# JEHOVAH-NISSI

## Exodus 17:8—16

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> 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 [Miriam's husband] 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 [or *toward?*] the throne of the Lord the Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation."

First, I want to supply you with a brief background to this story. Under the leadership of Moses, Israel had just passed through the Red Sea and escaped the cruelty of Egyptian bondage. That entire miraculous event had occurred only weeks earlier, and now they had pitched camp in a place called Rephidim. The word Rephidim means, "resting place; a pleasant place."

Thus, with the Israelites camped in a pleasant place and waiting for Moses to provide them with God's next instructions for their journey, the Amalekites suddenly launched an attack. With Israel caught by surprise, Moses quickly drew up a counterattack. He told Joshua to select some men for the military campaign and move toward the enemy. Meanwhile, Moses would climb a hill that overlooked the field of fight, where he would raise the staff of God toward God's throne. In so doing, God would intervene for Israel and let his people know that forever forward, his hand would be placed against the Amalekites.

**(Transition)** With that background in place, let's investigate who these Amalekites were and what motivated their behavior. And it takes nothing more than a brief look at Amalek's ancestry to know why they were so cruel.

## The Amalekites

It begins with Abraham, the divinely selected man who was the father of the Judeo-Christian Faith, and with the eternal promises God attached to him and his chosen seed. Next, God passed the blessings of Abraham to his son, Isaac. Isaac had twins—Jacob and Esau. And it is here that a great "family feud" erupted between these twins. On two occasions, Jacob outwitted and supplanted Esau's claims to his birthright. And though Esau was the firstborn, Jacob secured those grand promises of Abraham.

You can imagine the resentment this created in Esau. He hated Jacob! And the grudge ate away at his soul. Esau likely rehearsed the story of Jacob's treachery and deception for the rest of his life. And as he told his descendants, it corrupted their soul too. The people that were most adversely affected were the grandsons of Esau that the Bible calls the Amalekites. They inherited the base and corrupt nature of their grandfather!

The menace of the Amalekites is such that God purposely marked them in Scripture and told Moses to **"Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered**" (17:13). In essence, Moses was warning, "Watch out for these people; take note of them because they can be terrifying!"

**(Transition)** Since God issued a foreboding caveat regarding the Amalekites I want to briefly investigate several characteristics of them.

## Characteristics of the Amalekites

As I mentioned the descendants of Abraham a moment ago did you notice how closely related Amalek was to the chosen seed of Abraham without being the chosen seed of Abraham? It's remarkable! Do you see what this creates? It's like the kid that "tries out" for the varsity basketball squad but barely misses "the cut." This is the person that fights resentment because, in his mind, he should have made the roster. Or the candidate lacking one vote of gaining membership into the Country Club can easily become sour.

Consequently, this created immense enmity in the Amalekites toward the Israelites. For hundreds of years Esau's descendants—the Amalekites—brutalized Jacob's descendants—the Israelites. They lived without any fear of God. Ultimately, they aimed at displacing Believers from their inheritance.

In order to understand the nature of the Amalekites, I want to assign them a present-day badge to wear: They were the Old Testament version of present-day Taliban or ISIS**.** Does this give you an idea of how cruel they were? They hated the Jews and God's people. Now, for the second time, God said in Deuteronomy 25:17, "Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt."

**(Emphasis)** Although the Amalekite people have been destroyed, we must remember that "the spirit of Amalek" continues to manifest. And they've got their mojo directly from Satan! If you have ever been attacked out of the blue by an angry, misguided person when all was pleasant and serene, you understand what the "spirit of Amalek" is about.

**(Transition)** With that information stated, let's go deeper and investigate the Amalekites' attack and how God gave Israel the victory.

## The Staff of Moses

As I mentioned, when Moses becomes aware that Israel is under attack, he orders Joshua to recruit some men for battle. (For the inquiring mind, does anyone know where the Israelis got weapons? You recall they were but weeks from escaping Egypt and passing through the Red Sea. One historian says that when God drown the Egyptian army in the Red Sea that their weapons washed up to shore after that great surge of water. This certainly makes good sense!)

But this battle would not be won by Joshua and his fighters. God had another responsibility for Moses. Let's read verses 9—13. Moses says:

> "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 [Jewish writings state this is possibly Miriam's husband] 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.

