

Know Your Spiritual Enemies: The Amalekites

A Sermon by the Rev. Malcolm G. Smith

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Readings

Exodus 17:8-16 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)

⁸ And Amalek came, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. ⁹ And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand up on the top of the hill, and the rod of God will be in my hand." ¹⁰ And Joshua did as Moses had said to him, in fighting against Amalek. And Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹ And it was, when Moses lifted his hand high, that Israel prevailed; and when he rested his hand, that Amalek prevailed. ¹² And the hands of Moses were heavy, and they took a stone, and set it under him, and he sat upon it; and Aaron and Hur upheld his hands, one on this side, and one on that; and his hands were faithful even until the setting of the sun. ¹³ And Joshua weakened Amalek and his people with the mouth of the sword.

¹⁴ And Jehovah said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book, and set it in the ears of Joshua, that wiping I will wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens." ¹⁵ And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-Is-My-Standard. ¹⁶ And he said, "Because there is a hand against the throne of Jah, the war of Jehovah is against Amalek from generation to generation."

Matthew 7:15-20

¹⁵ [Jesus said,] "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a rotten tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

Secrets of Heaven 8555

The conflict of falsity arising from evil with the truth and good of faith.... is represented by the battle which Amalek fought against Israel. The fact that those who have the truth and good of faith within them are winning when they look up to the Lord, and losing when they look down, is represented by the children of Israel, who were winning as long as Moses kept his hands raised up, but losing whenever he let them down.

Secrets of Heaven 8607

By Israel now conquering, and now Amalek, was represented that people who are of the spiritual church cannot be in a faith that continuously looks to the Lord, but that they are by turns in a faith which looks to themselves and the world; for they who are of that church are in obscurity, and consequently in weakness, as to faith.

Introduction

- Back in March we started a sermon series called "Know Your Spiritual Enemies".
 - It's an opportunity to examine the different enemies that attacked the people in the stories of the Lord's Word so that we can better understand the spiritual enemies that attack us and better defend ourselves against them, with the Lord's help.
- Today, we are focussing on the Amalekites.
 - The last enemy we looked at was the Egyptians and the Egyptians are sometimes an enemy and sometimes an ally to the children of Israel.
 - It's different with the Amalekites: it's only when Amalek is first mentioned as a descendant of Esau that the teachings of the New Church talk about it having a positive representation (*Secrets of Heaven* 4646-4647); after that it's all negative and, in fact, the children of Israel are commanded on multiple occasions to utterly destroy the Amalekites.
- Today, rather than looking at just one story about the Amalekites, we are going to look at a number of stories about them to try to get a real feel for what they're like, how they attack us, and how the Lord can help us to fight back against them.

A Brief Survey of Amalekites in the Word

- Let's start with a survey of the Amalekites in the Lord's Word and then we'll go into some of the stories in more detail.
- The first mention of Amalekites is intriguingly early in the book of Genesis in a war between 4 kings and 5 kings (Genesis 14:7).
 - Chronologically this comes before Esau and his descendants were born so scholars argue about what's going on here.
 - For our purposes, it doesn't really matter because the teachings of the New Church say that the Amalekites in this story symbolize the same things that they do in later stories: falsities which attack truths (*Secrets of Heaven* 1679).
- Next we read about Amalek being born to one of Esau's sons and becoming one of the chiefs of Esau's descendants (Genesis 36:12,16).
- Then the story we read in our lesson of the Amalekites attacking the children of Israel in the wilderness as they were on their way from Egypt to Mt. Sinai (Exodus 17).
- The Amalekites next show up when the 12 spies spy out the land of Canaan.
 - They are first listed as one of the many enemies that occupy the land that make 10 of the 12 spies conclude that they can't go in and conquer the land (Numbers 13:29).
 - And then, a bit later, when the Lord tells the people that they'll have to wander in the wilderness for forty years before they can go in, and the people decide to go and attack anyway, against the Lord's orders, and we read, "Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah" (Numbers 14:45).

- We next hear about the Amalekites when Balaam is looking down on the Israelites and making prophecies about them.
 - He also makes a prophecy about the Amalekites.
 - Numbers 24:20
 - Then he looked on Amalek, and he took up his oracle and said:
 - “Amalek was first among the nations,
But shall be last until he perishes.”
 - This language seems to capture some of the status that Amalek had and continues to have, in some ways, as the worst or at least one of the worst enemies of the children of Israel.
- Next, when Moses is making his final speeches to the people in the book of Deuteronomy he includes a command about the Amalekites which gives us more insight into how they attacked.
 - Deuteronomy 25:17-19
 - ¹⁷ “Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, ¹⁸ how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God. ¹⁹ Therefore it shall be, when Jehovah your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which Jehovah your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.”
- In the time of the judges, the Amalekites are one of the enemies that harasses the children of Israel, often working together with other enemies.
 - For example, in the story of Gideon, the Amalekites work together with the Midianites.
 - Judges 6:3-4
 - ³ So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. ⁴ Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey.
 - Gideon ultimately defeats a huge army of Midianites and Amalekites with just 300 men.
- In the time of the kings, the newly crowned King Saul has some success against various enemies, including the Amalekites (1 Samuel 14:48) and then Samuel comes to him with explicit instructions to fight against the Amalekites.
 - 1 Samuel 15:2-3
 - ² Thus says the Jehovah of hosts: “I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. ³ Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.”
 - Saul wins a great victory against the Amalekites but he does not follow through with this command and so is told that he has been rejected from being king.

