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Exodus 17

“When Battles Come”

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[Exodus 17](#) provides the details of the first battle the Israelites faced on their way to the Promised Land. They were unfamiliar with war because they had been slaves for 400 years and slaves weren't included in the Egyptian army. Nevertheless, according to [Exodus 13:18b](#),¹ they were ready, which means that along with the gold, silver, and clothing the Hebrews received from the Egyptians, they also must have been supplied with weapons.

According to [Exodus 17:8](#), the *“Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.”* Moses commissioned Joshua and said to him, “You take some of our men and go out and fight the Amalekites.” Having never been to a military boot camp or having seen war, much less fight in one, they had to defend themselves. Knowing they were inexperienced and untrained, Moses did something to help them fight the battle; he took his staff in hand and went up on a hill that overlooked the battlefield. He held up his staff and it became a tool in his hand for the supernatural work of God, because whenever he held the staff up, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.

The staff itself was just an ordinary shepherd's staff² that Moses had been using when he was a shepherd in the desert of Midian. When God first appeared to him in the burning bush, he was commissioned for service, and God said, *“Take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it.”*³ God took the staff and used it as his instrument of purpose so his power could be displayed. While it may

¹ [Exodus 13:18b](#) - *“The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.”*

² Moses stretched out his hand with this staff and some of the plagues came upon Egypt. This staff was also used in the parting of the Red Sea, as well as the time Moses struck the rock at Horeb and water came forth for the people to drink.

³ [Exodus 4:17](#)

have been a non-descript staff in Moses' hand, with God it became the instrument through which God did many miraculous things.

What we often see as ordinary, God will often use to display the extraordinary. For example, a shepherd's staff in Moses' hands became a tool of power and victory. The jawbone of a donkey in Samson's hands became a weapon that helped him defeat a small army. A sling in the hands of a little shepherd boy named David became a lethal weapon that was used to kill Goliath, the enemy of God. A few fish and several loaves of bread belonging to a little boy became a meal big enough to feed thousands of men, women and children.

Moses naturally grew tired in the battle, so Aaron and Hur ⁴ held up his arms. They got a stone for Moses to sit on so they could steady his hands until sunset. ⁵ [Exodus 17:13](#) tells us "*Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.*" This victory was so important to the history of the Israelites that Moses gave instructions to record the details "*as something to be remembered.*"⁶

It's interesting to note that God didn't instruct Moses to write down the details of the plagues he inflicted on Egypt, nor did he tell him to write about the parting of the Red Sea. God didn't say, "Oh, this is going to be a good story, Moses, so you better write this down because there's going to be a blockbuster movie made about all I've done to deliver you and all of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt."

There are a few things God wants us to remember from this account: battles often come when we are in a comfortable place, and battles are fought best with the help of true friends.

Battles Often Come When We Are In A Comfortable Place

1. The Israelites were attacked at Rephidim, which means, 'resting places' in Hebrew.
 - a. Scholars believe Rephidim was in a valley of the Sinai, which today is called Wadi Feiran.
 - b. This area is an oasis, and is the most fertile valley in the Sinai.
 - c. Part of the landscape includes a palm grove that extends for about 2.5 miles!
 - d. There is a rock at Wadi Feiran the Arabs call, "The seat of the prophet Moses."

⁴ Hur became Moses' assistant and had a leadership role. There is no way to know for sure, but Josephus, a 1st Century Jewish historian, wrote that Hur was married to Moses' sister, Miriam.