There's a lot to unpack in those verses, but I'll start with this. **What did the staff of Moses represent?** The answer lies in rehearsing how Moses used this staff:

> He used it to overpower the demonic powers that festered in Pharaoh's Court.

He brought plagues upon Egypt with it, including turning the Nile into blood.

He then parted the Red Sea with it.

Later, he struck a rock in the desert with it, and it brought forth a river of water.

**So what did the staff of Moses represent? It represented the presence and power of God in that rod.** We know this because each time Moses lowered his hands in exhaustion, the Amalekites prevailed. But so long as he held the staff of God high, the Israelites prevailed!

And what is the great spiritual lesson that's learned from this? **This entire scene of Moses hoisting that staff high illustrates how God alone brought victory to Israel.** Always remember that! Regardless of how well we think we can handle life, regardless of our intellect, and regardless of our connections with the right people, we must always remember it is God who determines the victory in all situations! Our responsibility, like Moses, is to cling tightly to God and hold high his name.

**(Transition)** Could there be anything in the New Testament that resembles Moses' actions in Exodus 17? Turn to 1 Timothy 2 and let's read something that could correlate.

## A New Testament Application

Paul said in **1 Timothy 2:8, "Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing."**

Let's not overspiritualize Paul's command. He's calling Christians to literally raise their hands unto the Lord. And the testimony it provides to us and others is remarkable. Here's what I mean:

**(Illustration)** I need an assistant for this part, please. *Jonathon, lift your hands high into the air. Now, with your hands raised and keeping them raised over your head, reach into your back pocket, take out your wallet, and give it to me.* (Pause) The point is, it can't be done! You have to lower your hands to get into your pocket. Thus, a partial meaning of raising your hands toward God is this: You are exhibiting total surrender to God. Hands that are raised toward God's heavenly throne are a visible act of worship acknowledging where our victories descend from. And as we obey Paul's admonition to pray with lifted hands, we exemplify our trust in God to help us just as God helped Moses when he lifted his hands. Remember, the Lord promised to be at war against the Amalekites from "generation to generation." He will fight for you!

**(Example)** Years ago, I heard the testimony of a vision God gave to someone. He said the Lord showed him a group of Christians raising their hands in prayer. A moment later, in response to these worshippers lifting their hands, he witnessed angels rushing forth in their assignment. Is this person's vision correct? Does a Christian's obedience to lift their hands in prayer cause a dynamic response from angels? I believe it can! It sure complies with how God intervened for Israel on the battlefield when Moses raised his hands heavenward.

**(Transition)** Now let's finally look at the Hebrew phrase, **Jehovah-Nissi.**

## JEHOVAH-NISSI

Moses was so moved by God's victory over the Amalekites that he paused to build an altar to the Lord. He named that altar, **Jehovah-Nissi.** And this a simple Hebrew phrase to translate. The Hebrew word Jehovah means *Lord* in English, and the Hebrew word Nissi means *banner* in English. Thus, it translates into the English phrase, **"The Lord is my Banner."**

Consider how people throughout history have used banners. They represent a rallying point. We sometimes hear the statement, "This is the banner I stand under." For Americans, it is the flag of the USA! As we salute it or honor it with hand-over-heart, we are acknowledging our allegiance to life, liberty, and the pursuit of freedom. We revere the principles of freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and the right to bear arms.

For Christians, the banner we stand under is the Lord God Almighty and his only begotten Son Jesus Christ who died on the Cross! As we hoist the banner of God we are declaring that he alone is God; he alone is sovereign and all-powerful; he alone possesses all the conceivable and inconceivable characteristics of Godship. This is the meaning of JEHOVAH-NISSI and he is the banner lift above all others. We've anchored our eternal hopes in him and "like a tree planted by the water, we shall not be moved."

## Conclusion

**(Application)** How can we demonstrate, in reality, that the Lord is our banner during our time of devotions? Well, unwittingly enough, we may do this each time our hands are raised in worship. And that's good enough! But for those who like to be creative, perhaps you would like to further demonstrate how the Lord is your banner. Like Moses, you could lift a staff during worship. But there is another object that represents God—it's our Bible. You could lift either object over your head and worship him.

If you should practice this, I would advise you of something. Don't punish yourself. Don't get legalistic about it. Simply hold up your Bible or staff, which represents God, and after you tire, rest. Remember, Moses needed assistance, too.