- Some time later we read that the Amalekites attacked the city of Ziklag.
 - David, who later became the king after Saul was using that city as his home base.
 - That was where David's family were and the families of all the men in his army.
 - The Amalekites attacked while David and his men were off fighting somewhere else.
 - The Amalekites came, burned the city, stole all of their animals and belongings, and took their wives, sons, and daughters as their captives and ran off with them (1 Samuel 30).
 - We'll talk more about this story a bit later on.

- Shortly after that another Amalekite comes to David at Ziklag, claiming to have been the one who finally killed Saul, presumably assuming that David would be grateful to him.
 - But David executes him for daring to kill the Lord's anointed (2 Samuel 1:14,15).

- The book of Chronicles says that, in the time of King Hezekiah, five hundred men of the sons of Simeon "defeated the rest of the Amalekites who had escaped" (1 Chronicles 4:42,43).
 - After that the Amalekites are mentioned just one more time in the Word, in a list of enemies in the book of Psalms (83:7).
 - That defeat in the book of Chronicles is taken as the end of the Amalekites by many, though that passage is not referred to in the teachings of the New Church.

- That's a summary of how the Amalekites show up in the Word; now let's get into what they're like.

What the Amalekites Are Like and How They Attack

Amalekites Attack When We're Weak and Tired

- I said in the family talk, the Amalekites are sneaky, really nasty bad guys!
 - They're nomadic – they move around a lot
 - They don't bring a big army and set up for a big battle.
 - They wait for a sign of weakness.
 - Like when the children of Israel were traveling to Mt. Sinai and had just been struggling to get food and then water, that was when the Amalekites attacked the weak and the stragglers at the back of the group, when they were faint from hunger and thirst (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).
 - Or when they attacked Ziklag – they didn't attack when David and his men were there to defend it; they waited till the defenses were low.

- The teachings of the New Church say that the Amalekites symbolize a particular kind of really evil spirits.
 - They say that these spirits, "never attack a person openly, or when the person can offer strong resistance, but when it is seen that the person is slipping and may therefore give in. At this point [the spirits represented by Amalek] are suddenly at hand, and give the person a shove so that he or she falls completely" (*Secrets of Heaven* 8593:2).
 - They're nasty, nasty, opportunistic, manipulative evil spirits.

- And the teachings of the New Church explain in some detail how these evil spirits don't try to get us to do bad things in a direct way but instead use all sorts of tricks (See *Secrets of Heaven* 8593, 8622, 8625).
 - In fact, the teachings of the New Church say that we would have no chance to resist the influence of these evil spirits.
 - Without the Lord keeping us safe from them, they would destroy our consciences, pervert our affection for good, and all without us even realizing it was happening (*Secrets of Heaven* 8622, 8625).
- The phrase used for what the Amalekites represent is "the falsity of interior evil" (*Secrets of Heaven* 8593), meaning false and harmful ideas that come from evil that we can't see is evil from the outside.
 - They are very good at pretending to be good and even kind and loving, while actually they are trying their hardest to hurt people.
 - They are the false prophets that the Lord was talking about – the ravenous wolves pretending to be sheep.

The Amalekites Pretend to Be Good

- The story of King Saul failing to wipe out the Amalekites illustrates how good the Amalekites are at pretending to be good.
 - 1 Samuel 15:9
 - 9 But Saul and the people spared Agag [king of the Amalekites] and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.
- Samuel comes and tells Saul that because he disobeyed the Lord in this matter, the Lord has rejected him from being king over Israel.
- Once he's done with Saul, Samuel calls for Agag, the king of the Amalekites, to be brought to him.
 - Some translations say that Agag came to him "delicately" but what does that mean?
 - Delicately here is meant to be related to the word for a delicacy – something sweet and appealing.
 - I think we should picture Agag coming to Samuel being charming, friendly, sweet, and charismatic (1 Samuel 15:32).
- We should picture the Amalekites as the most skilled scam artists – people who are so skilled at playing on our emotions, using our desire to do the right thing and help people in need to manipulate us into doing what they want.
- And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past" – meaning, "Aren't we done with all the killing now?"
 - It's like a wolf that has just been eating sheep, suddenly acting like a cute little puppy once it's been caught and chained up.
 - It may look cute now but, if you let it go, it's just going to go and attack more sheep.
- Agag was a murderer.
 - Maybe he could be charming and friendly and act like your biggest buddy but he was still a murderer who would murder more people if he was given half a chance.

