

God Overrules History

Exodus 17:8-16

Time is interesting to think about; we have the past, present, and future. We believe God created the world about 6,000 years ago; everything from now back to then is history. It is important for us to understand and learn from the past. Now, we have a very short moment called the present; this moment is very precious, and what we do now has consequences. The future lies out before us, unknown. We don't know if we have 2 days, 2 years, or 200 years. Only God knows, and He also knows exactly what will happen in the future. Three simple words: past, present, and future, and they each play a part in God's story.

You see, God Overrules History. Think of history as His story. God is the author, and He knows what is happening at every moment in every place. We can't grasp how this can be done, and we are astounded by our powerful God. With God, the past, present, and future are sure; they will happen exactly as He planned.

Today's story is one example from history of how God was involved and helped the children of Israel win one of their first battles. Turn to Exodus 17, and we will hear more about this great God.

Earthly rulers make big promises. They have big plans, but they find them hard to carry out and the promises hard to keep. They rise and fall. They come and go. They are somewhat like the ebb and flow of the sea. Behind all of history is the God of the universe, but most rulers of the kingdoms of the world pay no attention to Him.

In our world today, governments rise and fall regularly. Some change by elections, some by military coup, and some by conquest by a foreign power. Even the greatest empires of the world had a limited lifetime. They lasted hundreds of years, but today they are gone, relegated to the ash heap of history.

In their day, they thought they were invincible. But they didn't understand that God had raised them up to accomplish His purposes. He was moving in the kingdoms of men to prepare the world for the fulfillment of His plans. The Bible tells us that God rules in the kingdoms of men.

Many years ago, in the country of Babylon, there was a proud king named Nebuchadnezzar. He felt what had been accomplished in his kingdom was of his own doing. He was a rather smart man, to be sure, but he gave God no credit. Because he was so proud and gave God no credit, the Lord sent him out with the beasts of the field for seven years. He lost his reason; he couldn't think like a rational human being. He was out there with the oxen in the field eating grass until he learned, the Bible says, that God

rules. When he came back to his throne, and his reason returned to him, he made a decree throughout all his kingdom that men should honor the God of heaven because He rules in the kingdoms of men.

God rules in the kingdoms of men whether they acknowledge Him or not. We will find some help in understanding how GOD OVERRULES HISTORY in Exodus 17:8-16.

8. Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

9. And Moses said unto Joshua, choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.

10. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

11. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

12. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

13. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

14. And the LORD said unto Moses, 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.

15. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it, Jehovah-nissi:

16. For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

From this text, we gain several INSIGHTS into how God rules in the kingdoms of men. They emerge from this particular battle between Amalek and Israel.

The first INSIGHT comes from

The Call to Battle.

Amalek had attacked Israel and fought with them in Rephidim. Amalek was a descendant of Esau. The Bible tells us there had been conflict between Esau and Jacob ever since the boys were born, while their father Isaac still lived. So, this was an old problem which surfaced again.

In order to meet this provocation by the Amalekites, Moses ordered Joshua to set up a military organization and mobilize the army. This is the first mention in the Bible that the men of Israel were to

engage in battle. They had no experience in warfare and probably had little, if any, military equipment. But God told Moses to get the men ready for battle.

There is the account of how Abraham armed the servants of his household and fought the Canaanite kings to rescue his nephew Lot. But that was a very small group of men compared to this experience. Here, Joshua was commanded by Moses to choose out men, organize them to battle, and fight with Amalek.

Then Moses said he would go up to the top of the hill. Notice what he was going to take with him to the hilltop. He said, "I will go up on top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand." The rod of God symbolized the authority of God that had been delegated to Moses and the fact that God rules and overrules in history.

There was careful administration. Joshua did exactly what Moses asked him to do. Moses did what he had promised Joshua he would do; the orders were carried out, and the cooperation was complete. The call to battle had been given.

