

The Battle of Memory and the Banner for Nations (Exodus 17:14-18:12)

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, May 20, 2023

Please take God's Word and turn to the book of Exodus and chapter 17.

- We've been studying this book verse-by-verse,
- we've seen in this chapter God's power for human weariness.
 - o Today we'll see His power in remembrance.
- Power is a key word in Exodus, the theme is to show God's power
 - o and make His name known to the earth, 9:6. Power to conquer and convert.

It's not about powerful Moses, his weak arms lacked power on his own to keep lifting up Israel.

An old hymn says 'the arm of flesh may fail you, ye dare not trust your own'¹

Let's start back in Exodus 17:12: *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! [ESV, others something like 'He has sworn with a hand ...'] The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."* **18:1** *Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.* ² *Now Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had taken Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her home,* ³ *along with her two sons. The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land"),* ⁴ *and the name of the other, Eliezer (for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh").* ⁵ *Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped at the mountain of God.* ⁶ *And when he sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her,"* ⁷ *Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent.* ⁸ *Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how the LORD had delivered them.* ⁹ *And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians.* ¹⁰ *Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.* ¹¹ *Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people."* ¹² *And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.*

Last month after I took my daughter Annalee to the Bible school in England she's at,

- I took the train up to Edinburgh, Scotland, the same afternoon I flew to Rome.
- I walked old cobblestone streets of the Royal Mile,
 - o amazing grace on Scottish bagpipes echoing through the streets,
 - o and the ancient Edinburgh Castle still fires its cannons to mark the time.

But in the short time I had I wanted to see the John Knox House

- where the Reformer John Knox lived and preached in the 1500s.
 - o I got there and it was closed.

There was only one other guy outside it also wanting to see this place of this hero of the faith

- (a visitor from a reformed church in Michigan that traces their confession back to Knox).

John Knox is buried unceremoniously under a parking lot there (spot 22 by church),

- and secular Scotland has reduced his place to a tourist attraction sometimes open

In the cathedral where he preached his statue is hard to find, but I found it and took a selfie.

I didn't realize someone else was taking a picture that I'd stepped into and they shook their head

- But I was just excited to find Knox
 - o I saw the pulpit where he preached so powerfully against idolatry or false worship

I think of Ex 18 where Jethro says God is greater than all gods, worships the true God rightly.

- In v. 10 Jethro rejoices in Israel's deliverance from slavery. John had been a slave, too
- He had been captured by Catholic forces who made him a galley slave under boats.

Knox was later freed from slavery and proclaimed God's name, like Israel freed from slavery.

Ex 17:14 tells us it's good to remember history.

- Or as v. 16 says that God fights for His people from generation to generation.

v. 15 mentions a banner being raised up for the Lord's name and

- Banner of Truth publishing has helped raise up works of Knox and others to do that.
- The banner flag for the Church of Scotland comes out of Exodus, a burning bush image.

When v. 13 mentions Joshua prevailing with the sword, I think of how John Knox was called 'the Presbyterian with a sword.'

- Knox was a bodyguard sword-bearer for George Wishart,
 - o his mentor who became a martyr for preaching the reformed faith.

- Knox wielded the sword of the Spirit in his many battles for the truth.

Like Moses standing up to and speaking God's Word to the Pharaoh,

- Knox stood and spoke God's word with warnings to Mary, Queen of the Scots. It was said the Queen feared even the prayers of John Knox more than the armies of Europe.

He prayed: 'Behold our troubles and apparent destruction, and stay the sword of thy vengeance before it devour us. Place above us, O Lord, for thy great mercies' sake...rulers and magistrates, as fear thy name, and will the glory of Christ Jesus to spread. Take not from us the light of thy [gospel] and suffer no papistry [Pope dogma] to prevail in this realm. Illuminate the heart of our sovereign lady Queen Mary...and inflame the hearts of her counsel with thy true fear and love'²

Knox also applied OT warfare like Ex 17 to spiritual warfare. He said, if you're in (his words) 'a spiritual battle, do not be discouraged, as though you were less acceptable in God's presence, or that Satan might at any time prevail against you. No!... you may be so strengthened, that the world and Satan himself may understand and perceive, that God fights your battle.'³

- That's the message of the Exodus to Israel and us.
- The Satanic Pharaoh could not prevail against Israel
- and the gates of hell will not prevail against the church.
- The world sees it, starting with Jethro.

