

## Aaron and Hur

**The Point:** Leaders don't lead without the help of others.

**Session Passages:** Exodus 17:8-13; 24:13-15

**Exodus 17:8-10**

**Connection to The Point.** As leaders of the Israelites, Moses called on Joshua, Aaron, and Hur to help in the fight against Amalekites.

**The setting of Israel's first battle.** Following the miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery, the Israelite people needed to learn to trust God as they journeyed to the promised land. God provided water at Marah and again at Elim (Ex. 15:22-27). When they grumbled against Moses and Aaron because they wanted food, God provided manna and quail (16:1-36). As they camped at Rephidim, they found no water to drink so they once again complained to Moses that the Lord must have deserted them. Again God proved His faithfulness to Israel as Moses followed His instructions to provide them with water (17:1-7). Not only did God continue to meet Israel's physical needs, but He surrounded Moses with capable men who could provide the support he would need for the long haul. In the battle against Amalek at Rephidim, Israel would see for themselves how God would provide victory over their enemies, and Moses would experience physical, emotional, and spiritual support from Aaron and Hur.

**Rephidim (v. 8).** The Israelites stopped here in the wilderness on their way to Canaan just before they reached Sinai. The exact location is unknown. There God commanded Moses to strike a specific rock, and water came out to supply Israel's need. There, too, Jethro helped his son-in-law Moses delegate authority to other leaders.

**Amalekites (v. 8).** Upon the heels of God's miraculous provision of water for the Israelites, Moses and the people faced a military threat at Rephidim from a formidable foe in the Amalekites. This nomadic desert tribe needed no introduction to Moses's first readers because the history of fighting began with the Esau-Jacob rivalry described in Genesis. Amalek, the grandson of Esau (Gen. 36:12) whose name possibly signified "warlike," lived in the desolate wasteland south of Canaan and just north of the Israelites' location.

**Came and fought against Israel/Came and attacked the Israelites/Came . . . and fought with Israel (v. 8).** The impetus of this conflict likely stemmed from Israel's sudden arrival into occupied territory and their threat to the limited resources. The Amalekites used ruthless battle tactics including surprise and unprovoked attacks on the sick, aged, and weary (Deut. 25:17-18). By domesticating camels, they possessed an extreme advantage over any enemy. Traveling up to forty-five miles per hour, camel-riding Amalekite raiding parties could swoop down quickly, pillage their target, and escape with the loot. At the very least, the Amalekites likely intended to force the Israelites away from their new found water source. However, driven by their prejudice and hatred against the Israelites, the Amalekites might have actually set their hearts on annihilating their distant cousins.

**Joshua (v. 9).** The first mentioning of Joshua in the Bible comes abruptly, suggesting he needed no introduction to Israelite readers. Born in Egypt during the period of slavery, his appearance here foreshadowed the many military conquests he would later lead in the taking of Canaan. Moses selected Joshua as his military leader to mobilize and command an army to defend Israel. The swiftness with which Israel responded with an army to stop the Amalekite attack suggests that Joshua had already spent time during their march from Egypt preparing men of Israel in martial skills and strategy. Moses needed a leader like Joshua to come alongside him in the fight against the Amalekites.

**"Select some men for us and go fight against Amalek/Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites"/Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek (v. 9).** Having lived for hundreds of years as slaves, Israel never had to engage in battle to leave Egypt because God fought the Egyptians for them. They had not encountered any direct confrontation until they came to Rephidim. Joshua would assemble an army that would need to fight the enemy on a

single day's notice. These fighters, though perhaps having trained along the journey, had never experienced a single combat, yet would go up against a cutthroat band of guerrilla warriors.

**To morrow** (v. 9). Throughout the plague narrative, God acted "to morrow" in demonstrating His authority over the pharaoh (Ex. 8:23,29; 9:5,18; 10:4). Tomorrow symbolized that something big would happen. God would bring another plague on another of Israel's enemies that would serve as another redemptive event.

**God's staff****The staff of God** (v. 9). The rod or staff belonged to Moses during his forty year period of shepherding the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro (3:1). God used the staff to convince Moses of His authority by changing it into a serpent (4:2-4). He held it over the Red Sea as God parted the waters so He could deliver Israel (14:16,21). By now this staff had become anchored in the hearts of all the people as the authenticating symbol of God's powerful presence.

**"I will stand on the hilltop with God's staff in my hand I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands" I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand** (v. 9). While Joshua and his men fought, Moses promised to go atop the overlooking hill with the symbol of the Lord's power. This marked the first time Moses made special use of God's staff without receiving explicit instructions to do so. Yet this did not express confidence in his own authority, but Moses's belief in God who had promised to deliver them to the land of their destiny.