The next INSIGHT comes from

The Conquest in the Battle.

Moses took his position on the hill and lifted his hands in intercession to God. When he did that, Israel prevailed; they were defeating the Amalekites. But when Moses' hands got heavy, and he lowered them, Amalek prevailed.

Most likely, the men on the battlefield never knew what Moses was doing up on the hill. They may have thought the battle ebbed and flowed by the ability of the soldiers on the field. But what Moses did on the hill was more important than what Joshua did on the battlefield. Now there was a cooperation which was necessary, but when Moses prayed and lifted his hands to God, the forces of Israel were successful.

But he got weary. His arms got tired. If you've ever stood for a long time with your arms in the air, you know how heavy they become. Moses was interceding, and intercession is work. He got weary and was exhausted. So, they turned up a stone for him to sit on. This elevated him so Aaron could stand on one side and Hur on the other, holding up his hands until the sun went down for that day. And as long as they held up his hands, Israel prevailed.

What happened on the hill was more important in many respects than what happened on the battlefield. Because Moses was faithful in his prayer, because Moses' hands were held up in intercession to the God of the universe, Joshua's forces on the battlefield were successful. That should convince us

that God overrules in history. It should also convince us of the power of intercessory prayer in winning the spiritual battles we face.

The Final INSIGHT naturally follows:

The Memorial of the Battle.

The Lord said, "Write this for a memorial, so the succeeding generations might understand how God rules and overrules in history." I am sure that Moses put in that document that he was up on the hill praying when the forces were on the battlefield with Amalek.

When you and I fight major battles in life, and the Lord delivers us, it is good for us to have some kind of memorial of that event. That memorial serves as a reminder to us of God's provision. It also can be a conversation starter for our children and grandchildren. When they ask, "What's the reason for that memorial?" we can then share with them the experience of how God delivered us in our time of difficulty.

Furthermore, there was a prediction in that memorial document. The Lord told Moses, "I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." Now please understand that God doesn't act by whims and fancies. God knows everything, and He operates by a certain divine law. He is merciful to those who seek Him, but He renders just judgment to those who turn against Him. That is the reason for His pronouncement against Amalek. Amalek did not worship the true God. That is why this prediction was included in the memorial record of this battle.

Moses wrote a memorial and built a praise altar. He named it Jehovah-nissi, which means "the Lord is my banner." Moses echoed what God said when he made this remark, "Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." That banner was important. It was a symbol of God's victory to both Israel and the Amalekites. Every time it was lifted up, people would remember the great victory that God had provided for them.

Don't ever forget that God is against those who are against Him. This is important. God is merciful toward those who seek His face. But with those who turn against Him and go their own way, He has constant conflict. This same truth is contained in the New Testament. Listen to the words of Jesus in John 3:16, 17 and 18.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." See, that's God's mercy being extended to those who believe on Him.

But listen to verse 18, *“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”* There is the promise of judgment for those who turn against God or reject His love.

As you read the Bible, you should see how God overrules history, shaping and preparing the world for His plans as human history moves toward its end.

Since God is the ruler of history, He certainly is concerned about all people. Be assured, without Him, we fail; with Him, we triumph.

Thanks, J. Mark, for teaching us, and thank you for joining us. We trust our time together has been a blessing. If you would like this teaching or if you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to us.

Here are a few ways you can contact us. The best way is via email. Our email is hope@heraldsofhope.org. If you don't have email, you could send us a letter. Our address is Hope for Today, Box 3, Breezewood, Pennsylvania 15533. Or you can connect with us on our website. Our website is heraldsofhope.org. On our website, you will find more teaching like this and other helpful resources; please look around while you are there. Again, our website is heraldsofhope.org.

Thank you so much for being with us. We look forward to next week and hope you will join us then as we continue our study in Exodus. I will part with an encouraging thought from Joel chapter 2, *“Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God and there is no other.”* Blessings as you serve our great King!