⁵ [Exodus 17:12](#)

⁶ [Exodus 17:14](#)

- e. In addition to St. Catherine's Monastery, there are about a dozen churches in the area dating back to the 4th Century that commemorate the place as the ancient Rephidim.
2. It's at the place of rest that the Israelites were first attacked.
 - a. You can almost see them relaxing under palm trees, eating manna and drinking the water that flowed from the rock, not having a care or concern in the world.
3. This scene is a picture of the times when we are the most vulnerable to Satan's attack and the attack of our flesh.
 - a. When we are resting and living a life of ease, we often let our guard down.
 - b. When we are too comfortable and too casual about the things of God, we open ourselves up to attack.
4. The Bible includes many warnings about being self-controlled and alert, including:
 - a. **1 Peter 5:8** - *"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*
 - b. **Matthew 26:41** - *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."*
 - c. **1 Corinthians 16:13** - *"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong."*
5. The place of the greatest vulnerability is a resting place, like the times when we have become too comfortable, too casual, and too at ease.
6. The problem with always being on the lookout, being vigilant and on our guard so that we don't fall, is that we become exhausted.
 - a. Aaron and Hur came alongside Moses and ministered to him and with him.
 - b. They basically said, "Moses, when you are tired, we'll lift up your hands, and when you are weak, we'll be by your side to encourage you and help you."

Battles Are Fought Best With The Help Of True Friends

7. **Galatians 6:2** - *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."*
8. **Proverbs 17:17** - *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."*

God Will Fight Our Battles When We Are Surrendered To Him

9. Moses built an altar and called upon the Lord by another compound covenant name, Jehovah-Nissi, which means, *“The Lord is my Banner.”*⁷
 - a. The meaning of the word banner is that of a military standard, like a flag that an army would carry to identify the unit or nation under which the army was fighting.
 - b. Moses told the people that God would be the one who would fight their battles.
10. Notice, however, that when God fought for Moses and the Israelites, it was when Moses was in a posture of having his arms raised up.
11. When you go to any culture around the world, there is a universal sign, in which a person or army with their hands raised means ‘surrender.’
12. There are two prominent times in the Bible when we are invited to take a posture of surrender: prayer and praise.
13. Prayer
 - a. **1 Timothy 2:8** - *“I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.”*⁸
 - i. Traditionally, we bow our heads and hold our arms at our side when we pray, but biblically we have the freedom to raise our hands in prayer, as a sign of surrender to God and his will, trusting him for the answer(s).
 - ii. **Psalm 28:2** - *“Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place.”*
14. Praise
 - a. **Psalm 63:4** - *“I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.”*
 - b. **Psalm 134:2** - *“Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord.”*
15. **1 Samuel 17:47** - *“It is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s...”*
 - a. Whenever we go through difficult situations in life, we must remember that we are never alone and the battle is ultimately the Lord’s.

⁷ **Exodus 17:15**

⁸ KJV uses *“without wrath or doubting.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Exodus 17:8-16](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Has there been a time in your life when you became complacent and you came to a comfortable place in life that caused you to consider the things of the Lord too casually?
4. Read and discuss [1 Peter 5:8](#), [Matthew 26:41](#), and [1 Corinthians 16:13](#), and focus on the need to be under the influence, so to speak, of the Holy Spirit.
5. What ordinary thing (i.e. Moses' staff) about you might become an extraordinary thing for God when he is part of the equation?
6. Do you have an Aaron or a Hur in your life?
 - a. How do the people in your life, like Aaron and Hur, lift you up when you're feeling weak or when you're in a battle?
 - b. Read and discuss [Galatians 6:2](#).
7. How are you an Aaron or Hur in someone else's life?
8. Would there be one or more people in your life who could testify to your loyal friendship and ministry in their life/lives?
9. Allow the people in your group to share their prayer and praise experiences (practices, posture, etc.).
 - a. Read and discuss [1 Timothy 2:8](#) and [Psalm 28:2](#).
 - b. Read and discuss [Psalm 63:4](#) and [Psalm 134:2](#).
10. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: be alert for the attack and influence of the enemy and the flesh, that would create a situation in which the things of the Lord become commonplace; be thankful for the people in their life who are like Aaron and Hur; seek the Lord to find ways in which they can be an Aaron or a Hur in someone else's life; remain in a spirit of surrender to the Lord; be a Christian who prays and actively praises the Lord.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).