

Jehovah-Nissi

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." – Exodus 17:8-16 ESV

YHWH-Nissi – the LORD is my Banner. Like many of the other names of God, this one was coined by one of His servants; in this case, it was Moses. While this is one of the more familiar names of God, its meaning is sometimes difficult to grasp. Yet the context of the story recorded in Exodus provides insight into what prompted Moses had in mind when he built an altar to God and named it "The LORD is my banner."

On this occasion, Moses is leading the people of Israel to the land of Canaan. He had been used by God to deliver them from their captivity in Egypt and was in the process of guiding them across the barren Sinai Peninsula to the land that God had promised to them as their inheritance. While their escape from Egypt had been divinely orchestrated by God and inaugurated with their miraculous crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground, the rest of journey had not been easy or trouble-free.

One month after leaving Egypt, this rag-tag group of former slaves arrived at the wilderness of Sin, hungry and tired. It is estimated that there were as many as one and a half million men, women, and children under Moses' direction and this large entourage would have consumed massive quantities of food and water. Moses was likely forced to ration their resources to ensure they could make it to Canaan without starving to death. So when they arrived at Sin, the people expressed their frustration with Moses, saying, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Exodus 16:2-3 ESV).

As the saying goes, they were not happy campers. Their excitement at leaving Egypt had long worn off and they had run out of patience with their newfound leader. Weariness and hunger clouded their collective memory and caused them to long for the "good old days" in Egypt. Somehow, they forgot that they had been slaves laboring under the heavy hand of Pharaoh. But Moses took their complaint to God, who appeared to them and said, "At twilight you shall eat

meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 16:12 ESV). And God delivered on His word. The next morning, the people woke up to find the ground covered in “a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground” (Exodus 16:14 ESV). They were commanded to gather only as much as they needed to feed their family; no hoarding was allowed. Any excess they gathered would spoil before they could eat it. God was letting them know that He would be their provider and care for their needs all the way to the land of Canaan, and He did so for more than 40 years.

The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. – Exodus 16:35 ESV

Eventually, the people moved on from the wilderness of Sin and traveled to a place called Rephidim, where they ran into another problem: There was no water for them to drink (Exodus 17:1). Once again, the people voiced their frustration to Moses.

“Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” – Exodus 17:3 ESV

They were not being melodramatic or speaking in hyperbole; they feared for their lives. Moses recognized the extent of their anger and expressed his concern to God, stating, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me” (Exodus 17:4 ESV). As their leader, he knew he would be the one to bear the brunt of their anger and frustration but, once again, God intervened.

And the Lord said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” – Exodus 17:5-6 ESV

This point in the story is critical to understanding what happens next. God gave Moses specific instructions. He was to use the staff of Aaron to strike a rock so that it would produce fresh water. This was the same staff that God used to turn the water of the Nile into blood (Exodus 7). This time, rather than transforming the source of life into death, God caused a barren rock to produce life-giving water to nourish his people.

But Moses adds an important addendum to this story, stating, “they tested the Lord by saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’ (Exodus 17:7 ESV). The people didn’t just complain, they doubted God’s presence. They questioned His faithfulness and provision. Even though He had continued to provide them with manna every morning, they doubted His willingness or ability to care for their needs.

What happens next is important. Moses used Aaron’s rod to strike the rock, and a stream of fresh water poured out. God came through in a big way. But after having their thirst miraculously quenched by God, another faith-testing trial took place. With the rock continuing

to provide all the water they needed, the people enjoyed their respite in Rephidim. But their comfortable oasis in the wilderness was about to get uncomfortably crowded.

Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. – Exodus 17:8 ESV

This time, the problem was not a lack of food or water, but the presence of a formidable enemy. This would be their first real exposure to what the future held in store for them. Their destiny was Canaan, and when they arrived, they would find it filled with nations who would oppose their presence and resist their efforts to take up residence. If they couldn't handle hunger and thirst, how would survive the many battles that lay ahead?

Faced with a formidable enemy, Moses instructed Joshua to form a militia. It is important to recognize that the Israelites were not a well-organized fighting force. Up until a month ago, they had been indentured servants and slaves. They would have had no weapons and little to no experience in warfare. But Joshua obeyed Moses and conscripted enough men to go into battle against the Amalekites. At the same time, Moses climbed a nearby hill carrying Aaron's staff. The text doesn't explain where Moses got the idea to do what he did, simply states, "Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed" (Exodus 17:11 ESV). The staff that turned the water of the Nile into blood and produced water from a rock was used to bring victory in battle. As long as Moses held the staff aloft, the battle went in favor of the Israelites. But as soon as he grew weary and let his hands drop, the enemy prevailed.

Seeing the back-and-forth nature of the conflict and the obvious impact that staff was having, Aaron and Hur stepped in to provide assistance to their weary friend.

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. – Exodus 17:12-13 ESV

Joshua and the people fought valiantly. Moses struggled to hold up the staff. Aaron and Hur provided much-needed support and encouragement. But God brought the victory. That's the point of the story and the meaning behind the name *YHWH-Nissi*. Immediately after the battle, God gave Moses a message.

"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." – Exodus 17:14 ESV

This would not be a one-time battle with a single victorious outcome, but it would result in the eventual eradication of the Amalekites. They would show up again and would continue to dog the steps of the Israelites all along the way to Canaan. Just prior to their entry into the land of Canaan, God would command the Israelites to wipe out the Amalekites once and for all.

“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. Therefore when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.” – Deuteronomy 25:17-19 ESV

God didn't wipe out the Amalekites at Rephidim, but He did prove to the Israelites that, with His help, they could be victorious. When Moses named the altar The LORD our Banner, he was making a statement about the ongoing presence and power of God. The staff he held in his hand throughout the battle was a symbol of God's leadership, power, and provision. It had turned water into blood, produced water from a rock, and victory over the Amalekites.

The Hebrew word translated as “banner” is *nēs* and it can mean “something lifted up.” It was used to refer to a standard or banner that served to rally troops in the middle of a battle. In the case of the battle at Rephidim, Moses was lifting up the staff of Aaron that was to serve as a reminder of God's power and provision. He was with them and He was providing for them. Whether they needed a sign to convince Pharaoh to let them go or water to help them keep going on, God could and would provide. When they needed a victory over their enemy, all they needed to do was look up and God showed up.

There is another point in the story of the Israelites when God forced the people to look up so that they could see His deliverance. On this occasion, they resorted to grumbling and complaining again, communicating their dissatisfaction with the manna and the lack of water. Angered by their lack of gratitude and absence of faith, God sent a plague of serpents to punish them. When Moses interceded on their behalf, God instructed him, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live” (Numbers 21:8 ESV). Moses did as God instructed and when anyone was bit, all they had to do was look at the bronze serpent on the pole and they would be healed. This is a strange story that raises all kinds of questions until you read the commentary of Jesus, spoken centuries later.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” – John 3:14-15 ESV

The serpent was simply a sign or symbol of a future and greater source of healing. But in both cases, something had to be lifted up. The bronze serpent became the standard for healing. In the same way, as Jesus was lifted up on the cross, he became the standard for spiritual restoration and redemption. Later in John's gospel, he records the promise that Jesus offered to all who looked to Him for salvation from sin and deliverance from death.

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. – John 12:32-33 ESV

YHWH-Nissi – the LORD is my Banner. He is my standard, the one to whom I look in my time of greatest need; for salvation, daily sustenance, victory in battle, and the provision of my future inheritance.

So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” As he was saying these things, many believed in him. – John 8:28-30 ESV

Look up and let *YHWH-Nissi* lift you up.

