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Lesson 6
War with Amalek
Exodus 17:8-16

In this section of Scripture, we have the Israelites' first involvement in physical warfare. They were attacked by that old desert fox, Amalek, and his Bedouin guerrillas.

Since they crossed the Red Sea, the Israelites had been tested by God three times in order to develop and stretch their faith. Twice they came up short on water and once they had no food, and in each case, God, using Moses as His instrument, did a miracle so as to supernaturally provide food and water for the sons of Israel. However, when these tests came, Israel failed them, and each time mumbled, groaned, grumbled, and griped against God and Moses, refusing to operate on faith in the living God. However, because Israel was an infant nation, new to the faith, God was very patient and longsuffering with His people. In fact, God dealt with them in grace in each testing when He should have brought them strict discipline and judgment. God was testing in order to get the people strong in faith so they could take Canaan, the land God had promised them. When they finally arrived in Canaan, they would have to fight the big war, and they could only win if they knew how to believe God and trust Him for the victory. However, before they would be ready to fight the big war, they would have to fight several small wars to get prepared for the big one. This war with Amalek was a minor skirmish to get Israel battle-toughened to take the land of Canaan when the time came.

The spiritual truth here is that we must learn to fight and win all small spiritual skirmishes before we can fight the big war. Before we can kill spiritual giants, we must learn to kill spiritual pigmies.

Amalek does have a typical significance to the Christian. Amalek typically represents the world and its hatred of Christ and God's people. Amalek depicts the attack of the kingdom of this world on the kingdom of God. Yet, Amalek seems to typify more than just the antagonism of the world to Christ; it represents the world still left in the Christian after his conversion to Christ. It is the spirit of the world as it manifests itself through the sin nature inside of every Christian. After a Christian has tasted spiritual food and drunk of the spiritual Rock, Christ, spiritual warfare begins in his life. This spiritual struggle is with the sin nature in the Christian that wants to go back into the world system, and the Holy Spirit who is working through the new nature, which wants to take the Christian into godly, holy living. The result is a fierce conflict.

AMALEK'S ATTACK - Exodus 17:8

"Then Amalek . . ." -- Amalek may refer to a leader and his armies or to a nation. The Amalekites were descendants of Esau's grandson Amalek after whom they had been named (Gen. 36:12). The Amalekites had a standing hatred of the descendants of Jacob who was a Jew and an inheritor of God's promises to Abraham. This malice of the Amalekites ran in the blood, and perhaps these Amalekites knew of the promise of Abraham to the Jews that they would receive the land of Canaan. If so, then they were extremely jealous because they felt their father Esau got a bum deal. Amalek may also be a person, for every leader of the Amalekites probably took the name Amalek. Whatever, these vicious fighting people roamed the deserts of northern Sinai, and the luscious plain of Rephidim was controlled and protected by Amalekites.

The typical significance here is that the world and the sin nature in the believer goes back to Adam. All men have a sin nature and all Christians have the sin nature working in their lives. This sin nature despises the things of God and wants to sin by pleasing self. The sin nature is an ugly monster on the inside of each Christian that he inherited from Adam.

“... Came and fought against Israel . . .”-- Amalek and his tough Bedouin guerrillas took the war directly to Israel. They probably attacked late in the evening, and the going down of the sun foiled their surprise attack to some degree. This was the first time the Israelites were engaged in conflict with an external enemy. They were experiencing something they had never experienced before. Perhaps they naively thought they would never experience this kind of conflict. It should be noted that Israel in no way provoked this action, but the Amalekites took the offensive. The Amalekites had a reason to make war against Israel. They were undoubtedly trying to protect their own territory as well as regain control over the oasis area where Israel was encamped. The Jews were encamped right outside the plain of Rephidim, and the Amalekites reasoned that this land could not support the human and animal life of two nations. The Amalekites saw two million people moving in on their land, and they did not like it. This was a territorial dispute. Amalek, the desert fox, knew that his army was outnumbered but that it was superior and could, if not defeat Israel, at least drive Israel off their land. We cannot be certain, but it is quite probable that the Amalekites attacked while the Israelites were actually drinking of the cooling water that was flowing from the rock of Horeb. We are told that the Amalekites hung around Israel's rear flanks and captured or killed all the stragglers they could.

“Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God” (Deut. 25:17-18).

The stragglers and those last in line to drink of the supernatural waters of Horeb were picked off one by one by these guerrilla desert fighters. When the Jews were tired, weary and dying of thirst, they were open prey for the enemy.

Typically, this shows us that the sin nature takes the offensive in the life of a Christian in order to cause him to want to go back into the world. The sin nature attempts to regain control of all areas of sin that the Holy Spirit has won through progressive sanctification. Notice the attack came when the Israelites were drinking of the water from the rock. According to 1 Corinthians 10:4, this rock was Christ, and the water flowing out from the rock may well represent the Holy Spirit who indwells every true Christian and from whom every Christian drinks.

“Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, “From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.”’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39).

Whenever the Holy Spirit makes gains over sin in the life of the Christian, the sin nature puts up a horrible struggle to get that territory back. The result, of course, is bitter conflict.

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (Gal. 5:16-17).

“ . . . at Rephidim.” -- Rephidim means “refreshments”. This attack from the Amalekites came when Israel was in a time of refreshment. It was a surprise attack and came when it was least expected.

The sin nature often attacks us from the rear in a surprise attack. Just when we think we have lust, temper, laziness, pride, or any other sin licked, it raises its ugly head in our lives, and we realize again we are in a struggle with sin until we die and get our new resurrected bodies.

We must remember that receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior does not end spiritual warfare and conflict. In fact, it just begins the process. Before receiving Christ as Savior and Lord, a person has only one nature (the sin nature), and it is never in conflict with itself. There is really no struggle as long as a person has only one nature to satisfy. After trusting Christ, a person receives the Holy Spirit and a new nature from God (2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 3:9). The Holy Spirit, working through the new nature, and the self-life, working through the sin nature, are in constant warfare. Only when a person is walking in the Holy Spirit will he be able to cope with the evil and sinful desires of the Adamic or sin nature.

*There are two natures within my breast.
The one is foul, the other blessed.
The one I love; the other I hate.
The one I feed will dominate.*

AMALEK COUNTERATTACKED BY ISRAEL - Exodus 17: 9-10

“So Moses said to Joshua . . .” -- This is the first mention in the Bible of Joshua who was a prince of the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:9). Joshua was Moses’ personal minister (Exodus 24:13) and was in training to take over leadership when Moses died. Joshua was about forty-five years old at this time. His name originally was Hoshea which means “savior”, but it was changed to Jehoshua which means “Jehovah is savior”. Perhaps this change of name occurred here or later at Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 13:16).

“ . . . ‘Choose men for us, and go out, fight against Amalek.’” -- Joshua was made commander-in-chief of Israel’s army and was to choose out certain men to fight Amalek. One is immediately impressed with the faith of Joshua. By faith, he organized and trained a group of undisciplined and poorly equipped soldiers. Joshua had to be a man of faith even to attempt this feat. For the first time, Israel had to fight physically the enemy. Before this time, Israel had been supernaturally delivered by God from her enemies without any help from the Jews. All the Israelites had to do before this time was to **“Stand fast and see the deliverance of the Lord,”** but now they must see the deliverance of the Lord by actually going to war against Amalek. God was now going to fight through Israel and not just for them.

Joshua did not choose every male in Israel to go to war. He chose a select few. Whom did he take? He took the ones he thought might have learned something from the previous tests given to Israel. He had to separate the men from the boys spiritually. Because of all the moaning and griping and complaining, the vast majority of the eligible men were military rejects; they were 4-Fs spiritually. They were not spiritually prepared to fight against Amalek. Those who were chosen knew some doctrine and had, hopefully, exercised some faith in God, although the whole group was pitiful.

Notice the Jews counterattacked the moves of Amalek. The Christian is to take the offensive against the sin nature when it raises its ugly head. When the sin nature attacks, the Christian must counterattack and put it to death.

“For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (Rom 8: 13 NIV). .

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5 NIV).

