



SESSION 3

OUR BANNER

▶ ***The Point***

We are always covered by God's protection.

▶ ***The Passage***

Exodus 17:8-16

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

The United States flag represents a lot of things to its citizens: freedom, democracy, justice, and home. Seeing the flag unfurled inspires a feeling of patriotism in many of us. For so many who served in the military or who lost a family member in war, the flag reminds them of courage and sacrifice. For American citizens abroad needing assistance, the American flag also represents protection. When an American citizen steps onto the grounds of the U.S. embassy, the stars and stripes remind them they are now under the protection of the United States. We face times when life throws us such a curve that we can feel alone and exposed—even when we're surrounded by others. In those moments, we feel vulnerable and under attack. In one moment of Israel's history, they too were vulnerable and under attack. But God Himself showed that He was on their side; He was their Banner, standing over them with His sovereign protection. We are not alone. We stand under another flag, a banner of protection: God Himself. He stands over every issue we face. God covers us with His protection.

▶ ***The Setting***

Moving on from Elim, the Israelites journeyed to the Wilderness of Sin, where they again fell into grumbling against God's spokesman, Moses, and his brother, Aaron. In their hunger, they complained that Moses and Aaron had led them out into the wilderness to die of starvation; they also longed for their former life in Egypt where there was plenty to eat. God mercifully provided the Israelites manna to eat. (See Ex. 16.) They then traveled on to Rephidim, where they again grumbled against Moses and complained of a lack of water. (See 17:1-3.) But in spite of the people's insults and testing of the Lord, God again graciously provided for their needs. (See vv. 4-7.)

What does the Bible say?

Amalek (v. 8)—Amalek was Esau’s grandson. His descendants, known as Amalek or Amalekites, were nomads who ranged across the northeast part of the Sinai peninsula from the Negev to the border of Egypt

The LORD Is My Banner (v. 15)—Banners were used to identify families and tribes. Having the Lord as their banner associated the Israelites with their covenant God, Yahweh.

Exodus 17:8-16

⁸ Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim.

⁹ So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”

¹⁰ So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

¹¹ Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.

¹² But Moses’ hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

¹³ And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”

¹⁵ And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner,

¹⁶ saying, “A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 1**, the “God Is ...” poster, and briefly recap the topics of the past two sessions. Remind group members how today’s session fits in with the previous sessions.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): To introduce the idea of protection, secure three or more of the following items: a lock, a blanket, a life jacket, a surge protector, or something else that communicates protection or security. Display these to

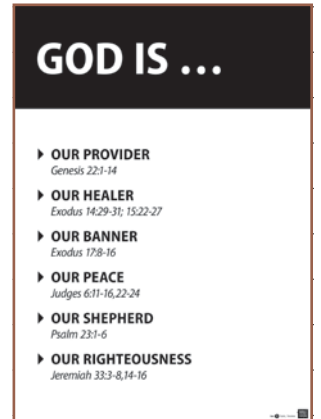
your group and ask: “What do these things have in common?” Allow time for discussion. Explain that when used properly, these items provide protection.

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 29 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “What are some things we rely on for protection?” Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 30 of the PSG. Introduce the key theme of God as our Protector by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 30 of the PSG: “We are always covered by God’s protection.”

PRAY: Ask the Lord to show us the ways He has acted as our Protector. Thank Him for His goodness and pray for insights into how we can stand against those who seek to harm us.



Dotted lines for taking notes.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Exodus 17:8-10

⁸ Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. ⁹ So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." ¹⁰ So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Exodus 17:8-10 on page 31 of the PSG.

RECAP: Read the first paragraph after the Scripture on page 31 of the PSG.

The Israelites were now camped at Rephidim, and again the people had no water to drink. (See Ex. 17:1.) Unfortunately, the people responded in their usual way: they grumbled. Although they were testing God, the Lord provided water by instructing Moses to strike the rock with his staff. As when the people had complained about an earlier water problem (see Ex. 15:22-27), God miraculously provided this time too.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for verse 8 on the next page of this Leader Guide to offer additional information on the background of the Amalekites.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 31 of the PSG: **"What daily challenges can make us feel like we're in a battle?"**

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see how we prevail in spiritual battle because of God's presence and power in our lives.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What's your typical reaction when you feel under attack?

Exodus 17:8-10 Commentary

[Verse 8] God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt. Delivering them from slavery, God had demonstrated that through His power, protection, and provision the Israelites could stand against those who sought to harm them. As the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness, God kept them both fed and safe from harm. However, despite having seen and experienced God's protective care time and time again, the Israelites still had not learned to trust God completely for the protection and provision they needed.

