

Provision of Water and Warfare with Amalek

The Old Testament portion of our daily readings for today brings us to consider two major events in the history of Israel. Exodus chapter 17 describes the miraculous provision of water in the desert, and the warfare with Amalek, when Israel were saved from the hand of their enemies. In our exhortation for today, we shall consider each of these aspects in turn.

THE PROVISION OF WATER IN THE DESERT

Psalm 81 recounts the blessings of Yahweh upon Israel following their departure from the darkness of Egypt:

“Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah” (Psa. 81:7).

What this tells us is that when we read in Exodus 17 that “there was no water for the people to drink” (Exo. 17:1), this was not simply a consequence of living in the desert. Yahweh purposely did not provide them with water to “prove” them, and see whether they would turn to Him in faith, asking for the provision to be made. They failed this test, and instead “the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” (Exo. 17:3).

The situation was resolved in the provision that the Lord made for his people, but in a most unusual way. Moses was told:

“Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.” (Exo. 17:6)

We are left with no doubt, that this scenario whereby water would emerge from a stricken Rock foreshadows how spiritual waters would come through the smiting of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament writer informs us of this, saying that the people “did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them: ***and that Rock was Christ***” (1 Cor. 10:4). The drink and the Rock itself were “spiritual” in the sense that in these things the spirit was foreshadowing Christ. Hence we read in the Messianic Psalms of the stricken Christ: “I am ***poured out like water***, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels” (Psa. 22:14). This had a literal fulfilment in that when Messiah was crucified, the spear that entered into him caused blood and water to pour out (Jno. 19:34), but the spiritual aspect is more significant:

“... whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water ***springing up unto everlasting life***” (Jno. 4:14).

Again:

“... in the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow ***rivers of living water***” (Jno. 7:37-38).

Waters provide both cleansing and nourishment. Just as we depend upon physical water to meet our daily needs, even so we should depend upon the spiritual water that comes from our stricken Lord, to

meet our spiritual needs. Do we ever forget to drink? If we go for some time without drinking literal water, we become faint and weary: we seldom forget to meet this vital requirement of life. Even so, the man of the spirit will faint under the pressures of life if there is no spiritual water to partake of. The water that Israel sought after would only provide temporary nourishment: but the water that Messiah is able to provide is “living” water, able to provide “everlasting life”.

WARFARE AGAINST AMALEK

Exodus 17 describes how that Amalek was the first nation to wage war against Israel, following their symbolic baptism into Moses (1 Cor. 10:2), and miraculous departure from Egypt: “then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim.” (Exo. 17:8). Amalek, we learn from other Scriptures, had a particular tactic that they employed against Yahweh’s Holy Nation. Deuteronomy 25 recounts the reminder of what took place in Rephidim:

“Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met thee by the way, ***and smote the hindmost of thee, when thou was faint and weary;*** and he feared not God” (Deut. 25:17-18)

Here, we find the tactic of King Sin: following our baptism into the Lord Jesus Christ, the law of sin wars in our members, against the developing mind of the Spirit. “... the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other ...” (Gal. 5:17). There is a “warfare of faith” that we become engaged in, as we seek to be faithful soldiers in the commission of Jesus, our Captain. But Sin, like Amalek targets us when we are at our weakest. When we are spiritually strong, such as just after our baptism for instance, we might feel almost invincible, and ready to take on all that the world of sin can throw at us. But as we progress through life, we become spiritually weak at times – and it is then that sin can so easily take a hold of us, as even the Apostle Paul experienced: “I see another law in my members, ***warring against the law of my mind,*** and bringing me into captivity to the law of Sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:23). Notice, this passage comes immediately after the Baptism chapter of Romans chapter 6. We can trust in power of Christ, the Captain of our Salvation, to overcome, and ultimately we will win the warfare through faith in him. Being rescued from our hapless situation, we will be given the victory, as foreshadowed in Israel’s victory over Amalek.

CHOOSING JOSHUA

It is significant that when the adversary declared war against Israel, Moses chose a man called Joshua to lead the battle of defence. And he, in turn, was to choose out others to fight with him:

“And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and to out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the Rod of God in my hand” (Exo. 17:9).

