

Place: Lurgan Baptist 28:2:2006

Reading: Exodus 17:8-16

FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN

10. THE BATTLE THAT WAS WON THROUGH PRAYER

“ *Victory is too small a word to describe what has taken place today.* ” That was part of a communiqué sent by Lord Nelson, the British naval hero, after a great battle against the French fleet, in which he and his men were victorious. Now when we read the thrilling account of Israel’s victory over the Amalekites in this chapter that’s the feeling you get. ***Victory is far to small a word to set forth what took place.*** This was a battle that was won through prayer. If we approach the story only as a record of a desert skirmish between a nomadic tribe and a horde of ex-slaves fleeing from the oppressive regime of the Egyptians, then the story has little to say to us today. But if we approach the incident in the unfolding drama of redemption, then it provides us with an illustration of how the people of God may be victorious over the forces of the enemy that attack and oppose us in our mission for the Lord. Lets never forget that we as God’s people are in a conflict, fierce and continuous. As one has said,

“ *We are not called onto a playground or sports field but into a grim, terrible, bloody conflict.* ” As Christian believers we face three specific enemies. The world, the flesh, and the devil. The world, that’s the external enemy, the flesh, that’s the internal enemy, and the devil that’s the infernal enemy. John in his first epistle speaks of this three fold enemy ! (1 Jn 2:12-17) He speaks of,

1. The EXTERNAL Enemy: The World:

John says, “ *Love not the world.* ” (1 Jn 2:15) Now the Greek word for “ *world,* ” is cosmos. It can mean,

(a) The Earth:

It is used to refer to the physical world of mountains, water bodies, plant and animal life, and all the other things that are part of God’s creation on this planet. Paul uses this word this way, in (Acts 17:24) when he says,

“ *God that made the world and all things therein.* ”

(2) The Human Race:

It an refer to the world of people humanity. That’s how its used in (Jn 3:16) “ *For God so loved the world,* ” Christ was not talking about the mountains, He was talking about people.

(3) The Evil System:

“ *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,* ” (1 Jn 2:15) That refers to the invisible spiritual system of evil. The world’s system is opposed to the Lord. When we speak of the world of sports, the world of politics, or the world of medicine we refer to a system of ideas, activities, and purposes that relate to a specific area of society. So “ *the world,* ” can refer to Satan’s activities, ideas and purposes as they are revealed on earth. Now its all right for a Christian to be in the world, but its not very good for the world to be in the Christian.

2. The INFERNAL Enemy: The Devil:

John refers to him in (2:14) as “ *the wicked one.* ” Satan is never to be regarded lightly for puny man is no match for him. He tempted Eve (Gen 3:1) He tempted Christ. (Matt 4:1) He perverts God’s Word. (Gen 3:1) He opposes God’s work (Zech 3:1) He hinders God’s servants (1 Thes 2:18) He ensnares the wicked (2 Tim 2:26) He deceives the nations (Rev 20:7) He disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14) He contended with the angel Michael (Jude 9) He instigated the fall of the human race, (Gen 3:13) He seeks to devour (1 Pet 5:8) He accuses God’s people, (Rev 12:10). He once had the power of death (Heb 2:14) and the whole world lies in his power. (1 Jn 5:19) My have you not discovered that the Devil will to seek to hinder you in every possible way ?

3. The INTERNAL Enemy: The Flesh:

John speaks about it in (2:16) “ *the lust of the flesh.* ”

Paul also uses this term. Now they don’t mean the human body, the human body is not sinful, it is neutral. If the Holy Spirit controls the body, then we walk in the Spirit, but if the flesh controls the body, then we walk in the lusts or desires of the flesh. You see, the flesh stands for that part of man’s nature wherein his natural desires have free rein. (Rom 7:18) All of us were born “ *in the flesh.* ” But then something wonderful happens. We receive Christ as our personal Saviour. We are born spiritually (Jn 3:5) and at that moment we receive a new spiritual nature. You see, the unbeliever is a one-natured man, the flesh, but the believer is two-natured, the old sinful flesh and the new Spirit nature, which came to him at his conversion.

