

## JEHOVAH-NISSI

AND MOSES BUILT AN ALTAR, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi [Jehovah, my banner]” (Exod. 17:15).

Only a few weeks had elapsed from the time the children of Israel left Marah, the place of bitter waters, till they reached Rephidim, the scene of Jehovah’s revelation of Himself to them as **Jehovah-nissi, Jehovah my banner**. At Marah, we will recall, in healing the bitter waters of that place, He had revealed Himself as Jehovah-rophe, Jehovah who heals, the one who alone has the remedy for the sins of mankind, the balm for the sorrows and sufferings of His people; who has sweetened the bitter waters of human misery and death through Christ, the Tree of life and the sweet and living waters.

The children of Israel had gone from Marah to Elim, the place of refreshing and rest (Exod. 15:27). From there they journeyed to the wilderness of Sin (Exod. 16) where they murmured against Moses because there was no food, and where they longed for the fleshpots of Egypt. There, Jehovah appeared in the cloud of glory and began to feed them with the wilderness manna. Then they came to Rephidim where there was no water (Exod. 17). At Marah the waters were bitter. Here there was no water at all. “And the people thirsted there for water.” Hunger is difficult and discouraging enough to bear, but the sufferings and torments of thirst are unbearable. Their murmurings and threatenings against Moses were rather a tempting of Jehovah. They doubted God. Forgotten, the marvelous passage of the Red Sea and the drowning of Pharaoh and his hosts; forgotten, the miraculous healing of Marah’s waters! Ignoring the coming down of the manna from heaven, they questioned God’s goodness and even His presence. “Is the Lord among us, or not?” they said. And there from the rock in Horeb, that rock which Paul tells us was Christ (I Cor. 10:4), Jehovah caused waters to spring forth to quench the multitude’s thirst.

Then came the experience which occasioned Jehovah’s revelation of Himself to His people as Jehovah-nissi. Israel discovered that perhaps there were worse enemies than even hunger and thirst. They now learned that their pathway was to be contested and barred by implacable human

foes. For “then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim” (Exod. 17:8).

## **ISRAEL’S ENEMY**

Who were the Amalekites?

The Amalekites were the descendants of Amalek, a grandson of Esau, we are told in Genesis 36:12. Thus they were direct descendants of Isaac. Yet they became the persistent and hereditary enemies of Israel, a thorn in the flesh, and a constant menace to their spiritual and national life. Balaam calls them “the first of the nations” (Num. 24:20), that is, to oppose Israel. They were a numerous and powerful people. It might have been expected that, as closely related to Israel as they were, they would have afforded help instead of opposition. Yet they opposed Israel in a most mean and cowardly way. Years later Moses calls upon Israel to “remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way as ye came forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God” (Deut. 25:17, 18). God had bidden him write in a book the words: “For I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven” and “Jehovah hath sworn that Jehovah will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Exod. 17:14-16). For “the face of Jehovah is against them that do evil, to cut off their memory from the earth.”

Centuries later Samuel came to King Saul with a commission from Jehovah to utterly destroy the Amalekites with all their possessions so that not a trace of them or theirs should remain (I Sam. 15:3). The failure of King Saul to carry out the command to destroy Amalek (I Sam. 15:2, 3) led to his own rejection and death (I Sam. 15:26-28). When he lay mortally wounded on the battlefield of Mount Gilboa, a young man, a stranger, came to him. Saul urgently requested this young man to put an end to him for he knew he could not live, and did not wish to fall into the hands of his conquerors while yet alive (II Sam. 1:1-16). By the bitter irony of a just retribution this young man was an Amalekite. The sinful thing which Saul had spared now returned to slay him. Not until the days of King Hezekiah was the command finally carried out, that “the rest of the Amalekites that were escaped were smitten” (I Chron. 4:43). This is no doubt one reason why

Hezekiah was so favored by Jehovah. Yet it is highly probable that the Haman, who a thousand years after Moses almost accomplished the total destruction of all the Jews in Persia, as told in the Book of Esther-Haman the Agagite, as he is called was a descendant of King Agag of the Amalekites, whom Saul in his foolish disobedience sought to spare alive.