The people of Israel were camped at Rephidim, the area where God had instructed Moses to strike a rock in order to provide water for the people. (See Ex. 17:1-6.) This is the last site mentioned before the Israelites came to Mount Sinai. (See 19:1-2.) While they were at Rephidim, they were attacked by a tribe of people known as **Amalek** (or the Amalekites). Genesis 36:12 contains a list of Esau's descendants and mentions Amalek as one of his grandsons. Though the tribe who attacked Israel is identified as Amalek (see Ex. 17:8,10-11,13), these people are clearly the descendants of Esau's grandson. They were nomads who ranged across the northeast part of the Sinai peninsula from the Negev to the border of Egypt. The biblical text gives no reason for the Amalekites' attack on Israel, but they may have wanted to drive the Israelites from the wilderness sources of food and water, such as at Elim (see Ex. 15:27), to keep from having to compete for resources.

[Verses 9-10] Joshua, who would later lead the Israelites into the promised land as the leader of God's people and the successor to Moses, is mentioned here for the first time in the Old Testament. Scripture describes him as Moses' assistant. (See Ex. 24:13; Deut. 1:38.) Moses told Joshua to gather some of the men in the camp and prepare to go into battle against the Amalekites the next day. Though previously in the Israelites' journey Moses had always been the leader in front of the people, he told Joshua that he was to lead the army in this battle. Instead of going out with Joshua, Moses said he would go up on a nearby hill with **the staff of God** in his hand. This was the staff God had told Moses to use to convince the people that He had sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt. (See Ex. 4:1-5.) God had also told Moses to use the staff to initiate several plagues against the Egyptians (see 9:22-23; 10:12-14) and divide the waters of the Red Sea so that the Israelites could escape from the Egyptians. (See 14:15-16.) God referred to the staff as "your [Moses'] staff" (v. 16), but now Moses referred to it as "the staff of God," perhaps in acknowledgment that it was always God's power, not a stick of wood, that had accomplished the miracles.

The next day Joshua led his soldiers into battle while Moses walked up the hill accompanied by his brother Aaron and another leader named Hur. This is the first time Hur is mentioned in Scripture. At a later point in Israel's journey, Moses left Aaron and Hur in charge of the camp while he and Joshua went up onto Mount Sinai to meet with God. (See 24:14.)

Exodus 17:11-13 Commentary

[Verse 11] Joshua obeyed Moses' order and led the Israelite army into battle in the valley against the Amalekites. As the battle progressed, it became clear that Joshua and the Israelites prevailed not because of their own strength, but because of God's presence and power. As Joshua and the army fought, Moses stood on the hill with God's staff in his hand. As long as Moses held up the staff, Joshua and the Israelites successfully pushed forward against the Amalekites.

However, the battle lasted until sunset. Obviously, Moses could not hold up the staff all day. When his arms became tired and he lowered the staff, the Amalekite army would start overcoming Joshua and the Israelites.

[Verses 12-13] In order to enable Moses to continue holding up the staff, Aaron and Hur placed a large stone into position so Moses could sit on it. To provide the additional support Moses needed, Aaron and Hur stood one on one side and one on the other side of Moses to help support his arms as he held the staff in the air. Finally, the army of Israel was able to overcome the Amalekite army.

Why did God command Moses to go up on the hill and hold up the staff in order for the Israelites to defeat the Amalekites? Did the sight of Moses holding up the staff provide some kind of emotional or psychological boost for the Israelite army? No. Was there something special about this wooden staff? No. As previously stated, it was just a stick of wood. In order to understand the meaning of God's command to Moses to hold up the staff during the battle, we need to recall Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. (See Ex. 3:1–4:17.) After God told Moses that He had chosen him to go to Egypt and lead His people to freedom, Moses had expressed concern that the Israelites might not believe him when he told them that God had appeared to him. (See 4:1.) God responded by asking Moses, "What is that in your hand?" (v. 2). Moses replied, "A staff" (v. 2). It was nothing more than a piece of wood that had been crafted into a tool which Moses used to guide and protect his sheep. God told him to throw the staff down. When Moses obeyed, the wooden staff turned into a snake. Then God told him to pick the snake up "by the tail" (v. 4), not usually a wise thing to do with a snake; but, Moses obeyed and the snake turned back into his staff. God was not putting on a magic show: He was assuring Moses that His power was unlimited as well as giving Moses a sign to use to convince others that he came at God's command and spoke with God's authority. (See v. 5.)

