



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Fighting the Good Fight

Reverend Scott Johnson | August 31, 2025 | Exodus 17:8-16

Old Testament Reading

The Old Testament reading is Exodus chapter 17, verses 8 through 16, and this is God's infallible and inerrant word. Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. So Moses said to Joshua, choose for us men and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand. So Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. 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. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. 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. And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, the Lord is my banner, saying, a hand upon the throne of the Lord. The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

New Testament Reading

You can keep your place there at Exodus and turn to Ephesians chapter six, verses 10 through 20 for our New Testament reading. Ephesians six, 10 through 20. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm. Stand therefore having fastened on the belt of truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness and as shoes for your feet having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace in all circumstances take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication to that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

No Promise of a Smooth Journey

You may turn back to Exodus chapter 17, As we have been making our way through Exodus, it wasn't too long ago that the Israelites were still in Egypt. They were still there in their bondage and in their misery. But at that time, God made a promise to them that he would lead them to the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And we have seen, again, as we have gone through

Exodus, how God has begun to make good on that promise. He has brought his people out of Egypt by signs and wonders, by his almighty power. But God never promised the Israelites that they would arrive to the promised land without a struggle. There would be, on their way to Canaan, many adversities, many difficulties and struggles. We've already seen how the Israelites, as they are being led in the wilderness, were led to a place without water and a place without food. And now in our passage this morning that we are considering, the Israelites face another kind of trial, and that is they are attacked by another nation, the Amalekites. And so the Israelites would have to struggle. They would have to fight on their way to the promised land. And the same is true for us today. For the Church of Jesus Christ today, God has promised us in His grace that He will lead us to our promised land in glory in the life to come. But on the way there, we can anticipate that we also will have to struggle. We will have to fight. The way to our promised land will not be easy either. And just as God never promised the Israelites a smooth and easy journey to Canaan, so God does not promise us a smooth and easy journey to heaven. Rather, the Bible tells us the exact opposite of that. In Acts 14.22, it says, through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.

The Israelites Were Engaged in Spiritual Warfare

So with that in mind then, let's take a look at our passage and there are three things that I want us to notice in this passage. The first thing is this, that Israel was engaged in spiritual warfare. It is a physical battle to be sure, but it is at heart spiritual warfare. So Moses says this in verse 8, then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. Moses doesn't tell us why the Amalekites attacked Israel. On the surface, at least, it would seem that perhaps attacking other nations for plunder was probably a practice of the Amalekites, as it was for many other nations at that time, and as it has been for many nations ever since that

time. No doubt the Amalekites saw that the Israelites were not well armed and therefore they looked to be a soft target. In Deuteronomy, Moses gives us a fuller description of this attack on the Israelites by the Amalekites. In Deuteronomy 25 verses 17 through 18, Moses says, remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God. The way that Moses describes it for us is that this was a very cowardly attack on the part of the Amalekites. They attacked the weakest part of the people of Israel. The people of Israel as a whole were not a formidable force. They were vulnerable. They were innocent. They had not attacked the Amalekites. But again, this is the kind of thing that has happened throughout human history. The real reason why Amalek attacked Israel was deeper. It was spiritual. And that is Amalek was used of Satan to try to destroy this newly liberated people before they could reach the promised land. Whether the Amalekites realized it or not, I'm sure they did not realize it, but it was because the Israelites were the chosen people of God. Because they were God's people, it was for that reason that they attacked them. It's the same reason why Pharaoh and the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites while they were in Egypt. Because they were the people of God and behind those nations there was the evil one and he was using them for his own evil purposes. And this sort of conflict between Israel as the people of God and other nations of the world is exactly what the Lord said would happen way back in Genesis chapter 3. In Genesis chapter 3:15 the Lord said this to the serpent who had tempted Eve and caused Eve and Adam to sin the Lord said to Eve that he will put enmity between or he said to the serpent rather I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel of course the woman was Eve and the serpent is the devil, the evil one. Those who are of the seed of the woman, or the offspring of the woman, these are those who belong to God, who belong to Christ. They are the people of God. And those