The Amalekites were at that time living with their flocks and herds in the vicinity of Rephidim. Moved by suspicion, jealousy, and fear they resented the presence of such a multitude of strange people in the wilderness and were determined to prevent their passage through it. Thus they opposed the purpose and plan of God. They had first carried on a sort of harassing, guerilla campaign against Israel. Then apparently they came out against them in open, pitched battle.

## **ISRAEL'S TRIUMPH**

Strange to say, there appears to have been no fear or confusion among Israel in such a crisis. Perhaps the recent miracle of the water from the rock had overawed them and inspired them with confidence and trust. Perhaps it was easier to fight a tangible foe of flesh and blood after the terrors of the wilderness with its hunger and thirst and weariness. At any rate, no hint is given of alarm or confusion. Moses calmly orders Joshua to choose men and go out and fight Amalek. These enemies of God's people, the masters of this peninsula of Sinai, thought, no doubt, to prevail easily over this newly freed slave rabble without supplies, without arms, without knowledge of the country. For Israel was indeed an illequipped, ill-disciplined, inexperienced mob going out against a well-armed and experienced foe. But Amalek little knew the secret source of the calm and courage of God's people. Two other factors, at least, must have contributed to this confidence. The first is the man Joshua, whom Moses chose to lead the expedition, a man of inflexible purpose, of indomitable courage, an able leader and soldier. His name had originally been Hoshea, a prince of the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8). Hoshea means to give deliverance or help. But in Numbers 13:16 we read that Moses changed his name from Hoshea to Joshua, which means Jehovah is help or salvation. Whether this change was before or as a result of this event we do not know. But he must have been a man to inspire confidence and courage. And we know he was a man of faith, for he with Caleb were the only two of the twelve

spies who brought back an encouraging report of the promised land they were sent to spy out. The second factor was, of course, Moses himself, now vindicated and honored in the eyes of the people after smiting the rock with his rod to bring the waters gushing out of it. In order to encourage Joshua and his men, Moses promises to take his position upon a hill with this rod, the rod of God, in his hand. In the account we are told that as long as Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and when his hand was lowered Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were supported. Israel was finally victorious and the defeat of Amalek complete.

Moses standing upon the hill with uplifted hands has generally been thought of as interceding with God for the vindication of God's cause in the victory of His people. This factor of intercession suggested by the upraised hands was no doubt present and important in Moses' attitude. But there was something much more important than that, for in Moses' hand was the rod of God, the God-given rod, the wonder-working rod, the rod which brought the terrible plagues upon Egypt, which opened a path through the Red Sea for the deliverance of Israel, and brought the waters closing down in destruction on God's enemies. It was the rod of God's mighty hand and outstretched arm, the rod of the Elohim. How significant is this use of the name denoting His creative glory, might, and sovereignty, the general name of God, the name especially used in relationship to the nations (represented here by Amalek) as distinguished from Jehovah in relationship especially to Israel! Then it is the Elohim here, with the definite article, the only Elohim, denoting that whether Amalek acknowledged it or not, He was God.

It is this rod, as the banner of God, which brought the victory. What was the meaning then of Amalek's success when it was lowered and Israel's success when it was raised? It was to sharply emphasize and deeply impress upon Israel's warring soldiers and her watching, anxious host that upon God alone depended and to Him belonged the victory; that under His "raised banner victory was always assured. No matter what the odds, then, for in Moses' own words five should chase a hundred and a hundred should chase ten thousand (Lev. 26:8). That rod was the symbol and pledge of His presence and power and working.

