



Geography of Salvation

Preaching the Map

A Bible Study with Stan Key

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Exodus 17:8–16

I. This is war!

A. University of the Desert

1. The first three “tests” at Desert U (Ex 15:25; 16:4) involved basic human needs for survival: water and food. God was teaching his redeemed people to trust him for **provision**. Although the word “test” isn’t used in Exodus 17:8–16, the Amalekite attack is clearly yet another test. God is teaching his people to trust him for **protection**.
2. The first experience of warfare for Israel was at the Red Sea when they were attacked by the Egyptian army (Ex 14). In that battle, God’s people were told; “The Lord will fight for you; you need only to **be still**” (Ex 14:14 NIV). But at Rephidim when the Amalekites attack, God instructs his people to **fight**—and **pray**!
3. This fourth course at U of D could be called **Spiritual Warfare 101**. When they reach Canaan, the people will discover that enemies of God live there! Unless they learn how to fight while enrolled at Desert U, they will never be able to possess their inheritance.

*Now these are the nations that the LORD left, to **test** Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach **war** to those who had not known it before. (Judges 3:1–2)*

B. Spiritual formation... but for what?

1. Some people envision the Christian life as a kind of **amusement park** filled with joy and excitement. Others envision a cloistered **monastery** filled with prayer, meditation and worship. Still others envision a center for **social services** where we are equipped to meet the needs of others. But one of the dominant metaphors in the Bible to define the Christian life is that of a **battlefield**. The goal of spiritual formation, therefore, is to teach us to be **soldiers**, ready for battle.
 - “Put on the whole **armor** of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil...” (Eph 6:10–20)
 - “Share in suffering as a good **soldier** of Christ Jesus....” (II Tim 2: 3–4)
 - “I have fought the good **fight**, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (II Tim 4:7)
2. Describe how it impacts our understanding of spirituality when we envision the Christian life as a battlefield and our role as that of a soldier:
 - It’s **dangerous** to follow Christ.
 - The Christian life can be chaotic and **messy**.
 - I must understand my **weapons** (both offensive and defensive).
 - The need for military **intelligence** (enemy tactics and strategy).
 - Who are my fellow soldiers? Can I **trust** them?

- What's the **objective** of this battle?
- _____.
- _____.
- _____.

C. For a classic illustration of spiritual warfare, see the account of Christian and the dragon Apollyon as told by John Bunyan in *Pilgrim's Progress* (see addendum).

II. The Battle with Amalek (Ex 17:8–16).

A. The enemy.

1. The Amalekites were descendants of Esau (Gen 36:12) and thus distant cousins of the Hebrews. They lived in the Negeb (Num 13:29) and saw the arrival of Israel as a threat. They employed an early form of **terrorism** against the Hebrews, attacking when the people were “faint and weary” and killing those who were “lagging behind.” Amalek “did not fear God” (see Deut 25:18).
2. In spiritual warfare it is crucial that we recognize who the enemy is. This story teaches us that the enemy is anyone or anything that seeks to cause us to **turn back** in our journey; that **hinders** us from doing the will of God. When Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross, he became an enemy: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me.” (Matt 16:23). Ultimately, our enemy is not “flesh and blood” but “**spiritual forces** of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

B. Battle strategy and weapons.

Joshua was to go down into the valley and fight with the **sword**. Moses was to go up on the mountain and pray with the **staff**.¹ To fight God's battles we must use the right weapons! “For the weapons of our warfare are not **of the flesh** but have divine power to destroy strongholds.” (II Cor. 10:4). We must fight and pray; better, we must fight **by** prayer. The real battle is not in the valley with Amalek, but on the mountain with **God**.

1. The battle of **motives**. *Why* do I want to win this battle? For selfish gain? Because I hate the enemy? If my motives are impure the battle is lost before it begins.
2. The battle of **faith**. Can I trust that God? Is he really good? Why is this happening? Can I say with Job, “Though he (God) slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15 KJV)?
3. The battle of the **will**. I know what I want in this conflict but do I know what God wants? The hardest prayer we will ever pray is this: “Not my will but your will be done.” (Mk 14:36).

