, the great focus of this passage: *The Fifth Crisis of Israel in the Wilderness — Warfare: Victory Through Prevailing Prayer*, Exodus 17:8-16.

- I. The crisis (vv. 8-9).
- II. The prevailing prayer (vv. 10-12).
- III. The results of prevailing prayer (vv. 13-16).

I. *Exodus 17:08–09 The Crisis: The Amalekites Attacked Israel*

1. The Amalekites attacked Israel while they were camped at Rephidim. (See *Amalekites*, Exo 17:8). Why would the Amalekites attack Israel? No doubt, because they felt threatened. They were a desert people who lived just south of the promised land of Canaan. They had obviously heard about Israel being freed from Egypt and of their march to Canaan, somewhere between two to three million of them. To reach Canaan, this large mass of Israelites would have to march either through or close by the land of the Amalekites. The leaders of the Amalekites had no idea what Israel's intentions would be, to pass by their land in peace or to attack and ransack them. Consequently, the Amalekites launched a surprise attack against Israel. The attack was sudden, totally unexpected. Four facts need to be pointed out about the attack of the Amalekites.
 - a. The attack was most cruel and savage. It was launched first against the handicapped and the helpless: the stragglers — the sick, aged and weary — who lagged behind the main body of travellers. Scripture says the Amalekites slaughtered them all (Deut 25:17-19).
 - b. The attack was a surprise attack launched against a mass of civilians, not against an army, totally unprovoked and uncalled for. The leaders of the Amalekites should have sent emissaries out to investigate Israel's intentions and to seek peace. The launching of an army to begin killing, maiming, raping and enslaving people was reprehensible.
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- c. The Amalekites were set on annihilation of the Israelites, totally exterminating and erasing them from the face of the earth. They were driven by prejudice and bitter hatred against the Israelites, the same bitter prejudice held by many nations against the Jews down through the generations.

Psa 83:4, 7 “Come,” they say, “let us destroy them as a nation, so that Israel’s name is remembered no more.”.....Byblos, Ammon and Amalek, Philistia, with the people of Tyre.

- d. The Amalekites should have known that God had promised the land of Canaan to Israel. They should have known just as people today know that the Jews look upon the land of Palestine (Canaan) as the *promised land* given to them by God. But the Amalekites should have been aware of the fact far more than we are today. Why?

=> Because the Amalekites were the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. And God had given the promise of the *promised land* to Jacob and his descendants. Esau knew all about the promise. And note: Amalek was the grandson of Esau. His father, Eliphaz, was the oldest son of Esau. Esau would certainly have shared the great promises of God with both his son Eliphaz and his grandson Amalek (see Gen 36:15).

The point is this: the Amalekites were distant cousins of the Israelites. They most likely knew and certainly should have known about Israel’s being promised the promised land of Canaan. They should have sent emissaries and investigated Israel’s intentions, not launched a savage and brutal attack against them. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* says this:

*There is every possibility that [the Amalekites] had known about the promise of the land of Canaan that had been given to Esau’s twin brother, Jacob; therefore, they should not have felt any threat to their interests in the Negev had this promise been remembered and taken seriously. After all, the promise was to be a means of blessing Amalek along with all the other nations (Gen 12:3) if only they, like Abraham, would have believed. Instead they “came” (wayyabo) and attacked Israel at Rephidim — some distance south of the north-central district of the Sinai where they lived. (Frank E. Gaebelien, Editor. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2, p. 408).*

2. Moses appointed a commander to mobilize an army to defend Israel, the young man Joshua (v. 9). Apparently, Moses had already charged Joshua with mobilizing an army for Israel. This is suggested by the quickness with which Joshua and the armed men were able to mobilize and stop the attack of the Amalekites. Remember, the attack was a surprise attack against those who lagged behind: the handicapped, sick, weary and aged.

Where did Israel’s armed forces get their weapons? Most likely from the Egyptians. When they were freed by the Egyptians, they requested wages — back pay — for their slave labour. One of the requests would have been for weapons for protection and

hunting purposes out in the wilderness of the desert, weapons such as swords and bows and arrows. This would have been a natural and understandable request. There is also a possibility that they were able to recover some weapons from the Egyptians when the army was drowned in the Red Sea. In addition, they would have been making what weapons they could as they marched along from place to place in their wilderness wanderings, weapons such as long spears, slingshots, bows and arrows and shields.

3. Note that Moses promised to seek God, to intercede for Joshua and the soldiers (v. 9). Joshua was to fight; Moses was to pray. Moses promised to go to the top of the highest hill surrounding the battle field, to lift up the rod of God, appealing and calling out to God in prayer. The rod of God was looked upon as the *Banner* of Israel. Consequently, when they saw the *rod of God* — their banner — lifted high, they knew that God’s servant was crying out to God. They were encouraged and motivated to fight beyond their strength. They knew that God would give them the victory over their enemy. The point is this: Moses promised the warriors of Israel that he would be their intercessor, their prayer-warrior.