We've seen the battle is the Lord's, in this text we'll see the banner of the Lord for the world.

- His power is displayed to His enemies so His name will be proclaimed to all the earth.
- It starts with a Gentile converted to confess '*now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods.*'

This passage shows us the Lord is to be supreme 1) in man's memory and 2) in God's mission.

- It's a battle of men and memory in ch 17
- and a banner beyond Jews, to Jethro, Gentiles in ch 18

1st man's memory. Look at ch 17, v. 14: *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial..."*

We use this word for 'memorial services' and Memorial Day weekend starting Friday

- Saturday is the memorial service to remember Grace Bernardo
- Monday after is memorial for Paul Anthes, former pastor at GCBC and friend of many
- Ron Eicher's memorial service here next month.
- It's good to remember these in prayer
- a good Christian memorial service remembers and celebrates God's faithfulness in a life.

We'll see in the psalms how in grief, remembering that in the past helps move us forward

In v.15 Moses built a monument for this purpose and v.14 describes this like a war memorial

- to be written down and recited to the ears,
- to remember God's past work in the life of Israel.

This is the 1st mention of writing in scripture and 1st time the word **memory** is used in scripture.

- The memory of Amalek was to be wiped out, and a memorial of God's power written out
- The context is war, which often leaves trauma in the memory, wounds difficult to heal.
- People died earlier in ch 17. As many here grieve, how do you keep moving forward?
- People have hurtful painful memories. Past wrongs keep replaying. This text can help us

Recall and re-tell how God redeems (v. 14 says write it down and repeat it out loud).

In ch 12 Passover is called a '*memorial day*' of their redemption, it had visual elements '*as a memorial between your eyes*' (12:14, 13:9) to help recall, re-tell how God redeems.

Remember God's power (that's why in v. 15 Moses built an altar, to memorialize it).

It's why in ch 15 doesn't move on from the Red Sea till they make and memorize a song they sing of victory to the Lord who triumphed gloriously over horse and rider in the sea.

It's a fact that the memory of songs we learn when very young often stay to very old age⁴

Refuse to dwell on past wrongs (God says He'll '*utterly blot out the memory of/remembrance*')

This isn't about amnesia, it's about Amalek forgotten in the sense of not focused on. It's not memory you lose like dementia, it's when you refuse to dwell on past bad memory.

For believers, God remembers our sin no more (i.e., won't bring up against)

Look at 18:8 *Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how the LORD had delivered them...*

- He didn't dwell on the past and stay there, Moses recalls it briefly
 - o to retell God's deliverance from the evil hardship of Pharaoh and Egypt.
- He's also remembering God's victory and help to deliver his family from past evil.
- Look at v. 3 for a reminder of this in his 2 sons with her: *The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land"),⁴ and the*

name of the other, **Eliezer** (for he said, “The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh”)

There was a lot wrong in Moses’ past, but God helped him to dwell elsewhere

Moses’ life had been that of a foreigner or sojourner

- (a Hebrew raised as Egyptian by Pharaoh’s daughter,
- then later in Midian as a Jew with Arabs).
- So he named his first son Gershom, which means foreigner/outsider/sojourner

He saw that as defining his life, but by the time his 2nd son comes, he names him Eliezer

- ezer=help, eli=my God. That’s what defines his life now, God is my help who delivers

Later readers could recall Ps 22 in Hebrew ‘Eli, Eli: **‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me...²⁰ Deliver Me from the sword...** [NKJV, sounds like Eliezer=‘my God helps and delivers me from the sword.’ Ps 22 ends] *It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation’*

In other words it would be retold of the Lord who helps when all feels forsaken

That recalls the cross, where Jesus used this language, *eli, eli, lama sabachthani*

- Jesus experienced it in a greater way need for God’s help
- We need to retell how He redeems and delivers us from sin
 - o and remember His power over death in the empty tomb.
- By grace we can refuse to dwell on past evil in the power of the cross.
- We’re not defined by our past, we have a redeemed new identity in Christ.