“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Rom. 13:13-14 NIV).

We kill the ugly deeds of the sin nature by deliberate acts of the human will. We do not do it in our own strength, but we do kill the sin nature as we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit. We attack the sin nature and kill it. Who are those capable of fighting the sin nature? Those who know doctrine, walk by faith and claim the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Tomorrow I will station myself on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” -- Moses said he would go up on the hill in plain sight of all the soldiers below in the valley. There he would hold up his rod or staff. The staff represented God’s power and judgment. This staff symbolized to Israel God’s presence with them. The holding high of the rod depicted God’s banner flying over the soldiers as they were fighting.

Just one day before, these Israelites were ready to stone Moses, their leader, but now in the time of crisis, the time of warfare, he became a symbol of strength to these pitifully weak believers. Again, in a time of crisis, Moses’ leadership was needed and wanted, for God was obviously with him.

“And Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek . . .” – Joshua was obedient and went out bravely to fight Amalek in the valley of Rephidim.

No Christian will ever defeat the sin nature until he is committed to be obedient and to fight the sin nature biblically.

“ . . . And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.” -- God sent Moses to the top of the hill with Aaron and Hur to be his helpers and companions while He sent Joshua to the valley with Israel’s army to fight Amalek. Some may have questioned why Aaron and Hur were exempt from the fight and went up with Moses, but God knew this was going to be a long, tough battle and Moses was going to need the help of Aaron and Hur.

When we do not think we need the help of other Christians is usually the time we need it the most.

AMALEK DEFEATED - Exodus 17:11-13

“So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed.” -- The symbolic meaning of Moses with his staff hand raised was the banner of God with Israel His people in battle. Yet as Moses had his hands up, he also prayed, for Jews often prayed with hands lifted to heaven (Psalm 63:4; Psalm 134:2). When the Israelites saw the rod lifted, they were encouraged and advanced because they knew God was flying as a banner over them and Moses was praying for them. When they saw the arm of Moses go down, they retreated and it appeared as though Amalek would win the battle. The battle seesawed back and forth, depending on Moses’ ability to hold up the rod.

Sometimes the battle with the sin nature is so strong it looks like we are going to lose the battle completely. The struggle is so intense that we seesaw between victory and defeat, but God gives us the victory as we trust Him. Just as Joshua fought in the valley with the sword (a picture of everyday warfare for the Christian) and Moses prayed on the hilltop (a picture of a consistent, personal, prayer life), so the way to defeat the sin nature is to pray, use the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit, and trust the Holy Spirit. Christians must attack and kill the sin nature in the skirmishes of life. It took both the fighting of Joshua and the prayer of Moses to prevail against Amalek. So, too, it takes prayer and fighting against the sin nature to defeat it. We must always deal with the sin nature ruthlessly and take no prisoners. In the battle with the sin nature, it is kill or be killed!

“But Moses’ hands were heavy. Then 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 one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set.” -- Moses, after many hours, became weary, so they put a stone under him to rest on, and Aaron and Hur held up his hands, and Moses continued to pray.

Moses rested on the rock, so the Christian is to rest on the Rock, Christ, when in the battle with the sin nature. As Aaron and Hur upheld Moses’ hands, so Christians are to uphold one another when Christians are struggling for their lives against the evil impulses and drives of the sin nature that would take them to spiritual oblivion if they would but feed it. Christians need to hold one another up in this bitter battle with the sin nature.

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints ...” (Eph. 6:18)

Moses not only tired because he was holding up the staff, but he also tired in prayer. We all tire so easily in the serious business of prayer and our Lord speaks to that for us. ***“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart (faint) . . .”*** (Luke 18:1). Prayer is something that we must not talk about but do. All Christians agree prayer is important, but most Christians talk more than they pray. This was true of the disciples when our Lord left them in the Garden of Gethsemane. When He came back, He found them fast asleep. It says in Matthew 26:40-41:

“And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’”

Christians should be exhorting one another to a consistent prayer life at all times.

“So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” -The word “overwhelmed” has sometimes been translated “prostrated” or “disabled” or “mowed down”. It

is a Hebrew word which means “to knock down and stand on”. Joshua had a complete victory at that moment.