Thought 1. We are often attacked by the enemies of this life, enemies such as...

- disease • temptation • loneliness • injury
- lust • emptiness • prejudice • greed
- death • hatred • arrogance

When enemies attack us, our only hope is the LORD, going before Him and crying out for help. Prevailing prayer — intercession, seeking the face of God — are our only hope.

1 Chr 16:11 *Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.*

Mat 7:7-8 *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

Eph 6:18 *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

1 Th 5:17 *Pray continually.*

Jer 29:13 *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

EXODUS 17:08 AMALEKITES

The Amalekites were the bitter, life-long enemies of Israel. They were the first nation to physically attack God’s people on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. A nomadic tribe, their influence stretched from the Sinai to Canaan. From their first attack on Israel at Rephidim (Exo 17:1), the Amalekites’ hatred for Israel was demonstrated with disdain for God, a foolish lack of fear of Him. Significant historical events in Israel’s relationship with the Amalekites were:

- => The Amalekites cowardly attack on the weak members of the exodus (Deut 25:17-18).
- => God's non-negotiable instructions to exterminate the Amalekites (Deut 25:19).
- => An embarrassing defeat to the Amalekites because of Israel's rebellion toward God (Num 14:39-45).
- => An unholy alliance of the Amalekites, the king of Moab and the Ammonites defeated God's people and captured the city of palms (most likely Jericho, Deut 34:3) (Jud 3:12-14).
- => Gideon's great victory over the combined forces of the Amalekites and Midianites (Jud 7:19-23).
- => King Saul's moral failure to obey the LORD's instructions to kill the Amalekites' king (Agag). This cost Saul his place as the king of Israel (1 Sam 15:1-23).
- => King David's conquests of Amalek (2 Sam 8:12; 1 Chr 18:11). □

II. *Exodus 17:10–12 The Prevailing Prayer*

There was the prevailing prayer.

1. Note that Moses prayed while Joshua and the army fought: *prevailing prayer* was made while the battle was being waged (v. 10).

Thought 1. The time for prevailing prayer is when the enemy attacks. Spiritually, the attack may be the fierceness of some...

- temptation
- compulsion to lie
- immoral suggestion
- urge to steal
- lustful notion
- temptation to cheat
- evil thought
- act of selfishness

Physically, the attack may be the threat of ridicule, mockery, abuse, persecution, bodily harm — even the threat of death. Whatever the attack by the enemy, the believer's hope lies in God. As soon as the attack is launched, as soon as the believer becomes aware of the attack, the believer must immediately turn to God and pray. And he must prevail in prayer.

1 Chr 16:11 *Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.*

Mat 7:7 *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

Mat 26:41 *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”*

Luke 18:1 *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*

John 16:24 “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”

Eph 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

1 Th 5:17 Pray continually.

2. Moses did exactly what he promised he would do: he went up to the top of the highest hill. He went to the very top so everyone could see him as he sought God. Why?
3. Because of the critical importance of prevailing prayer (v. 11). Note what happened.
 - a. When Moses held up his hand and the rod of God, Israel advanced (v. 11).
 - b. When Moses’ hand tired and he lowered his arm and the rod, Israel had to retreat under the onslaught of the enemy (v. 11).

Why did this happen? Because God needed to teach His people a striking lesson. They were just beginning their journey to the *promised land*, and they needed to learn the basic truth of life: victory is through the LORD and through the LORD alone. In the future, no matter who the enemy was, the only hope for victory was the LORD. No one else could carry them victoriously to the *promised land*, no one except the LORD.

This was the reason God wanted Moses on top of the hill in sight of all, so they could witness the power of...

- prevailing prayer
- seeking God
- intercession
- appealing to God
- crying out to God
- trusting God

God’s people, both the soldiers and the civilians, could easily see what happened when Moses was strong enough to keep the rod raised: the army of God began advancing against the enemy, began winning the battle. But they also witnessed what happened when Moses became tired and lowered the rod of God: they began losing the battle and were forced to retreat.

Thought 1. The lesson was clear: when the enemy attacks, God’s people must go before God: they must...

- prevail in prayer
- become intercessors
- cry out to God
- seek God
- trust God
- continuously appeal to God

2 Chr 20:18 Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD.

Luke 6:12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

Gen 32:26 Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

Psa 34:6 *This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.*

Psa 61:2 *From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*

4. Note that Moses, the prayer warrior, needed a stone to sit upon for rest and support (v. 12). The stone supported him, held him up and gave him rest so that he could endure and continue to prevail in prayer.