**Joshua did as Moses had told said to him Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered** (v. 10). Joshua carried out Moses's instructions to fight the Amalekites. His obedience helped prepare him as a fitting successor to Moses.

**Aaron** (v. 10). Moses and Miriam's brother, who served as the spokesman for Moses in the encounters with the Egyptian pharaoh. He stood alongside Moses throughout the Exodus narratives and served as an intermediary between Moses and the people. This foreshadowed his later intermediary role as the high priest.

**Hur** (v. 10). This marks the first reference in the Bible to Hur. The scant references do not reveal many details. His name in Hebrew means "white" which may indicate something about one of his physical characteristics. Josephus referred to him as Moses's brother-in-law (married to Moses's sister, Miriam). Later Hur, along with Aaron, helped to rule the tribes while Moses went up Mount Sinai (24:14).

**Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill** (v. 10). While Joshua and the army fought the Amalekites, Moses interceded for them. His location atop the hill positioned Moses as the standard bearer of Israel as he prayed for their success. But in addition to his military leader, Joshua, Moses needed others to remain with him while he prayed for the battle. He selected Aaron and Hur. Moses did not merely take these men with him as adjutants to convey battle strategies, but to support him as he appealed to God on Israel's behalf.

### **Exodus 17:11-13**

**Connection to The Point.** Moses's raised hands played a significant role in the battle's outcome, but he could not keep his hands raised without the help of Aaron and Hur.

**While Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed** (v. 11). Moses had God's staff in his hand and would hold it up high. Rather than a means for Moses to direct the battle below, his lifting up the staff served to encourage the Israelites as a banner of victory over their enemies. The uplifted hand would symbolically indicate Moses appealing to God. Jews customarily prayed with lifted hands (1 Kings 8:22,38; Ps. 63:4; 1 Tim. 2:8) as Moses would have done here. By lifting the staff of God in his hands, Moses confessed total dependence on the authority and power of the Lord. As the warriors looked up and saw Moses praying for their success, they prevailed over the Amalekites and found encouragement to continue in their fight.

**But whenever he put his hand down, Amalek prevailed** lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning **And when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed** (v. 11). Whenever Moses let his arms fall down due to fatigue, the power of God diminished among the Israelite warriors and Amalek gained the upper hand. By allowing the Amalekites to prevail at times during the battle, God taught Israel a striking lesson. Just as they began their journey to the promised land, they needed to learn that their victories would only come through the Lord. No matter what enemy they faced, only God could carry them victoriously to the promised land.

**Theological truth on God's role in the battle** (v. 11). God reinforced the truth that Israel's war was God's war and that He alone served as the deciding factor. The position of the staff with the favorable and unfavorable ebb and flow of the battle would communicate unmistakably to Moses, Aaron, Hur, Joshua, and the warriors that the only reason Israel could defeat the Amalekites came from the Lord. Just as God had defeated the Egyptian army at the Red Sea, He vanquished this enemy on Israel's behalf.

**When Moses's hands grew heavy** **When Moses' hands grew tired** **But Moses hands were heavy** (v. 12). As Moses become tired from holding his hands above his head—symbolizing his appeal to God who is superior over all—he needed to rest. However this should not be understood as a problem of his age or physical condition. Moses remained physically strong throughout his life. Nevertheless, he grew tired. Aaron and Hur brought a stone for him, and Moses sat down on it.

**Then Aaron and Hur supported his hands** **Aaron and Hur held his hands up** **Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands** (v. 12). Moses tuckered out from holding up the staff because he could not bear this burden alone. However, God had provided for him two men who could support him. Aaron and Hur came to his rescue. They stayed with Moses throughout the battle and partnered with him in prayer by supporting his arms on either side. Each could have locked his fingers together in order to cradle Moses's elbows thus enabling him to keep the staff raised. So with Moses seated on the stone and his hands held above his head by Aaron and Hur, they could have easily kept the staff of God held high above Moses's head.

Aaron and Hur anchored themselves on either side of Moses, keeping his hands steady **until the sun went down** **till sunset** **until the going down of the sun**. The three of them stood strong throughout the heat of the day interceding for Israel's survival as the battle raged in the valley. Moses could not have done this alone. He needed Aaron's and Hur's support.

**So Joshua defeated Amalek and his army** **So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army** **And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people** (v. 13). The raised staff played a significant role in the battle's outcome. Joshua could not have defeated the Amalekites without Moses's intercession, and Moses could not have kept his hands raised all day without Aaron and Hur. Although their contributions might seem insignificant, Aaron and Hur played an important part in Israel's victory over the Amalekites.