Now though we can distinguish between the world, the flesh, and the devil, we cannot always exclusively attribute temptations to any one of these three. In many cases Satan’s angels work with the world system and our sinful nature to lead us into conduct which does not glorify the Lord. Now what has all this to do with this passage ? Well, have a look at,

(1) THE ENEMY THAT ISRAEL FACED

There is a good deal of confusion in the church today about spiritual warfare. Part of the problem is that Christians think of spiritual warfare too much in physical terms. But my the real battle is not visible, but invisible, not human but superhuman. The war is raging all around us, but more

frightening is the way that it rages inside us. Our real enemy is not other people, whether outside or inside the church. If we see them as our spiritual opponents, then we will end up, demonising them, and we will also fail to sense our own great danger of falling into sin. Our real enemy is Satan himself, who with all his unholy helpers attacks our flesh. (1) “ *Then came Amalek.* ” Three questions are raised by this statement ! ***Who came ? When did they come ? Why did they come ?*** In relation to the identity of Israel’s enemy we are left in no doubt. “ *Then came Amalek.* ” But who was Amalek ? Well, the Amalekites were Edomites, or the offspring of Esau. (Gen 36:12) You see, Amalek was the grandson of Esau and as the name signifies they were warlike, fierce and wild.

When did they come to attack ? After Israel had been redeemed from bondage by the blood of the lamb. Here is Israel meeting the first enemy and fighting the first battle ! What a striking reminder that we know nothing about engaging in spiritual battle until we are separated from Egypt the world system which keeps us in bondage. I mean what do the church’s battle hymns mean to the unsaved ? “ *Onward Christian Soldiers,* ”

“ *Stand up, stand up for Jesus,* ” what do these hymns mean to the person who is still captive in Egypt ? Such people have no recognition or realisation of another realm where spiritual warfare is carried on ! But my once we have been “ *redeemed to God,* ” and severed from this present evil world (Gal 1:4) the conflict with the enemy begins. Who ? Amalek ! When ? After they were redeemed ! Why ? Well, they did not take lightly the intrusion of this new people into their pasture lands and so they began by insidiously attacking the rear of the Hebrew column when it was exhausted and weary.

(Deut 25:18) Having cut off many stragglers they now gather together a formidable army and Israel and Amalek are now face to face at Rephidim. You see, the enemy that Israel faced were,

(a) ***CUNNING:***

Did you notice here,

1. The ***TACTICS*** of this Attack:

The Lord says a very interesting thing about Amalek in the book of Samuel. He says, “ *I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt.* ” (1 Sam 15:2) Amalek attacked Israel at the weakest point, they attacked when they were faint and weary. (Deut 25:18) Do you see who they attacked ? The weak ! Do you see when they attacked ? When they were faint and weary !

Seemingly out of nowhere, Amalek in all his military strength arose to battle the children of Israel. Is that not just like the flesh ? Suddenly out of nowhere, the flesh, with the force of hell behind it, is stirred up to withstand the desires of the new man. Is that not just like the devil ? Have you not heard his tempting voice during those times of physical tiredness, mental weakness, and spiritual exhaustion ? Was this not when the Tempter attacked the Saviour ? “ *And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungred. And when the Tempter came to Him he said, If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread.* ” (Matt 4:2-3) 1. Did you note,

2. The TIMING of this Attack:

“ *Then came Amalek,*” then, when ? Well, this attack took place after a remarkable demonstration of the power of God. You see, Moses struck the rock at Rephidim and a refreshing stream flowed from the rock meeting the needs of the people. “ *Then came Amalek.*” My is it not when we are spiritually elated that the enemy directs his fiercest blows against us ?

(Matt 3:16-17 4:1) Matthew says, “ *Then.*” Mark says

“ *Immediately.*” You see, after the approval of heaven, there was the assault of hell, after the dove, the devil, after the benediction, the battle, from a Jordan experience to a wilderness conflict ! Have you not found that to be so true in your spiritual experience ? Times of benediction followed by times of temptation, times of blessing, followed by times of buffeting ! (a)

(b) CRUEL:

For they attacked Israel at the weakest point, the women and children probably in the rear of the column.

(Deut 25:18) Here were a people who feared not God. Some years later the same people burned Ziglag with fire and one of them left his servant to die because he fell sick. (1 Sam 30:13) What a cruel, merciless enemy this was. Do you recall how Peter depicts our enemy ? He says, “ *Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.*” (1 Pet 5:7) (a) (b)

(c) CONTINUAL:

Look at (17:15-16) Do you know something ? The Amalekites were a continual thorn in the side of Israel ! In the days of Gideon they joined with the Midianites, but were defeated by Gideon in the valley of Jezreel.

(Judges 6:13) In the days of Saul they were at it again (1 Sam 14:48) indeed do you remember Saul was rejected as king because he did not utterly destroy them ?

(1 Sam 15:3, 26) The result of all that was that both David and Hezekiah also felt their power. (1 Sam 27:8

1 Chron 4:41) They were a constant threat and nuisance to the people of God ! My will Satan ever let us go ? Will Satan ever gave us up ? Will Satan ever let us off ? Never ! Until we land in glory, we will be his constant target ! This is the (1) (a) (b) (c) and,

(d) CONDEMNED:

For the Lord says in (16:14 Deut 25:19) Do you what Balaam prophesied concerning Amalek ?