In the Hebrew, the name for “Joshua” is the name of Jesus: the Lord Jesus Christ with his chosen Apostles lead the battle for the mind. We follow their lead, being clothed with the whole armour of God

“ ... put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in High Places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:11-16).

The armour is defensive: the only weapon mentioned in this chapter is “the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). Our warfare is not carnal, but spiritual, pulling down the strongholds of sin, both within our own minds, and as manifested in the world around us.

THE ROD OF GOD

Moses was to hold up “the rod of God” in order to achieve a victory over Amalek. This Rod had already been used in Egypt, to demonstrate the power of Israel’s God over the Egyptian idols. Before the Plagues came upon the land, Moses himself learned a lesson from this rod. Yahweh told him:

“ cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And Yahweh said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it and it became a rod in his hand” (Exo. 4:2-4).

The serpent is used in Scripture as a metaphor to describe that which has the power of death. Whilst there was a literal serpent in Eden, it is also used as a figure to describe the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, gaining the mastery over sin (Gen. 3:15). Moses fled before it, because of the deadly nature of it’s bite – but he was taught to take control over it, and gain the mastery over it. This he did in faith, believing that God would grant him power over it, and render it harmless. It was this serpent-rod that would accomplish the victory over Amalek.

Holding the Rod in his hands Moses lifted up his arms upon the top of the hill:

“And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed” (Exo. 17:11).

The lifting up of the hands is associated with Prayer in Scripture. Consider these testimonies:

“let my prayer be set before thee as incense; **and the lifting up of my hands** as the evening sacrifice” (Psa. 141:2).

“I will therefore, that men pray everywhere, **lifting up holy hands**, without wrath and doubting” (1 Tim 2:8)

See also the example of king Solomon in 1 Kings 8:22: in his prayer at the dedication of the Temple, he **“spread forth his hands** towards heaven.”

But although the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak, and due to the weakness of the flesh Moses couldn’t keep his hands held up by himself. Moses was the Lawgiver, and he seems to typify how that the Law could not save in itself. So, continuing in Romans, the next chapter describes the weakness of the Law:

“... the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For **what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh**, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit ...” (Rom. 8:2-4).

What the Law could not do (Moses) Christ Jesus (Joshua) did, being a captain of salvation, leading Israel into victory against the powers of Sin.

The victory was granted through the raising up of the “rod of God” in the hands of Moses. His hands were helped and held up by Aaron (the priest), and Hur (from Judah = kingship?), two principles which enabled Messiah to be lifted up for the victory of his people. Speaking of another “lifting up”, the words of John chapter 3 seem relevant here:

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jno. 3:14-15).

The context here is of a serpent made of brass, which was lifted up to be a source healing from the fiery serpents which plagued Israel on a particular occasion, but similar principles can be seen in the lifting up of the Rod of God by Moses, the means of Israel’s deliverance from Amalek.

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND HEBREWS 12

Just as Israel looked to Moses and the lifting up of the Rod, so we are exhorted to look to the Lord Jesus Christ in Hebrews chapter 12:

“... looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith: who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Interestingly, the Greek word for “author” here, is the same as that translated “Captain” in chapter 2, and verse 10. As well as being the forerunner winning the race (the context of Heb. 12), he is also a “captain of salvation”. Consider some of the other language used in Hebrews 12, which take us back to Exodus 17:

“consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, let ye **be weary and faint** in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood **striving against sin**” (Heb. 12:3).

We saw earlier how that the Amalekites targeted those who ere “weary” and “faint,” and that the striving against this race represents the striving against sin.

Again, we read in Hebrews 12 how that we should help others to win the warfare, even as Aaron and Hur helped Moses:

“wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way: but let it rather be healed ...” (Heb. 12:12-13)

Like Moses sitting upon the rock supported on either side by his Israelitish brethren, we need to support each other in our striving against Sin.

Finally in this regard, note the words of Yahweh against Amalek:

“... write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will **utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven**” (Exod. 17:14).

Even so, the power of Sin will eventually be utterly extirpated from the face of the earth. We must engage earnestly in the Warfare of Faith - following Messiah’s lead – for we know that if we are fighting the battle that he is leading, the victory will certainly be accomplished.

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