Thought 1. Remember the stone is a symbol, a picture of the LORD Jesus Christ. (See *Hur*, Exo 17:6.) As the rock of our lives, He is our...

- support
- rest
- security
- foundation

Psa 94:22 *But the LORD has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge.*

Deut 32:4 *He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.*

Psa 118:22 *The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.*

Mat 21:42 *Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes’?”*

Eph 2:20 *Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.*

1 Pet 2:6 *For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”*

Thought 2. All believers have faced times in their wilderness wanderings when exhaustion and sheer fatigue hit with great force. There have been times...

- when deadlines came and went, and the harder we worked the more we fell behind
- when children demanded too much time or got into too much trouble
- when our schedules were out of control
- when finances ran low and there was simply not enough to make ends meet
- when times of personal devotion to God were pushed aside — until a more convenient time
- when a loved one forsook us or died and we were left with unbearable pain
- when life was only endured and not enjoyed
- when enemies attacked and we saw no way to escape
- when spouses just did not understand, creating tension and frustration for us
- when fellowship with the body of Christ was the last thing on our minds

- when an accident or disease hit with foil force
- when everything seemed hopeless, as though all were lost

God knows that we need His support day-by-day, moment-by-moment. This is where Jesus Christ comes in. He is the Rock of our salvation. He undergirds us as we walk through the wilderness of this world. When we reach the end of our resources, He will undergird our lives. He is a rock, a support that never collapses, a source that has no limits or boundaries, a Saviour who never grows weary of saving us from ourselves.

Deut 33:27 *The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, ‘Destroy him!’*

Psa 18:2 *The LORD is my rock, and my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, and my stronghold.*

Psa. 18:31-32 *For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure.*

Psa 18:35 *You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great.*

Psa 18:46 *The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Saviour!*

Psa. 27:5 *For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.*

Psa. 28:1 *To you, LORD, I call; you are my Rock, do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who go down to the pit.*

Psa 31:2-3 *Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.*

Psa 40:2 *He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.*

Isa 41:10 *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Isa 46:4 *Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.*

Rom 10:13 *For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

1 Pet 5:7 *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

5. Note that the prayer warrior, Moses, also needed others who could help him in his intercession and appeal to God. Two other men had gone up the hill to see the LORD with Moses: Aaron and Hur. (See *Hur*, Exo 17:12.)

When Moses became too tired to hold up the rod of God, the two men held up his arms for him. Note that they stayed right with Moses all day, until sunset. Keep in

mind that all three of these men were servants of God. Standing there on the hill, holding up the rod of God with the battle for their very survival being waged in the valley below, these men were doing what any servant of God would be doing:

- => praying and crying out to God
- => struggling and interceding with God
- => begging and appealing to God

The point to see is this: one prayer warrior is often not enough. Support in prayer is needed. Others are needed when the enemy attacks and threatens God's people.

Thought 1. Every believer needs to prevail in prayer. There are times when we, our loved ones, friends, church and believers worldwide need special prayer — special periods of intercession — of crying out to God. Therefore, we must be ready to pray and pray — ready to spend long periods of time in prayer — ready to prevail in prayer, appealing to God to give us the victory over the fierce enemies who attack us.

Luke 6:12 *One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.*

Gen 32:26 *Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."*

Eph 6:18 *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

1 Th 5:17 *Pray continually.*

Jer 29:13 *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

EXODUS 17:12 HUR

More than one man in the Old Testament bears the name of Hur. The most familiar is the Hur mentioned here who was the son of Caleb and Ephrath and the grandfather of Bezalel the artist (1 Chr 2:19-20).

- => Hur served with Moses.
- => Hur may have been Moses' brother-in-law, the husband of Moses' sister Miriam. (Flavius Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*. "Complete Works," III, 2, 4).
- => Hur, along with Aaron, supported Moses as they prayed for victory during the battle (Exo 17:10-13).
- => Hur helped in ruling the tribes while Moses was on Mount Sinai (Exo 24:14).
- => Hur had a part in building the Tabernacle (Exo 31:2; 1 Chr 2:19).
- => A man named Hur was a Midianite king who died with Balaam (Num 31:1-8; Josh 13:21).

=> A man named Hur was an officer in Solomon's charge who worked in Ephraim. This Hur's responsibility was to provide food for Solomon's palace. (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 3:227)

=> Hur's son was a co-ruler with Nehemiah. He helped rebuild the wall around Jerusalem (Neh 3:9).