Our battles are first won or lost in the secret places of our will in God's presence, never in full view of the world. The Spirit of God seizes me and I am compelled to get alone with God and fight the battle before him. Until I do this, I will lose every time. The battle may take one minute or one year, but that will depend on me, not God... Nothing has any power over someone who has fought the battle before God and won there.... The reason the battle is not won is because I try to win it in the external world first. Get alone with God, fight it out before him, settle the matter

¹ The “rod of God” plays a crucial role in the journey of salvation. See for example, Ex 4:2–4, 17, 20; 7:9–20; 8:5, 16–17; 9:23; 10:13; 14:16; 17:5, 9; Num 17:1–10; 20:8–11).

there once and for all. (Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, December 27).

C. The results of the battle.

1. Amalek is defeated and his future destiny is announced when God says, “I will utterly **blot out** the memory of Amalek from under heaven” (v. 14).
2. Moses builds an altar and names it “The Lord is my **banner**” (*Yahweh Nissi*). A “banner” is a battle standard, a flag, or a signal. Moses explains the name by saying: “A hand upon the **throne** of the Lord”² (v. 16 ESV). This could perhaps be a reference to Amalek (those who touch God’s throne in defiance will be destroyed) or it could be a reference to the effective prayer of a righteous man (Moses changes history because he touches God’s throne in prayer).

III. Four great principles of intercession.

Though many will find it easier to identify with Joshua in the valley with his sword, let’s focus where the text puts the emphasis: on the mountain where Moses is standing **in the gap** for the people. Do not conceive of intercession as only when our head is bowed and eyes closed. The ministry of intercession is a **lifestyle** that involves the following principles.

A. **Identification.**

We cannot pray with **emotional detachment** and intercede effectively. On the mountain, Moses identifies with what is happening in the battle below, he is personally affected. He is no detached spectator. His fate is **intertwined** with those who are fighting. See an even greater example when he prayed after the sin with the golden calf, “Lord, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written” (Ex 32:32). Jesus was the ultimate intercessor. He became one of us; he became sin, for our salvation (II Cor 5:21). “Intercessory prayer is only another name for **love**” (Fenelon).

B. **Unity.**

Moses is not alone: Aaron and Hur are with him to help, to encourage, to say “Amen” and **agree** with his prayers. Jesus said, “If two of you agree (Greek, *sumphoneo*) on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where **two or three** are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matt 18:19–20).

C. **Agony.**

Holding his arms up in prayer (with the staff) was painful! To intercede is to enter in to the heart of God and experience the ache that God experiences when he sees what is happening in our world. Paul said; “I fill up in my flesh what is still **lacking** in regard to Christ’s afflictions” (Col 1:24). He also wrote:

*For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with **groanings** too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Rom 8:26–27)*

There is a sense in which true intercessory prayer is God, through his Spirit groaning in us, talking **to himself!**

² Some manuscripts indicate “a hand upon the banner of the Lord.”

D. **Authority.**

Though we don't know the words Moses, Aaron and Hur used when they prayed, we can be certain it *wasn't* something like this: "Sovereign Lord, give us grace to **accept** these trying circumstances and submit to the control of these Amalakites that you have permitted to stand in our path." No! Moses prayed with authority because he knew **God's will** was for the people to arrive at their inheritance in Canaan. To intercede effectively we must learn to pray with authority; to pray in the Name of Jesus; like Jacob, to wrestle with God until we "win."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which metaphor of the Christian life best describes your own perspective: amusement park, monastery, social service center or battlefield?
2. When it comes to spiritual warfare, are you more "comfortable" with fighting or praying? Discuss this.
3. Do you think of prayer as a battle? Why or why not? When prayer is viewed as a battle, where does the conflict lie? In the motive? In faith? In the will?
4. What is the most important thing you learned in this lesson about the ministry of intercession?
5. The author mentioned four principles of intercession: identification, unity, agony and authority. Which one of these is most missing in your own effort to pray for others? Discuss this.