who are the offspring of the seed of the serpent are those who do not belong to God. They continue to rebel against God. They do not belong to Christ. And therefore, however unwittingly it may be, those who are of the seed of the serpent have the devil as their father, and they do his will. And from that point on in Genesis chapter 3 until the end of history, there would be and there still continues to be a fundamental conflict and struggle between the people who belong to God and to Christ and those who are not his people. And this conflict that takes place on earth, this is just the stage for a far greater cosmic conflict that is taking place between God and His hosts, that is the angels who belong to Him, and the devil and his hosts, that is his demons. And therefore, when Israel, here in our passage, Israel who is the offspring of the woman, when they were attacked by the Amalekites, the offspring of the serpents, it was part of this greater spiritual warfare between Christ and Satan, between good and evil, between light and darkness. There was in the wilderness that day in Rephidim a real physical battle. Nevertheless, the deeper struggle, the true struggle was spiritual. And for the people of God today, for us who belong to Christ, for the church, we are engaged in the same spiritual warfare. We read from Ephesians chapter 6, let me read verse 12 again. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. In the verse before that, in verse 11, we are told who is the chief of our spiritual enemies and it is the devil, it is Satan. Verse 11, put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. First Peter 5 8 tells us, be sober minded, be watchful, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. And so, just as we observe here in Exodus 17 that the Amalekites were used by Satan to oppose, to try to destroy the people of God then, so today Satan is very active. His purpose is to oppose, to try to destroy, if he can, the Church of Jesus Christ today. And very often his attacks do come in the form of the kind of oppression or opposition or

persecution that We have witnessed throughout church history that's taking place very much in different parts of the world today, but Satan has other weapons at his disposal. He has other tools that he uses. They may be more subtle, but they are no less devastating. When he attacks the church, he uses various temptations to lead the people of God into sin. He seeks to seduce us through different kinds of idolatry. He tempts believers to doubt the truth of God's word and promises. This is what Satan did to Eve. Hath God really said? And so the devil will use any means he can to try to separate us, if he can, from our union with the Lord Jesus Christ. And because we have a powerful enemy, an evil enemy, who devotes all his might, all his resources to destroy our faith in Christ and to hinder our faithfulness to God, as believers in Jesus Christ, you and I are called to be fully engaged in this spiritual warfare. We must fight. We must fight against temptation. We are called to put to death the sin that is within us. We must hold fast to the word of God. We must stand upon the truth of God. And so the Christian life, while we can characterize it in many ways, one way that is very true of the Christian life is it is a life of struggle, of striving, of fighting. We have true enemies. We have real opponents who seek to destroy our souls. Again, we strive against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. A shorthand way of saying all of this is to say that we are in a continual battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. And we could even put this in an even more shorthand way, and that is to say, as a Christian, you fight against sin. You fight against sin, the sin of unbelief, the sin of disobedience.

Well, the good news is we know what the outcome will be of this spiritual warfare. In his death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ, the captain of our salvation, he has already dealt the death blow to the devil, to all the powers of evil and hell that oppose us. And so while we may in this battle in which we are engaged in this warfare, we may lose a skirmish here or there. Sin may get the upper hand