(See Exo17:10, 12; 24:14; 31:1-2; 35:30; 38:22; Num 31:8; Josh 13:21; 1 Kng 4:8; 1 Chr 2:19-20, 50; 4:1, 4; 2 Chr 1:5; Neh 3:9) □

III. *Exodus 17:13–16 The Results of Prevailing Prayer: Victory*

There were the results of prevailing prayer.

1. The enemy was defeated (v. 13). God gave His people victory over their enemy. The Amalekites were crushed.

Thought 1. The Amalekites are a picture of fierce, violent enemies, enemies whom the believer has to face as he walks through the wilderness of this world. Such enemies as...

- evil rulers
- oppressive people
- drugs
- alcohol
- gluttony
- immorality
- pornography
- lust
- greed
- pride
- loneliness
- boredom
- loss of job
- lack of purpose
- lack of money
- fear
- hopelessness
- helplessness

Such enemies are extremely dangerous. But there is hope, glorious hope. All enemies, no matter how strong or terrible, can be defeated. We can overcome and conquer. We can gain the victory over all — no matter what confronts us. How? By God! By God's power. By calling upon the LORD for help. If we call — pray, prevail in prayer — God will hear and deliver us from the Amalekites of our day. God will give us victory over all enemies, no matter who or what they are, and no matter how ferocious their attack. Victory only comes when God's power, the power of prayer, is used to overcome the Amalekites of this day and age.

Mat 7:7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Luke 21:18 “But not a hair of your head will perish.”

John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

2 Cor 1:10 *He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.*

2 Tim 4:18 *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Heb 2:14-15 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

2 Pet 2:9 *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

Exo 14:14 *“The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”*

Deut 20:1 *When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you.*

2 Sam 22:2-3 *He said: “The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my saviour — from violent people you save me.”*

1 Chr 16:11 *Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.*

Psa 34:7 *The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.*

Psa 40:17 *Yet I am poor and needy; may the LORD think of me. You are my help and my deliverer: O my God, do not delay.*

Psa 91:3 *Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence.*

Isa 41:10 *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Isa 43:2 *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

Jer 1:8 *“Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.*

2. The victory was to be written down and remembered forever (v. 14). God told Moses to write an account of the attack and victory so that Joshua and succeeding generations would always remember the event. But note: What specifically did God want His people to remember? That victory is through the LORD and through the LORD alone. When enemies attack God’s people, their hope is the LORD. God’s people are to go before the LORD and pray, prevail in prayer until the LORD gives the victory.

Exo 15:1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: “I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and rider he has hurled into the sea.”

Psa 25:2 I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.

Psa 92:4 For you make me glad by your deeds, LORD; I sing for joy at what your hands have done.

Col 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he [Jesus Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

3. Judgment was pronounced upon the enemy: the enemy of God’s people was to be completely blotted out (v. 14). The Amalekites as a nation of people were to be utterly destroyed. The evil and cruelty of the Amalekites were terrible (see note, Exo 17:8-9 and *Amalekites*, Exo 17:8). Consequently, they were to face the judgment of God. They had set out to erase God’s people from the face of the earth, but in the end, God brought the judgment of extinction to them. Their final extinction as a nation apparently took place under Saul and David (1 Sam 15:1-35; 2 Sam 1:1-8:12).
4. God’s name was established forever: Moses built an altar there at Rephidim and called it *Jehovah-Nissi*, which means “the LORD is my Banner” (vv. 15-16. See *Names and Titles of God*, Exo 17:15.) Note that Moses honoured God, not Joshua. He did not have Joshua parading before the people in a triumphant march; he had an altar built to God.

Thought 1. There are many enemies throughout life who seek to destroy us, terrible enemies: such enemies as...

- disease • immorality • gluttony • accident
- abuse • loneliness • temptation • irresponsibility
- violence • alcohol • bankruptcy • threats
- lust • greed • war

On and on the list could go, but there is hope. Deliverance is possible. Victory over all enemies can be had. Victory is through the LORD. But note: victory is through the LORD and through Him alone.

2 Cor 2:14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.

1 Cor 15:57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 John 5:4 For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ■

EXODUS 17:15 NAMES AND TITLES OF GOD

Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. Exodus 15:15

Jehovah Nissi means “the LORD is my Banner.” Moses had lifted up the rod of God as the banner of Israel, as the emblem, the symbol of Israel. Remember, the rod was the symbol of God’s power. Moses had cried out, praying for God to give victory over the enemy that had attacked God’s people. The rod of God had been lifted up as the identifying *banner* and *symbol* that God’s power was present with Israel. The LORD (Jehovah, Yahweh) was present and gave the victory. It was God’s presence, salvation and deliverance — His power — that had triumphed. Therefore, Moses declared that the Banner of Israel, the Banner of God’s people, was the LORD Himself. □