“ *Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever.*” (Num

24:20) The Lord purposes Amalek’s complete destruction. My aren’t you glad this that the devil is on his way down ? Indeed, there is coming a day when he shall be cast into the lake of fire to share it with the beast and the false prophet.

(Rev 20:10) That’s his future destiny, but his present goal is to oppose the person of God, the

people of God, the power of God, and the purpose of God. That's why we need to be prayerful, vigilant and clothed with the armour of God. (1)

(2) THE POLICY THAT ISRAEL ADOPTED

Here they were confronted by a fierce, warlike people, and what was the course of action they adopted ? Well, let me set before you the policy they adopted in negative terms. Israel did not,

(a) **DESPISE HER ENEMY:**

For this conflict was entered upon with a full appreciation of the seriousness of the situation. The leaders did not commit the error of despising the enemy for according to (16:9) arrangements were made for battle. Now there was no disguising the fact that the men of Israel were raw, undisciplined, lacking in courage, prone to panic, while those of Amalek were men of the desert, bold, warlike, able to hold their own. Judged by outward appearances, the odds were against Israel, so it was felt that the most strenuous efforts, coupled with the most earnest prayers would be needed to gain a victory. Israel did not despise her enemy ! My do you ? For some it may sound mythical to speak of the Devil. Liberals try to deny his existence. However, if you belong to the Lord, you do not need to be convinced of the reality of the Devil. You will soon discover how real he is.

The world today treats the Devil as though he were a joke or some imaginary character. I heard of two boys discussing if there were such a thing as the Devil or not. One said to the other “ *I don't know if I believe there is a Devil or not. Look at what happened when we believed in Santa Claus.* ” The other boy asked, “ *do you think that Dad could be the devil too ?* ” My the Scriptures do not treat the Devil lightly or as a figment of the imagination. Do you recall how Paul describes our enemy in (Eph 6:12-13) ? Paul says the adversaries that we face are **Spiritual**: “ *not flesh and blood,* ” this conflict is not with the human and visible, but with the superhuman and invisible. Paul implies that the adversaries we face are **Strong**: “ *principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, spiritual wickedness in high places.* ”

He says the adversaries we face are **Subtle**: what folly then to underestimate His power ! What incited the Amalekites to attack Israel ? My can we doubt that it was evil angels, the princes of Satan, who moved Amalek and his soldiers to pounce on the people of God ? But Israel did not despise her enemy ! Later she did. Do you recall that when they got into the Promised Land, took Jericho, they were filled with self-confidence. They came to Joshua and said, “ *Ai is only a bump on the road, let not all the men go up, 2000 or 3000 men will do the job.* ” (Joshua 6:2-3) They despised the enemy ! The result ? Defeat ! (a)

(b) **DESERT HER RESPONSIBILITY:**

Look at (16:9) if you will ! It was not a call, like that at the Red Sea, where the Israelites could do nothing but help themselves ! The command was not “ *stand still,* ” (14:13) but “ *go out,* ” and that's exactly what Israel did. The result ? (16:13) Incidentally, that reminds us that in the conflict with the Devil and the Flesh we need to take unto ourselves, “ *the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.* ” (Eph 6:17) No this battle was to be fought, but it

was to be fought through human instrumentalities. You see, what we can do for yourselves the Lord will not do miracles for us ! We must play our part, fulfil our duty, exercise our responsibility ! In the midst of the battle that they were fighting Oliver Cromwell's advice to his men was

“ *Trust in God and keep your powder dry.* ” (a) (b)

(c) DISCOURAGE DIVERSITY:

In Moses at the age of eighty plus (7:7) the qualities required for vigorous warfare were not present. His age and temperament (Num 12:3) made him primarily a man of prayer ! Joshua, on the other hand, in the full vigour of middle life was active, energetic, bold and intrepid, a born soldier ! To Moses belongs the credit of having recognised the needs of the occasion, and the different gifts in himself and in Joshua ! So he says to Joshua, “ *You go to the valley with the sword and I'll go to the mountain with my rod.* ” I tell you if we are to recognise to the full all the potential and gifts possessed by the people of God, then there must be a recognition of diversity of gift within the church ! You see, we all possess different gifts, and it is in the exercise of those gifts that the whole body is edified ! (1 Cor 12:4, 27 Eph 4:11-12)

My if you are a believer, the Lord has given you a gift, are you exercising it for the good of the body ?