There are times when it appears we have been given a complete victory over some aspect of our sin nature. The particular sin is “knocked down and we are standing on it,” that is, it is under control. The sin nature can be controlled if the Christian is walking in dependence on the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) and under the control of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). However, if the sin nature is not under control by the Spirit, it can raise its ugly head in a split second.

Amalek was put to death by the sword, so we are to put to death the sin nature by the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit. A Christian who does not operate on Scripture is doomed to defeat.

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12 NIV)

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.’”-This is the first mention in Exodus of written records that were kept by the Israelites. It was like a journal or diary. Apparently the first war of Israel with Amalek was written down in the Book of the Wars of Israel (Num. 21:14) While this Book of Wars was accurate historical data on Israel's history and probably was used to write part of the Pentateuch and other portions of the Old Testament, it was not an inspired book or it would have found its way into the canon. Amalek was the first nation to make war against the children of Israel, and God cursed them, promising to blot out and root out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. It is a very serious thing to attack the children of God, for it brings down cursing from God. Joshua, the military commander, was to have the victory over Amalek repeated to him over and over again so he would not forget that the Lord is with His people and will go before them in battle to give them the victory.

God blotted out Amalek, and the last record we have of this nation in the Bible is in 2 Samuel 8:12, so it is that one day God will wipe out forever the sin nature in the Christian. The Christian will struggle with the sin nature all the days he lives. He will win and lose some battles with the flesh (sin nature), but he will win the war. At the coming of Christ, the Christian will receive his new, perfected and glorified, resurrected body.

“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” (Rom 3:23 NIV)

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (Phil. 3:20-21 NIV)

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” (1 Cor. 15:51-52 NIV)

Just as Joshua had to hear about victory over and over again, so, too, the Christian must

be reminded that, while he may win and lose some battles with the sin nature, he will win the war, and one day the sin nature will be destroyed.

“And Moses built an altar, and named it, The LORD Is My Banner; . . .” -Moses built a memorial altar at this place of victory and called it Jehovah nissi, The Lord (Jehovah) Is My Banner. They fought and won the battle as they were under the banner of God. It was God who gave them the victory and they gave Him the glory.

Those who realize God’s presence in their lives and fight the spiritual battle with the sin nature will experience many victories as they move on in this life as pilgrims and strangers, looking forward to the eternal city, the New Jerusalem.

“. . . And he said, ‘The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation.’” -- God told Moses that He would make war with the Amalekites until they were blotted out. This was written for Israel that they might never make any league with the Amalekites but always look upon them as irreconcilable enemies, doomed to ruin.

God, through the death of Christ, has doomed the sin nature. The sin nature, while still very active in the Christian, is doomed to destruction, for it will one day be eradicated from the Christian’s body, either at death or the coming of Christ. However, while the Christian is waiting for his new body, he is to make no leagues (compromises, alliances or friendly treaties) with the sin nature. The Christian is always to treat the sin nature as an enemy and show it no mercy, for it is always the enemy of God because it does not want godliness, holiness, commitment, discipline or Christ-likeness. The Christian finds real assurance in that one day in the future the sin nature will be blotted out and he will be free of sin. Until this happens, the Christian will struggle with sin and hopefully win more battles against it than he loses.

Christian, the victory over the sin nature is already yours. Be patient and wait for that total victory. While you are waiting patiently for total victory, be a good soldier of Christ and kill the Amalek in your body by faith and the spiritual sword, the Bible.

CONCLUSION

Do you know that men shall be judged in eternity because all have a sin nature in them? Do you know that Christ not only died for sins but for sin, the sin nature in man? At the cross, Christ broke the power of the sin nature for all those for whom He died.

Did Christ die for you? The answer is “Yes” if you will but place your faith in Christ as your Savior and Lord. When you receive Christ, you will know He died for your sin nature, and you will begin to want to conquer it. You will also long for the day when you will be completely delivered from the sin nature. Trust Christ and He will begin to show you the death grip the sin nature has on your life. Trust Christ and He will also begin to give you victory over the sin nature.