Eph 2:11 **‘remember that formerly you who are Gentiles...remember that at that time you were... foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ...through the cross... [it goes on] you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household’** (NIV)

2 Tim 2:8 ‘Remember Christ Jesus, risen from the dead...’

Phil 3 says as we know the power of the resurrection, we can forget the things that are behind

- not like memory loss but counting them as loss.
- We’re to renew our mind, to put off bitterness.

One writer says forgiving and forgetting doesn’t mean you’ll never recall what hurt you greatly, it’s ‘a greater remembrance—remembrance of Christ’s forgiveness of you... By remembering your own offenses against God paid on the cross, forgiveness can be extended to others... the offense is no longer bathed in bitterness but bathed in blood—blood that pardoned your sin...’

The stars, bright against the velvet black of night, fade away in the sunlight. The stars...are still present. [But] The Son of God shines His forgiveness on you and the

bitterness of the offenses of others fades away. Forgiveness is not really forgetfulness but rather right remembrance.⁵

And we don't have to go to the NT.

- Moses already wrote of evil done to Joseph in his slavery.
- He also had 2 sons he named to remember grace in Gen 41:51:
Manasseh. "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship..." [and] Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

In what sense did he forget? He knew what they meant for evil God had meant for good, 50:20.

- He's not denying the evil they did, he's looking higher to sovereign goodness.
- Joseph's redeemed memory didn't dwell on what sinners did to him,
 - o but on what his Savior did in him.

We don't minimize sin, we memorialize grace greater than all sin

Moses wrote that and Ex 17, again recording power over evil to recite to the next generation.

- It's good to write down what God has done for us so we don't forget.
- We need to tell each other and hear it, repeat it,
- record it or journal it (one of my kids journals daily something to PTL for).

I'm really bad at remembering if I don't write it down. I need reminders to recall, retell out loud

One doctor writes 'Hearing plays a significant role in short-term memory, which is why you are able to remember a longer string of numbers by not just reading but saying them out loud; but hearing also greatly impacts your long-term memory... "Hear a piece of information and three days later you'll remember 10 percent of it. Add a picture and you'll remember 65 percent." Using these visual cues, God commanded Moses to keep a jar of manna for future generations to "see the bread that I fed you...when I brought you out of Egypt" (Ex. 16:31).⁶

- And Passover had bitter herbs to remind them of their bitter slavery,
- to both taste and see that the Lord is good

And God engaged their senses with altars like v. 15 where priests felt and heard animals die

The story of Exodus shows us we complain and blame when we forget His sovereign goodness.

- In ch 15 they complain for lack of water,
- forgetting that a good God just delivered them through water,
 - o and not trusting His sovereign power to deliver water.
- In ch 16 they're hungry and blame Moses as trying to kill them,
- not remembering he had just saved their lives. So the Psalms say:

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and **forget not all his benefits**...He made known his ways to Moses (Ps 103)*

- 105: **Remember** the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered... [then it goes through plagues on Egypt and God's power and provision to Israel each step of the way]

106: We have sinned, even as our fathers did...they **did not remember your many kindnesses**, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known...he redeemed them. The waters covered their adversaries...Then they...sang his praise. But they **soon forgot what he had done**...in the wasteland they put God to the test [Ex 16-17, story of Israel]... **They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt, miracles in the land of Ham and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.**⁷

Ps 77 is written in intense grief: 'my soul refuses to be comforted...I am so troubled that I cannot speak... Has **God forgotten** to be gracious?...Then I said, "...**I will remember** the deeds of the LORD; yes, **I will remember** your wonders of old...What god is great like our God? [an echo of Jethro]... You with your arm **redeemed** your people... Your way was **through the sea**...yet your footprints were unseen. You led...by the hand of **Moses**...'