(Eph 4:12) You see, the gifts that God has given to me He has not given to you, and the gifts the Lord has given to you He has sovereignty withheld from me. We are different from one another. ***There is diversity in the body of Christ !*** I mean God does not make duplicates He only makes originals, and the curse of imitation is the curse of the modern church, when everybody wants to be like everybody else and the body of Christ suffers. So Israel did not despise her enemy, desert her responsibility or discourage diversity. (1) (2)

(3) THE VICTORY THAT ISRAEL GAINED

Look at (17:13) if you will ! Now we know that Christ is going to win the war, but what is our part in helping to wage it ? My we join the battle the same way that Moses did, through prayer ! It is by persevering in prayer that we are victorious in the fight. Now its interesting, to have prayed without fighting would have been presumptuous, to have fought without prayer would have been self-dependent. Both are needed but especially prayer ! How do I know ? Well, more is made of Moses part in the battle than Joshua's ! Look at (17:11) The uplifted hand was emblematic of prayer. Paul says, “ *I will therefore that men pray everywhere lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.* ”

(1 Tim 2:8 Ps 28:2) What an impressive sight this must have been. The man of God lifting up his hands to heaven in the attitude of prayer ! And it was prayer,

(a) THAT INSTILLED POWER:

For did you notice that this mighty intercession of Moses had a decisive influence on the battle. (17:11) You see, in prayer we acknowledge our absolute dependence on the Lord to conquer our enemies ! When we wield the power of prayer, the power of God swings into operation. Prayer

decides battles, sways the tides of history, opens and shuts the windows of heaven, puts to rout our spiritual enemies ! (Eph 6:18 James 5:17) ***According to the prayers of a church so are the successes of a church !*** Prayer instils power for,

1. Spiritual Warfare:

As this passage teaches.

***“ Restraining prayer we cease to fight
Prayer makes the Christian armour bright
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.”***

2. Spiritual Witness:

Why is today that there seems to be so little power and unction in the pulpit ? Could one of the reasons be that God’s people have neglected to pray for the preaching and the preacher ! Do you recall the result of the early church prayer meetings ? “ *they spake the Word of God with boldness.* ” (Acts 4:31)

3. For Spiritual Wonders:

For the result of those early church prayer meetings were that “ *the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.* ” (Acts 6:7)

4. Spiritual Winsomeness:

There was an attractiveness about the early believers, they were not iceberg Christians. We read of them that

“ *great grace was upon them all.* ” (Acts 4:33)

5. Spiritual Wisdom:

For Peter was given wisdom to detect the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira and say “ *Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost ?* ” (Acts 5:3) Come back to Rephidim, it was prayer that instilled power !

(b) IMPLIED PERSEVERANCE:

Look if you will at (17:12)

***“ While Moses stood with arms spread wide
Success was found on Israel’s side
But when through weariness they failed***

That moment Amalek prevailed.”

Is it not so easy to grow weary of supplicating the throne ? The Lord Jesus says, “ *men ought always to pray and not to faint.* ” (Lk 18:1) But how sadly we fail. You see, we cannot carry on this ministry of intercession in our own strength ! Our human strength fails. We need to be divinely sustained for this kind of ministry. Now did you notice that Moses was sustained ? For Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands. Aaron was the head of Israel’s priesthood (Exod 28:1) and speaks of our great High Priest. Hur means “ *light,* ” an emblem of divine holiness pointing to the Spirit of God. My is it not wonderful that God in His grace has made provision for us, provision that will sustain us in the ministry of intercession.

On the one hand we have a “ *great high priest,* ” gone within the veil who liveth to make intercession for us. (Heb 7:25) But on the other hand we have “ *another Comforter,* ” (Jn 14:26) “ *the Spirit Himself who maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.* ” (Rom 8:26) Thus, with one intercessor with God for him, and another intercessor from God in him, the believer has power to prevail.

(c) INVOLVED PEOPLE:

What a beautiful picture we have here of three old men in prayer ! Two holding up the hands of the third. Advanced in years Moses could not take part personally in the battle, but he could pray for those who were in it. It’s a happy circumstance when those who bear the principal burden of responsibility in spiritual work can rely on being sustained through the prayers of others ! How can we hold up the hands of those who are in the forefront of the battle ? How can we sustain and support them ? By prayer ! (1 Thes 5:25) Are you debarred from preaching, from ministry, from missionary work ?

What can you do ? Engage in the ministry of prayer ! Do you realise how useful you still are ? Do you see how much you can still do ? Through the vital ministry of prayer ! (1) (2) (3)

The Battle that was won through Prayer ! Is victory possible for us today ? Can we defeat the enemies who seek to destroy us ? Yes ! How ? Through prayer !

***“ Lord I would climb each day prayers shining height
And draw with lifted hands Thy blessing down
My sword to prosper in the strenuous fight
My arm to strengthen for the victors crown
In life’s stern warfare sword and arm may fail
But backed by faith and prayer, they must prevail.”***