Christian vs Apollyon

While visiting House Beautiful, Christian was given armor to prepare him for what lay ahead when he would pass through the valley of Humiliation. Upon entering the valley a disgusting fiend named Apollyon³ approached, blocking the path forward. He was a hideous monster having scales like a fish, wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, and a mouth like a lion. Fire and smoke came out of his belly. Christian was terrified and would have turned around to run but he realized he had not been given armor to cover his back! Apollyon first employed lies, bribes, threats and accusations but when none of these caused Christian to budge, he attacked.

Then Apollyon broke out into a rage, saying, "I'm an enemy of this prince! I hate his person, his laws, and his people. I've come here to oppose you!" "Beware of what you do, Apollyon," said Christian, "for I'm in the King's Highway, the Way of Holiness. Therefore, take heed to yourself."

Then Apollyon straddled over the whole breadth of the path, and said, "I'm void of fear in this matter. Prepare yourself to die, for I swear by my infernal abode that you will go no farther." And with that, he shot a flaming arrow at Christian's chest! But Christian had the shield in his hand, and with it he intercepted the arrow and averted its danger. Then Christian drew his sword. And just as quickly, Apollyon charged him, shooting arrows as thick as hail.

Despite all that Christian could do to avoid it, Apollyon wounded him with arrows in his head, his hand, and his foot. This caused Christian to fall back a little. Apollyon, therefore, followed with another sudden and forceful attack. Christian took courage again and resisted as bravely as he could. This severe combat lasted for over half a day, even until Christian was almost worn out; for you must realize that Christian had to have grown weaker and weaker because of his wounds.

Then, seeing his opportunity, Apollyon began to draw close to Christian and, wrestling with him, gave him a dreadful fall. With that, Christian's sword flew out of his hand. Then Apollyon exclaimed, "I have you beaten now!" With that, he almost crushed him to death, and Christian began to despair of life.

But, as God would have it, while Apollyon was preparing for his last blow, which he would use to bring an end to this good man, Christian skillfully reached out his hand for his sword and grasped it, saying, "Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise." Then Christian gave him a deadly thrust, which made Apollyon back away as if he had received a mortal wound. Recognizing it, Christian attacked him again, saying, "No, in all these things 'we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.'" With that, Apollyon spread out his dragon's wings and quickly sped away, so that Christian saw him no more.

During this fight, no one can imagine (unless he had seen and heard as I did) what yelling and hideous roaring Apollyon made all the time of the fight; for he spoke as a dragon. And on the other side, what sighing and groaning burst from Christian's heart. All the while, I never saw him give as much as one pleasant look until he perceived he had wounded Apollyon with his double-edged sword. Then, yes, he did smile and look upward. But it was the most dreadful fight I ever saw. (The Pilgrim's Progress in Modern English, Bridge-Logos, 81–82)

³ Greek, meaning destroyer. Apollyon is the name given to the dragon from the bottomless pit (Rev 9:11).

Soldiers of Christ, Arise

Charles Wesley

*Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armor on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies,
Through His eternal Son;
Strong in the Lord of Hosts,
And in His mighty pow'r,
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
Is more than conqueror.*

*Stand then in His great might,
With all His strength endued;
And take, to arm you for the fight,
The panoply of God,
That, having all things done,
And all your conflicts past,
Ye may o'ercome through Christ alone,
And stand complete at last.*

*Leave no unguarded place,
No weakness of the soul,
Take every virtue, every grace,
And fortify the whole.
To keep your armor bright
Attend with constant care,
Still walking in your Captain's sight
And watching unto prayer.*

*Pray, without ceasing pray,
Your Captain gives the word;
His summons cheerfully obey,
And call upon the Lord:
To God your every want
In instant prayer display;
Pray always; pray, and never faint;
Pray, without ceasing pray.*

*From strength to strength go on;
Wrestle, and fight, and pray;
Tread all the powers of darkness down,
And win the well-fought day:
Still let the Spirit cry
In all His soldiers, "Come!"
Till Christ the Lord descend from high,
And take the conquerors home.*