In a similar way, the staff was a symbol of the power that God had supplied and would continue to supply to enable the Israelites to conquer their enemies and take control of the promised land. It was an object lesson for the Israelites that dependence on and trust in God, not their own strategies or strength, was what would win their battles.



15 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

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Exodus 17:14-16

14 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” **15** And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, **16** saying, “A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Exodus 17:14-16 on page 34 of the PSG.

RECAP: Read the following paragraphs from page 35 of the PSG.

In response to God’s work, Moses built an altar and called it “The LORD Is My Banner.” God had shown Israel yet another aspect of His character. Israel had already discovered that God was their healer (*Jehovah Rapha*). Now they understood He was also their banner of protection—their *Jehovah Nissi*.

The staff or banner in Moses’ hand was a visible image of the protection and the power of God, who provided the victory over Amalek. The Israelites were to understand that their victory was because God was a banner over them. He was their protection.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How can we help one another in the battles we face?

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 34 of the PSG: “What does God’s banner of protection look like in your life?”

LEADER PACK (OPTIONAL): Make copies of **Pack Item 3**, “Coat of Arms” handout, so that group members can create their own coat of arms to show God’s protection over them. Provide markers, scissors, and tape or glue as needed. Allow the members to share their work as time permits.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 35 of the PSG: “How can our actions and attitudes demonstrate that we follow the God who protects?”

COAT OF ARMS

Directions: Create your own Coat of Arms based on symbols and words that represent how you have seen God work in your life, your faith, values, personality, character, feelings, God-given gifts, talents, and gifts. You may request you include the following information on your own Coat of Arms, and take time to share with the group.

1. A picture or emblem from your own life.
2. A picture or emblem or symbol that has been used by your life's influences.
3. An animal or item that represents your temperament.
4. A picture or emblem of your personality.
5. Include a line of Bible verse or personal motto on the banner.

Exodus 17:14-16 Commentary

[Verse 14] Through their victory over the Amalekites, God had demonstrated to the Israelites that He is forever over His people as their banner of protection. To emphasize this, the Lord commanded Moses to write in a book, **“I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”** God gave two reasons for His command. First, His words were to serve as a **memorial**. While on this particular occasion the army of Israel defeated the army of the Amalekites, the Amalekites continued to be major adversaries even up to the time of King David. (See 1 Sam. 30:1-17.) God’s promise to erase the memory of the Amalekites served as both a reminder and hope that the Israelites would be victorious over this enemy through God’s power and protection. God’s words were also to be recited to Joshua, a reminder for the future leader to guard against further assaults by the Amalekites.

[Verse 15] After such a great victory, Moses built an altar which he called **“The LORD Is My Banner”** (*Yahweh Nissi*). This altar served as a memorial for the people of God. In this time period a banner might have been a flag or some kind of image carved in wood or metal, like the bronze serpent on a pole which God ordered Moses to make later in the exodus when the Israelites sinned and God sent serpents to punish them. (See Num. 21:4-9.) Banners were used to identify families and tribes. (See 2:1-2; 10:11-28.) They were also used as signals to call people to action. (See Isa. 13:2; 49:22.)

Through the building of this altar Moses was teaching the people that **The LORD** was the One—the only One—who had done all these things for the Israelites. God did not need a physical **banner** to identify His deity and sovereignty, but the Israelites needed to be frequently reminded that, as the psalmist wrote, “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:2). All the people had to do was to trust God for all their needs and to obey His commands.

[Verse 16] In the first part of verse 16, Moses added to his declaration about the Lord being his (and Israel’s) banner: **“A hand upon the throne of the LORD!”** The Hebrew text is difficult to translate. Some interpret the Hebrew words to mean that Moses was saying that his hand was lifted toward God’s throne in heaven in continued prayer. Another option is that Moses was saying lifting up the staff during the battle was symbolic of the presence of God on His throne being with the Israelites, through which they had won the battle. A third option is that the Hebrew could be translated, “the hand is against the throne,” suggesting Moses was talking about the hand of the Amalekites being against God Himself as they attacked His people. Perhaps this view is better in light of the remainder of the verse that describes the continuing warfare between Israel and Amalek: **“The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”** Whatever the interpretation, the emphasis is that though the fighting of this initial battle and future battles involved the Israelites, God Himself would be fighting on their behalf against the Amalekites.