- Samuel saw right through Agag's fake friendliness and so it says that he hacked him in pieces, as Saul should have as soon as he had the opportunity (1 Samuel 15:33).
- This is what the children of Israel were told to do multiple times with all Amalekites.
 - The Amalekites were so bad that the children of Israel were supposed to wipe them all out.
 - Now let's talk about how the Lord can help us to fight back against them.

How the Lord Can Help Us to Fight Back Against the Amalekites

David and the Amalekites

- Let's start by looking at the story of David, starting with once they discover that their home has been burned and their families taken captive by the Amalekites.
- 1 Samuel 30:4, 6
 - ⁴ And David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until there was no more power in them to weep. ⁶ And David was greatly distressed, for the people said that they would stone him, because the soul of all the people was bitter, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in Jehovah his God.
 - So David and the people were as upset as a person can be but David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.
 - That's should be our first step too.
- And then David asked the Lord what to do – whether he should chase after the Amalekites and the Lord told him that he should chase after them and that he would overtake them and rescue all the people.
 - So that was good news but there was still a lot of exhausting work to do.
 - The Amalekites had gotten several days head start.
 - So David and his men had to chase after them, as fast as they could, for a long time.
 - They got to a river that they had to cross and 200 of David's 600 men were too tired to be able to make it across the river and keep chasing.
 - And then, when they finally reached where the Amalekites were, there was a battle to fight.
 - David and his men won the battle but it says that they attacked the Amalekites "from twilight until the evening of the next day" (1 Samuel 30:17), which sounds like at least 24 hours of fighting.
 - We see a similar need to keep going even when we're exhausted in the story of Moses and Joshua fighting the Amalekites.

Moses and Joshua and the Amalekites

- In the story of Moses and Joshua fighting the Amalekites, Joshua is down in the valley actually leading the people in fighting against the Amalekites and Moses is up on the top of a hill nearby but it's what Moses is doing up on the hill that determines who wins the battle.
- Moses is holding the rod of God in his hands and, when he lifts his hands high, the children of Israel start winning the battle but, when he rests his hands, then the Amalekites start winning the battle.

- The teachings of the New Church tell us that this shows us how we can win in our spiritual battles against the Amalekites.
 - In our lessons we read that, when Moses was lifting his hands high, that represented how we can win our spiritual battles when we look up to the Lord.
 - That sounds easy but actually it's not easy at all.
- In the story it sounds like the children of Israel have a great advantage, until you think about actually having to hold a rod above your head for hour after hour of a battle.
 - Even just holding a rod above your head for 5 minutes would be a pretty hard task!
 - It's the same with trying to keep looking up to the Lord in the midst of our spiritual battles.
 - Our other lesson said that some people "cannot be in a faith that continuously looks to the Lord... they are by turns in a faith which looks to themselves and the world..." (*Secrets of Heaven* 8607).
 - Because it's too hard to hold the rod of God high for so long are the people bound to lose to the Amalekites?
 - No! Because Moses can get help and support.
 - Moses's brother Aaron comes up the hill to help and so does a man named Hur who was the son of Caleb, the man who, later on, was one of the two spies who believed that they could go right in and conquer the land, if the Lord was on their side.
 - As Moses' hands get heavy, Aaron and Hur bring a stone for him to sit on and then they hold up Moses' hands, Aaron on one side and Hur on the other, until the setting of the sun and until the battle was won by the children of Israel.
- This is a good image of our role in temptations in that we have a role to play.
 - We need to keep trying to lift our hands high, keep trying to look up to the Lord.
 - And then He can win the battle for us.
 - The evil spirits that the Amalekites represent are way beyond our ability to take on but we can try to look to the Lord and He can deal with our spiritual enemies for us.

Conclusion

- In just a few days we will be celebrating the Fourth of July, a day when we mark the anniversary of the brave step by the founding fathers of the United States of America to declare independence from a power that was controlling and mistreating the people who lived here.
 - In that declaration we can see them looking to the Lord for their strength.
 - In the conclusion they wrote, "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."
 - They were looking to the Lord and pledging to do their part.
- When we think of the bravery of those people back then, we can, like David, strengthen ourselves in the Lord and pledge to do the exhausting and necessary work to fight back against the Amalekites within us.
 - To support other people in their work and ask for the support that we need to follow through all the way to the end. *Amen.*