Ps 78 says of Israel's fathers under Moses: They did not remember his power or the day when he redeemed them from the foe, when he performed his signs in Egypt...They forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them...the sea...in the wilderness? He struck the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed... They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer... He drove out nations before them... he put his adversaries to rout; he put them to everlasting shame [like Amalek in Ex 17, Ps 78:4-8 applies that] tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He ... commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and **would not forget his deeds**...' That's the application for parents, grandparents, tell the next generation and the nations.

That takes us from #1. Man's memory to #2. God's mission (and final application for us)

Remember God's mission statement for the book in 9:6:

- to show His power and make known His name to all the earth.
- It's power to conquer enemies (ch 17) or to convert enemies (ch 18).

God justly destroys Amalekites but mercifully delivers an Arab pagan priest by sovereign grace.

- 18:1 calls Jethro the priest of Midian,
- maybe the highest religion leader in his Arabian religion

'Jethro...was such a prominent public leader among his own people that the story of his conversion could serve as both an encouragement to the Israelites and an example

to them of the importance of allowing faith in the only true God to spread to others.¹⁸ That's the mission.

God shows saving power to a Gentile and makes known His Hebrew name Yahweh (*the LORD*).

Let me read ch 18 in the Legacy Standard Bible that uses the Hebrew name Yahweh. **18:1** *Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how **Yahweh** had brought Israel out of Egypt...⁸ And Moses recounted to his father-in-law all that **Yahweh** had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and how **Yahweh** had delivered them.⁹ And Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which **Yahweh** had done to Israel, that He had delivered them from the hand of the Egyptians.¹⁰ So **Jethro said, "Blessed be Yahweh who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.¹¹ "Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all the gods...***

Jethro is the first of other non-Jews who say by new faith in the true God 'Now I know...'

In 1 Kings 17 there's a Gentile widow outside Israel in Sidon.

- Elijah miraculously delivers her from death by starvation.
- Her son dies and he miraculously brings him back to life. This Gentile woman says '**Now I know this: that you are a man of God and...the word of Yahweh in your mouth is truth.**'⁹

Later Elisha miraculously serves another Gentile, the Shunamite woman also says '**now I know.**'

- In the next chapter a commander of Syrians (Israel's enemy) has leprosy,
- but God miraculously heals him as he washes in the Jordan.
- This Naaman, a pagan general, apparently converts and confesses "**now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel...your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to Yahweh. "In this matter may Yahweh pardon your servant...when I bow myself...Yahweh pardon your servant in this matter.**" [Elisha replies] "Go in peace."¹⁰

Notice also here in v. 12 Jethro worships Yahweh alone with sacrifices

Jesus in Lk 4: *'there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah...and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian'* (v. 25-27).

- Jesus preached that to His hometown synagogue in Nazareth
- He read Isaiah about Messiah being sent to preach the gospel of deliverance for captives,
- but those Jews didn't see their need.

In Jn 4, Gentile Samaritans say to the woman at a well Jesus met: *'Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world.'*¹¹

Do you now know Jesus as your Savior and Lord, greater than all others to you?

If not, you need to come like Naaman humbly bowing, begging for pardon, to cleanse your sin.

- Jesus said in Jn 3 like Moses lifted up in the wilderness, Jesus would be lifted up for all.

In Ex 17:15, Moses lifted up His name as *'The LORD Is My Banner...'*

- A banner is what you lift up for all to see.
- Same Hebrew word used for Moses lifting up on a *pole* for all to look for healing,
- or a military banner to call soldiers, or a sail of a ship flying its colors,
- or a standard or signal on a hill to rally troops or announce victory.¹²
- On the cross, Lord Jesus is lifted up for all to see, for healing, help in battle, to show our colors of who's side we're on, to rally around, and proclaim His victory.

