

MIRACLES, MOSES, MEN...AMALEKITES, ARMIES, AND ARMS

Presented by

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The people of Israel **finally** were free from their many years of slavery in Egypt! By God's power, and under Moses' leadership, the people had successfully left Egypt to head toward the Promised Land of Canaan. But, as every Bible student knows, things did not go well for the Israelites after their departure from Egypt. First, as Exodus 32 explains, the Israelites crafted and worshiped a golden calf at the base of Mount Sinai—which caused them to have to wander for forty years in the wilderness while everyone over the age of 20 died because of the people's faithlessness. Second, during the Israelites' wilderness wanderings they continually griped and complained, saying such things to Moses as, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our souls loathe this worthless bread" (Numbers 21:5). This, in turn, caused God to punish the people even more. Third, the Israelites were constantly under attack by their enemies, the most notable of whom were the Amalekites, who were bitter foes of God's people.

Exodus 17:8-16 contains a fascinating account of one of the Israelites' battles with the Amalekites—an account that is made all the more intriguing because of the miracle that God performed on behalf of His people at the hand of Moses. Here is what happened.

The Amalekites came to a place known as Rephidim to battle against the Israelites. Moses instructed Joshua to take some Israelite soldiers to go fight against the Amalekites. Then Moses said something rather odd to Joshua: "Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand" (Exodus 17:9). We are not told, at first, why Moses made this unusual comment. Nor are we told whether or not Joshua understood its significance. But Exodus 17:10 does say, "Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek." The rest of the story about what happened next is recorded in Exodus 17:11-13.

"Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands became heavy; so 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 the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."

To say the least, this was a very unusual battle. As long as Moses was able to hold up his arms, the Israelites triumphed over their enemies. But whenever Moses lowered his arms, the tide turned and the Amalekites began to win. Upon seeing this, the two men who had accompanied Moses to the top of the hill—Aaron and Hur—decided that they needed to step in to "support Moses"—**in a very literal fashion!** First, Aaron and Hur put a large rock under Moses so he could sit down. Then Aaron lifted up one of Moses' arms, and Hur lifted up the other—and they held up Moses' arms until sunset, which allowed the Israelites to defeat their enemies the Amalekites.

Obviously, God's miraculous power was behind this strange turn of events. Two men holding up another man's arms hardly is enough to cause one army to win a battle, and the other one to lose it. In fact, in Exodus 17:14 we get a clue regarding God's involvement when we read that God told Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." Some years later, God did exactly that! From 1 Chronicles 4:39-43 we learn that in the days of King Hezekiah, 500 men from the tribe of Simeon defeated the Amalekites. The Simeonites then seized their enemy's territory and dispersed the Amalekites.

It is amazing, is it not, to see **how much** God did for the Israelites? He slew the firstborn child in every house in Egypt to remove them from centuries of slavery. He parted the waters of the Red Sea so they could walk across it on dry land. He sent them manna from heaven for bread, and quail from heaven for meat. He gave them water from rocks. He caused their clothes not to wear out during their forty-year wilderness wanderings. He healed them of various diseases. And He even defeated their enemies by doing such strange things as causing the Sun to stand still or honoring a tribute to Him composed solely of the raised arms of a single man.

All of that is quite impressive, is it not? Yet none of it can compare with the miracle that God performed for you and me one Sunday morning almost 2,000 years ago when He raised His Son Jesus Christ from the dead so that we could have the hope of eternal life in heaven. Perhaps Paul put it best when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:57, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Just as God gave the Israelites in Moses' day their victory over their enemy, the Amalekites, He has given us victory today over our enemy, death. This probably is why Paul chose to end 1 Corinthians 15 with this admonition: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Isn't that good to know?