A banner, in ancient times, was not necessarily a flag such as we use nowadays. Often it was a

bare pole with a bright shining ornament which glittered in the sun. The word here for banner means to glisten, among other things. It is translated variously pole, ensign, standard, and among the Jews it is also a word for miracle. As an ensign or standard it was a signal to God's people to rally to Him. It stood for His cause, His battle. It was a sign of deliverance, of salvation, as we shall see by the use of that word for the pole on which the brazen serpent was raised in the wilderness. It is the word used by the psalmist as "lift up" in the expression: "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us" (Ps. 4:6). So, Joshua, that is, Jehovah is salvation; the rod of Elohim held aloft in Moses' upraised hand as God's banner o'er them; and the light of His countenance upon them-these were Israel's victory.

## **THE WELFARE OF THE SAINTS**

Israel our Example. Israel's experience of battle is the analogy of our own spiritual warfare. Amalek represents the forces of this world order which stand opposed to Jehovah in all ages, the rulers and princes of this world who have lifted up their standard against the Lord and against His anointed. Exodus 17:16 reads: "Jehovah hath sworn that Jehovah will have war with Amalek from generation to generation," but the original could bear the rendering: "For there is a hand upon or against the throne of Jehovah; Jehovah will have war against Amalek from generation to generation." It represented the world which lieth in the wicked one (I John 5:19). Its characteristics are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (I John 2:16). Amalek was a grandson of Esau, who despised spiritual things and preferred a mess of pottage to a spiritual birthright. He was the first enemy to appear to a redeemed people. Israel had just been redeemed, and baptized in the cloud and in the sea. They had partaken of that spiritual meat, represented by the manna, and drunk of that spiritual rock which was Christ, as represented by the waters of Horeb. The newly born believer at once finds the old man of the flesh confronting him in sharp contrast and opposition to the new man of the Spirit within him, "for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5:17). The apostle Paul declared that in the flesh there is no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and regarded it as a law in his members warring against his mind, and seeking to bring him into captivity to itself (Rom. 7:23). It is this flesh and its lusts which are to be crucified in those who

are Christ's, His redeemed (Gal. 5:24).

The sphere of the conflict, however, as already indicated, is wider than that of the individual. Amalek may also be said to stand for the kingdoms of this world and their enmity to and attacks upon the people of God against Israel of old and against the Church now. And the world is enmity to God. The kingdoms of this world are not yet become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15). There is a usurper upon the throne of these kingdoms, the same one who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God (11 Thess. 2:4); who once tempted the rightful King with the offer of these kingdoms if He would fall down and worship him (Matt. 4:8, 9). Amalek was, as already stated, simply the first-fruits of the heathen, the beginning of Gentile power and hostility to the people of God, representing the kingdom of darkness as against the kingdom of light, of evil against good, of a lie against the truth.

God is represented, especially as Jehovah of hosts, as lifting up a standard against the nations, of which Amalek is a type. "Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain . . . I have commanded my sanctified ones, even them that rejoice in my highness. The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the Lord of hosts mustereth the host of the battle . . . I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity" (Isa. 13:2-4, 11; Jer. 51:12, 27). But behind every outward manifestation the conflict is essentially spiritual. For the gates of Hell are ever assaulting the Church. And "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

Our participation in this warfare. There is a striking contrast between the experience at the Red Sea and the experience at Rephidim. At the Red Sea, the children of Israel, terrified at the sight of Pharaoh's hosts coming upon them, and the way of escape barred on every hand, were commanded not to do anything, but simply to "stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah" (Exod. 14:13). For in the work of salvation God alone is the agent. God was here acting in redemption which is by grace, through faith alone, and not of works. They could do nothing to

secure that salvation. But once having been delivered and introduced into a new life there appeared a warfare to be waged. They were to fight the good fight of faith which must ever be the experience of every serious believer. That there are very many who appear to think that nothing more is needed after the initial experience of redemption is all too obvious. The experience of Israel is to warn us against such a deadly fallacy. It is not now, stand still and see the salvation of God. That salvation has been accomplished. Moses says to Joshua in clear, crisp commands: "Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek." Moses meant business. Too many people do not. We are not saved by works, but we are saved to works (Eph. 2: 10) and to a serious warfare. At Rephidim a redeemed people must fight the good fight of faith (2 Tim. 4:7). We are also told to "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3), although many have confused contend with contention. We are to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, willing to endure hardness, well pleasing to our Commander (2 Tim. 2:3, 4). We are to put on the armor of God, the whole armor provided for us, to be ready for attack or defense (Eph. 6:11-17). And the Christian, as John Bunyan has pointed out in his Pilgrim's Progress, has no armor for his back.