Isaiah 11 prophesied of Jesus: *there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him...a banner for the nations...*¹³ Isa 49: *the Sovereign LORD says...to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the people...all mankind will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, your Redeemer*¹⁴

We sing: Christ the royal master Leads against the foe;
Forward into battle, **See his banners go.**¹⁵

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Ye soldiers of the cross.

Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss.

From victory unto victory His army shall He lead,

Till every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed.¹⁶

The Lord Jesus is my banner. Is He yours? Do you lift Him up?

- Do you look to Him, seek Him, and speak to Him of others like Moses did?
- In a world flying rainbow flags and banners of wokeness and wickedness, let's fly ours
- Let's lift the banner of Christ highest. His banner over us is love as He defines it.
- Did you notice how Moses showed affection to his unsaved father-in-law?
- He loved him and spoke the truth in love to him.
- He gave his testimony of how God saved him
- and God drew Jethro in by covenant grace to true worship in fellowship.

God's mission is also our mission. What Moses did is what our marching orders are in the NT.

Over land and sea, wherever man may dwell, make the glorious [gospel] known

Of the [gospel] banner now the story tell, while the Lord shall claim His own...

Let the standard be displayed ... we lift it up today ... for the truth be not dismayed ...

Marching on, marching on, For Christ count everything but loss!

And to drown Him King, toil and sing 'Neath the banner of the cross!

Let this encourage us to love unsaved family (even in-laws), show care, share with them. Let this encourage us that if God could save a pagan Arab priest, he can save anyone. Let this encourage us to fight the good fight of faith, onward Christian soldiers, raise up the flag.

Ryken: ‘Soldiers always look to their banner. It establishes their identity; it helps them know who they are. On the battlefield it also helps them keep their bearings and gives them courage and hope. As long as their banner is still flying, they know that the battle is not lost... People need a standard, something to look to for their identity and security... What is the emblem of your hope? Where do you look for courage in times of difficulty and despair? Moses had the best answer. He said, “The *LORD* is my Banner. Whenever I am under attack I rally to his side.”

...[and the Lord Jesus] stands as a banner for God’s people, who rally to him from every nation.

...Whenever we come under attack, Christ and his cross give us courage for the fight.’¹⁷

¹ George Duffield, “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus.”

² [Four Convictions for Boldness from John Knox \(servantsofgrace.org\)](https://www.servantsofgrace.org)

³ Elliot Ritzema, *300 Quotations for Preachers from the Reformation*, Pastorum Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).

⁴ A medical doctor writes: ‘Interestingly, God created long-term memory for music to be stored outside of the hippocampus (the main place for other long-term memories). This is why musical memory remains in Alzheimers when many other functions of memory fade. In a memory-care facility at Christmas, a sweet lady in her eighties kept asking my daughter her name every few minutes; but when the piano started playing, she knew every word of *Away in a Manger*.’ – Matt Rehrer, *Redeeming Memory: How God Transforms Memories from a Heavy Burden to a Blessed Hope* (Shepherd Press, 2022), 106.

⁵ Rehrer, *Redeeming Memory*, 134-35.

⁶ Rehrer, 104, 101.

⁷ NIV84.

⁸ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 409.

⁹ 1 Kings 17:24 LSB.

¹⁰ 2 Kings 4:9, 5:15-19 LSB.

¹¹ John 4:42 NLT.

¹² Numbers 21:8-9, Psalm 60:4, Isaiah 33:23, 30:17, etc.

¹³ Isaiah 11:10, 12 NKJV.

¹⁴ Isaiah 49:22, 26 NIV84.

¹⁵ Sabine Baring-Gould, “Onward! Christian Soldiers.”

¹⁶ George Duffield, “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus.”

¹⁷ Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 465–467.