



Preparing for Battle

Date: May 26, 2024

Text: Exodus 17:8-16

BIG IDEA

In this first mention of Joshua in the Bible, he leads Israel in their first battle. Freshly emerged from Egypt, the people Joshua leads aren't soldiers; they are weary slaves, without any weapons or experience in warfare. Yet, their first step toward taking the promised land is to go to war for territory God has promised them. The people face a choice that will impact the course of their lives, as well as generations to come. Will God's people give up on His promises and return to slavery, or move forward in courageous faith and obedience?

Conversation Starter

- What is your “promised land,” i.e., promises or territory He is calling you to take?
 - What obstacles or fears might be preventing you from courageously fighting for that territory?
-

COMMENTARY #1

(Verse 8) The author of the passage does not mention why the people of Amalek attack Israel because the original readers would have been well-familiar with the people group. Amalek was a grandson of Esau (Genesis 36:13), and his descendants carried on the rivalry between Esau and Jacob/Israel (Genesis 25:19-34).

The attack takes place at Rephidim, which is further south than the nomadic Amalekites typically traveled. They likely make the journey because they see that their ancient enemy, Israel, is vulnerable. Later in the narrative, the Amalekites again attack Israel when they are in a weakened state after a failed attempt to take the Promised Land (Numbers 14:43-45).

Discussion Questions

1. What past traumas, offenses, or struggles might be hindering you from moving forward in courageous faith? Are there any areas of unforgiveness or bitter roots in your heart?
 2. What are some steps you can take today to begin to surrender these to the Lord? (See Hebrews 12:14–17.)
-

COMMENTARY #2

(Verses 9-13) As Moses instructs Joshua to seek out men who can fight, he notes that the battle will take place “tomorrow.” The Israelites had only one day to prepare for their first battle! Joshua’s criteria for selecting fighters likely consisted of men who weren’t too weak to fight or those who possessed some form of knife or rudimentary weapon. Yet, strength and weaponry weren’t

the criteria that would win the battle. God Himself fought for His people. As Moses, with the help of Aaron and Hur, held aloft the staff of God's protection, no enemy could prevail against them.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Deuteronomy 20:1–4 and again consider the previous two questions. How might remembering that the Lord fights on your behalf change your responses?
 2. How can you allow the Lord to fight on your behalf? What practical form might that take in terms of your own life and your own struggles?
-

COMMENTARY #3

(Verses 14-16) After Israel defeats Amalek, Moses instructs Joshua to write down an account of the battle, and then Moses himself builds an altar to God. The written record and the altar served to commemorate God's miraculous blessing and express gratitude.

Building the altar was a practice carried on from Israel's patriarchs that served as a reminder to worship the Lord. Typically, an altar was given a name that signified God's blessing at that particular site. In this case, *YHWH Nissi*, "the Lord is my Banner", alluded to Moses' staff, a visible reminder of God's presence among His people during the battle. Such memorials were not only an occasion for worship and thanksgiving in the present, but visible reminders of God's faithfulness that would carry into the future.

Discussion Questions

1. What practices or visible reminders help you commemorate God's faithfulness in your past?
 2. In what ways can you be more intentional to create reminders of God's protection and provision in your life?
 3. How can such reminders help you grow in faith and surrender your struggles to the Lord?
-

GOING DEEPER

God called Israel to be set apart—a holy people who would bear God's name to the nations (Exodus 19:6; 20:7). Yet, as soon as the people left Egypt they nearly let their fear overtake their faith (Exodus 14:11–12).

The lack of faith exhibited by the Israelites is heartbreaking. Nearly every member of the community wanted to bear bricks for the Egyptians rather than bearing the name of God to the nations. The people were so afraid to trust God that they clung to their oppression like a security blanket.

Choosing slavery over trusting God sounds like a ridiculous decision, but don't we do the same? When you and I cling to our sins and struggles, we are acting like the Israelites, seeking slavery because it is comfortable and familiar. Our Savior, however, implores us to relinquish our burdens to Him (Matthew 11:28–30).

This week, identify at least one practical strategy to implement to overcome fear with faith. For example, you might enlist the

help of trusted friends or mentors, as Aaron and Hur held up the arms of Moses.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters, by Carmen Joy Imes (IVP Academic, 2019).

GROUP ACTIVITY

Watch the Bible Project introduction to Joshua:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/joshua/>