from time to time, but nevertheless, as one who belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, as one who has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, you can know with absolute certainty that the final outcome of this battle will be victory. It will be your victory, your conquest. Romans 8:37 says that in Christ we are more than conquerors through him who loved us and Romans 8 also tells us that there is nothing there is nothing in all creation that will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord and so the victory is ours however however having said that notice here in this passage that the Israelites were called to fight. It was not the Lord's purpose to simply destroy the Amalekites by raining fire down from heaven. No, He called them to fight and it was through the fighting of the Israelites that the Amalekites would be destroyed. And in the very same way, for you and me, although we give all praise and glory and credit for our salvation, for our ultimate triumph over sin and death and the powers of hell, we give all credit to the Lord Jesus Christ for that. Nevertheless, in this life, we are called to be fully engaged in this fight, in this spiritual battle. We are called to fight the good fights of the faith. and so this battle then between Amalek and Israel at heart it was a spiritual warfare the very same kind of warfare that you and I are engaged in as believers in Christ and the reason why the Israelites were victorious that day against the Amalekites was because of the intercession of Moses and this is the second thing that I want us to take from this passage or notice in this passage Israel depended on the intercession of Moses for their victory. After the initial attack of the Amalekites against the people of Israel, Moses had a plan on how Israel would counterattack, and no doubt it was a plan that was given to him by the Lord. First of all, he told Joshua to choose a fighting man to go out the next day to fight against Amalek. Most likely, Joshua chose the best of the fighting men, such as they were. As for Moses, he would go up to the top of a nearby hill, with the staff of God in his hand. He would raise it above his head in order to call for the help and the power of God to fight for his people. And the plan worked marvelously. That is, until Moses became tired and his arms

drooped and the staff of God dropped and he couldn't hold up the staff anymore. And then the Amalekites would begin to prevail. And so this passage tells us that as long as Moses was able to hold up that staff, the Israelites prevailed, but as soon as he lowered the staff, because he got tired, the Amalekites prevailed over the Israelites. Well, thankfully, Moses' brother Aaron was with him, and there was another assistant with Moses that day, Hurr, and they helped Moses by giving him a place to sit, and then they held up his arms for him. and so with their help he was able to hold up the staff of God all the way until sundown and by that time the Israelites had completely routed the Amalekites. Verse 13 says, and Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. So this is how the Israelites won their first battle, their first engagement with an enemy nation. They're off to a good start. They're 1-0. They've defeated the Amalekites, but of course Their victory, although they fought, their victory was entirely due to the power of God. Joshua led the armies of Israel, but it wasn't his leadership that won the battle. It certainly wasn't the strength of the Israelite army. Remember, these were a people who just months before were in abject poverty. They were enslaved. They were simply trying to survive. The only skill they had was making bricks, certainly not warfare, fighting. Who knows what kind of weapons they were able to cobble together. And so if we think of this in sports terms. The Amalekites would have been the overwhelming favorites. No one would have bet against them. But the Israelites, they had the Lord. They had the Lord on their side. The almighty power of God. And that power of God, the power of God for his people, God's purpose, his will to fight for his people, this was signified in this staff that Moses held up above his head. And it was by his divine power that God won the victory for his people. But he only accomplished that victory as a means or as a result of using the means of the intercession of Moses as Moses held up the staff of God.

Now the historic And I believe correct way of understanding this passage, the way that most commentators have interpreted this passage is to say this, that

Moses here, he was interceding by prayer. This is Moses praying for the people of Israel and so have been some commentators, they have been a little too fastidious in interpreting this text by arguing that because it doesn't actually say that Moses was praying, we cannot say that Moses is praying here. He was merely holding up the staff of God, that's all it says. But if you were at a restaurant and you saw across the room a family, and when their dishes were served, they bowed their heads, they folded their hands, And you told me, now technically, I don't know if they were actually praying to God or not because I could not hear the words that they were saying. You would sound like you were splitting hairs. Here in this passage, Moses clearly is in a posture of prayer. His hands were raised up to God. He was appealing to the Lord for help. Clearly he was directing his heart heavenward. He was interceding on behalf of the Israelites for the help of God. In other words, he was praying. He was praying. And although the Hebrew of verse 16 is hard to interpret, it may be saying, as the English Standard Version interprets it, as saying, a hand upon the throne of the Lord. The hand was Moses' hand. His hand was upon the throne of God as he prayed, as he interceded for the people of Israel. This is not just a picture of prayer, but this is a picture of persevering prayer. Moses kept praying this way all the way to sundown, until the Amalekites were defeated, and that's how we are to pray as well. We are to pray with persistence, with patience, with perseverance. And another lesson to learn from this prayer of Moses is that we are to pray together. We are to pray together. And I believe that this is the meaning of Moses being helped by Aaron and Hur. Some people have been very creative in their understanding, their explanation of what it means that Aaron was on one side of Moses, Hur was on the other side of Moses. They were holding up his hands and helping him to pray. Some people have said that Aaron and Hur represent the Old and the New Testaments and that our prayers must rest on both Testaments of the Bible. Others have said that this was a symbol of the Calvary of Jesus on the cross where his arms are outstretched and he had on