Failure in our own strength alone. Another lesson taught us by the name Jehovah-nissi is that we cannot wage this warfare in our own strength alone. When Moses' arms grew weary the rod of God was lowered. The enemy then prevailed and Israel was pressed back. The lesson is quite clear. The rod was the symbol and pledge of God's presence and power. Lowered, it could not be seen. It was as though God were not present, and therefore not in the mind of the people. They were to learn that the evil forces of the world are powerful and implacable, too great for man's own, unaided strength. They could be strong only "by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob" (Gen. 49:24). Moses learned how indispensable God's presence was for victory and success, but Israel forgot. When for their gross lack of faith they were denied entrance into the Promised Land at Kadesh-barnea, they repented, and were willing to discard the evil report of the ten spies. When they attempted the entrance into Canaan, they were told by Moses: "Go not up, for Jehovah is not among you." They persisted, however, and were defeated and chased by the very Amalekites whom they had defeated at Rephidim (Num. 14:42-45). Israel suffered a similar defeat in its first encounter with the enemy in the Promised Land. (Jericho was not a battle in the sense of their active participation.) Because of sin God's presence was not with them at the battle

of Ai. They went again alone and in their own strength, and were defeated. And God said: “Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed [thing] from among you” (Josh. 7:12). Nor in the work and warfare of our Christian experience can we do anything without Him who is not only the Jehovah of the Old Testament, but the Jesus of the New.

Did we in our own strength confide,  
Our striving would be losing; Were not the right Man on our side,  
The Man of God’s own choosing: Dost ask who that may be?  
Christ Jesus it is He; Lord Sabaoth is His Name,  
From age to age the same,  
And He must win the battle.

We must be “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.” Then we may put on the whole armor of God and go confidently forth to wrestle with the enemy (Eph. 6:10-12).

The victory assured. The banner of Jehovah held aloft in Moses’ upraised hand brought victory to His people. As they beheld that rod they must have been assured of victory. This is always assured to the people of God over the powers of evil and the enemy of our souls when His banner is over us. Before every battle of olden days the priest would approach the people in behalf of God and would say: “Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; for Jehovah your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you” (Deut. 20:3, 4). “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear what man can do unto me” (Ps. 118:6). The rod in Moses’ hand, however, was only a symbol. Moses called the name of the altar which he built Jehovah- nissi-Jehovah, Himself, is my banner. Isaiah predicts a rod to come forth out of the stem of Jesse. This stem or root is also Himself to be an ensign, a banner of the peoples. That stem of Jesse is Christ, born of the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3). He, therefore, is our banner, the banner of our redemption. When Moses lifted up a brazen serpent in the wilderness so that all who had been bitten by serpents might look and live, the word used for the pole on which he raised it is our word banner. The Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John



3:14). So the cross of Christ is our banner of God's mighty power in redemption. But He is also the banner of our warfare. He has conquered before us; "in the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). He, too, promises His presence. "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). Faith in Him is the assurance of our victory, for "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (I John 5:4). Our faith is in Him whom Paul tells us has been placed "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named" (Eph. 1:19-22), so that in Him we may successfully wrestle against those principalities and powers of evil. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" For "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:31, 37).

With Jehovah-Jesus, our banner, we may go from strength to strength with each victory and we may say: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57), and "always causeth us to triumph in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14).

And tho' this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us;  
We will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph through us:  
The prince of darkness grim, We tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure,  
For lo! his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.