**A New Testament Perspective.** While Moses, Aaron, and Hur prayed on the hill, Joshua and his men conquered the enemy by means of hand-to-hand combat. Joshua could not have defeated the Amalekites by the sword alone. Moses, Aaron, Hur, Joshua, and the warriors all cooperated through prayer and physical battle as God gained the victory. In this Israel learned that in all its conflicts with the ungodly powers of the world, strength for the victory would come by continually lifting up their hands in prayer. Paul taught about the vital role prayer plays in spiritual battles in Ephesians 6:10-20.

#### **Exodus 24:13-15**

**Connection to The Point.** Moses typically served as the judge and settler of disputes. Moses could not maintain that role while on the mountain of God, so Aaron and Hur stepped in and filled the role in his absence.

**The setting.** The Israelites camped at the base of Mount Sinai (19:1-2) for about a year (Num. 10:11-13). From Sinai, God summoned Moses, along with Aaron and his sons as well as seventy of Israel's elders, to worship Him, and so He could establish a covenant with the nation.

God drew distinctions between the Israelites and Himself, but He also made distinctions between Israelites. He called Moses to approach Him on the mountain but the others had to worship at a distance from Moses. The tribes could not climb the mountain at all. When Moses came down from the mountain, he told the people the commands of the covenant and the

people gave their verbal assent. Symbolically, Moses offered covenant sacrifices and sprinkled blood from the sacrifices on the people to ratify the covenant. With the covenant ratified, God summoned Moses to come up the mountain to receive the stone tablets and commandments related to worship. Previously God had given Moses the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:2-17) but now He would inscribe them in stone.

**Moses arose with his assistant Joshua** *Moses set out with Joshua his aide* **Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua** (v. 13). God called Moses to come up and prepare to stay for a long time. Moses obeyed and took Joshua with him, although Moses did not reveal how far up Joshua climbed. This verse marks the first of four times the Bible identifies Joshua as Moses's assistant (Ex. 33:11; Num. 11:28; Josh. 1:1). His close association as Moses's disciple foreshadowed his later leadership of the Israelite people. Joshua apparently stayed with Moses during the six days before the Lord called Moses to the summit (Ex. 24:16).

**The mountain of God** (v. 13). Moses first met with God at Mount Horeb (3:1), also known as Mount Sinai. Although the exact location remains uncertain and multiple sites have been proposed, the biblical narrative states that the people encamped in the Sinai wilderness in front of the mountain (19:1-2). God made many revelations of Himself to Israel on this mountain, and it became known as *the mountain of God*.

**The elders** (v. 14). These leaders of the tribes assumed important leadership roles in governing the people. Seventy elders had just participated with Moses at the covenant meal at Sinai (vv. 9-11). Later as the task of governing the Israelite nation grew in complexity, more responsibility was transferred to a council of elders (Num. 11:16-17).

**"Wait here for us until we return** *come back to you* **"Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you** (v. 14). Moses did not know how long he would be on the mountain but ordered the elders to remain until they returned. Though they waited for a while, they did not stay the entire forty day period Moses met with God on the mountain. At some point, they returned to camp. Their return may have spurred the Israelites to cry out to their leaders for new gods to lead in the absence of Moses (32:1).

**Aaron and Hur** (v. 14). Not knowing how long he might stay on the mountain, Moses appointed Aaron and Hur as chief magistrates in his absence. He had good reason to believe they could handle this responsibility since they had proven and trustworthy track records. Aaron had served alongside Moses from the beginning of the confrontations with Pharaoh; Hur would have been known for serving as Moses's faithful assistant. While both may have demonstrated dependability in settling disputes among the people, Aaron failed in remaining faithful. At some point while Moses and Joshua remained on Mount Sinai, the people grew weary of waiting and became restless. After forty days, they presumed he would not return. They pressured Aaron, who succumbed to their demands to make new gods for them. He called for them to bring their gold to him and he fashioned a golden calf for them to worship (Ex. 32).

**"Whoever has a dispute should go to them** *Anyone involved in a dispute can go to them* **"If any man have any matters to do, let him come unto them** (v. 14). Allowing disputes to fester for weeks could destroy the unity of Israel. Therefore, Moses entrusted Aaron and Hur with the responsibility of handling disputes that might arise among the people.

**When Moses went up the mountain, the cloud covered it** *And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount* (v. 15). The cloud that covered the mountain represented the glory of God. This statement indicates that God welcomed Moses into His presence as he reached the summit. With the use of the definite article ("the"), Moses expected the readers to understand that God chose *the cloud* the cloud to represent Him. The cloud had already served to protect and guide the Israelites in their flight from the Egyptians. This current expression would confirm God's awesome, multifaceted, and even mysterious presence.

God represented Himself as cloud and fire on several occasions. The significance of the cloud would continue to demonstrate God's presence throughout Israel's history, especially in connection between Sinai and the tabernacle. The cloud surrounding the mountain anticipated the settling of the cloud over the tabernacle (40:34-38).