one side of him a man who was being crucified and on the other side of him another man who was being crucified. So those are certainly interesting but that kind of fanciful allegorical interpretation is not nearly as persuasive as the interpretation that this is a picture here of corporate prayer, of the people of God praying together, of God's people helping one another in praying to the Lord together. And an obvious implication of this truth is that we should not only be faithful in praying individually, we should not only, as Christians, have a private prayer life, but we also ought to seek times to pray together with our fellow Christians, with fellow members of the body of Christ. We all have priorities in our lives. We all have things that we believe are more important than other things, things that we could be giving our time and attention to. And as Christians, one major priority that every believer ought to have is that we ought to make time for and take advantage of occasions for us to pray for and with one another together. Consider this passage here. What would have happened if Aaron and Hur decided it was more important for them to go down to the battlefield and to fight alongside of Joshua than it was for them to be up on top of the hill with Moses helping him pray? Well clearly we know what would have happened. Israel would have been defeated. The Amalekites would have won. We read in Acts chapter 2 verse 42 that the very first Christians, they devoted themselves to certain things. They made certain things a priority. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. and if you read Acts 242 you'll notice it doesn't just say and praying or prayers but it says and the prayers the prayers and that definite article suggests and I believe it means that this is referring to set times of praying together that were there were appointed times in which the first Christians would meet together to pray together and the question that we need to ask ourselves is this Are you devoted to the same things that the first Christians were devoted to? Are your priorities the same as the priorities of these first Christians? That is to make time, to meet with other believers, to pray together, to unite in prayer for the church, for one

another, for God's glory. The commentator Phil Reichen says, Both individually and corporately, the neglect of prayer means the loss of spiritual warfare. Even if we fight like Joshua, we will not win the battle unless we pray like Moses. And I would add, unless we pray like Moses and Aaron and Hur, at times praying together. But even more important than the example that Moses gives us here of prayer is the picture that Moses gives us here as the leader of God's people, interceding for his people. And in this picture, we have here a shadow, a type of the greater leader of the people of God, the ultimate leader of God's people. That is Jesus Christ. And just as Moses made intercession for the people of Israel then, so our Lord Jesus, our leader, our captain, He makes intercession for us daily, continually, always. Hebrews 7.25 tells this about Jesus. He always lives to make intercession for them. What a marvelous truth this is, that if you belong to Jesus Christ by faith, that if He is your Savior, that you have come to Him in faith and repentance, and He is your Lord and your Savior, that you have one who, first of all, interceded for you upon the cross, that he interceded for you by taking upon himself your guilt, your sin, so that the wrath of God, the judgment of God that belonged to you and to me was poured out upon Christ. And he said on the cross, it is finished. And so, one time, once for all, Jesus made intercession for you so that you may receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life that you may be saved. But you also have a Savior whose intercession did not stop there, but who continues to intercede for you before the Father on the basis of His death and resurrection. He always lives to make intercession for you and me. And because, unlike Moses, Jesus is perfect, because he is perfect in strength, perfect in holiness, perfect in faithfulness. Unlike Moses, he never tires, he never fails, his arms do not droop, but he always prays before the Father for you and for me. And so we have a better intercessor than Moses. And by his intercession, we know that we have the victory. that the ultimate triumph is ours in Jesus Christ.

God's Purpose to Defeat Evil Forever

The third thing to take from this passage is Israel's victory shows God's purpose to defeat evil forever. Verse 14 says this, 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. Notice that Moses was not only to write this down in a book, but that he was specifically to recite this promise to Joshua. And he was to do so because Joshua, of course, would be the next leader of Israel, and he needed to know that it was the Lord's will, his purpose, that he would destroy this perennial enemy of Israel, the Amalekites. And when we read on in the New Testament, or the Old Testament, we see that God made good on this promise. David, in 1 Samuel chapter 30, he defeats the Amalekites once and for all. Now, as the people of God today, unlike the people of Israel in the days of the Exodus and the days of Moses, we belong to a purely spiritual kingdom, not an earthly kingdom. And so is the church today. We are no longer called, like the Israelites were then, to engage in physical, actual battle or warfare against the peoples or the nations of this world. In the same way, we do not defend the kingdom of God. We do not advance the kingdom of God with guns and bullets and bombs. The 2 Corinthians 10.4 says, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds. And so, rather than calling us, as the Church, to go out into the world to wage war against peoples and nations, as the Church, God sent us out into the world with quite a different mission, and that is to declare the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to sinners who are dying and perishing in their sin. To proclaim the good news that God has sent His Son into the world. that he was crucified for sinners, that he was raised to new life, and that all who come to him in faith are saved, will be saved from the judgment that is to come. That is how God is at work in the world today advancing his kingdom. It is through the preaching of the gospel. It is by the power, again, not of earthly weapons, but by the power of the

word of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit as he imparts new life and gives faith and repentance to sinners. And so in this gospel age, God overcomes his enemies, Christ triumphs over his enemies by the power of his divine grace and love and by the power of the gospel. But just as the Lord promised Moses, that he would utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. So it is the will of God one day to bring those who are his enemies, who remain his enemies, one day he will bring them to complete destruction forever. God will bring eternal ruin and destruction to all his enemies on the day of judgment when Christ returns with his angels and the glory of his father and judges all who have ever lived for what they have done. The day is coming, but it is still not yet here. And in the meantime, praise the Lord. Christ has many, many of those who are his enemies today, but who will be redeemed by his grace, who will become his servants and worshipers. And also in the meantime, as long as we are in this world, we are again engaged in spiritual warfare. And as we are, we must look to the banner of Christ. the banner of Christ. After the Lord defeated Amalek Moses built an altar and he called it the Lord is my banner. The word that's translated banner here could have been a flag like we think of as a banner. It may have also been a pole but it was something that the armies of Israel would have looked to to encourage them in their fighting. It was a military thing and so the Lord is my banner means here for Moses and for the Israelites is this that we will look to the Lord when we are engaged in battle when we are fighting our enemies we will look to the Lord to his banner because he is the one who brings victory not by our strength, not by our might but by the power of God we have hope of victory and until God brings in that total defeat of evil and sin in the world Until that day when all his enemies shall be cast out of the new heavens and new earth forever and ever, as the people of God, our banner is Christ. Our banner is Christ. And we might even be more specific. We might even say our banner is the empty tomb, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because that really was the victory of God over all his enemies, over all our enemies, sin and evil, They did their worst when

Jesus perished on the cross. They seem to have won the day. The Son of God was destroyed. He bore the curse of death. He was buried in the grave. But then God raised Jesus from the dead. And it was the ultimate proclamation from heaven to all creation that the enemies of Christ, the enemies of God, that they were defeated, they were broken, they would rise no more. And so our savior is victorious over all his and our enemies. And in Christ, your victory over sin and death is assured. And so when you are in the heat of the battle, in this life, in this struggle against sin and temptation and evil, when you feel like you are struggling to walk by faith, when you feel weak in your fight against temptation and sin, when your enemy seems so strong and invincible, Don't get discouraged. Don't lose heart. Keep fighting the good fight of faith. Keep praying. Keep worshiping. Keep holding fast to the Word of God and look to the banner of Christ. Look to the empty tomb. Look to the exalted Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, your Savior, the one who has triumphed for you. And know that as one who belongs to Jesus Christ in whatever battle you are experiencing now, in whatever struggles you may have in this life, you are on the winning side. You are on the winning side because Christ, because Christ is your Lord, He is your Savior, and His victory is yours. Let's pray.