

HELPING HANDS: Part I – Exodus 17:8-18:27

Introduction:

We return to Exodus, to this up close look at the early 'history' of the nation Israel. This study has been showing us the rich and robust theology of who God is, from His 'preeminent name' revealed in Exodus 3, 'THE GREAT I AM', to His all powerful 'omnipotence' over Egypt, to His 'loving mercy' and 'all provision' for Israel. These attributes we've seen to date in our study. We have also seen a robust 'anthropology' in this study, of mankind, from the fickleness of humanity, bouncing, from crying out and complaining, to a chronic disposition of fear and mistrust, even after crossing the Red Sea under the power of God. This is 'who God is', and that is 'who we are'. We will see these two doctrines, God and man, again today, intersecting on the matter of 'HELP'.

In the common everyday struggles of life, we often don't like 'help'. We bristle against 'help'. We equate 'help' with our not being in control, we see it as a weakness. We equate it with failure. We may not say it, but we act that way. 'Help' is for those tough times, and for those who are in need. But, in fact, 'help' reveals another dimension of our anthropology, that is, 'to be a human being is to need help'. Whether man, woman, or child, we need 'help'. We are, by nature, 'dependent' beings. Therefore, a problem has been revealed. WE HAVE A FAULTY VIEW OF SELF, for none of us are independent, but because we grow up and get jobs, and get good at our jobs, and earn money, and we find, and fix, we flourish and achieve, we build and we learn lots, and we assume we are doing fine. But then something happens and our 'dependence' hits us. We are exposed. We find ourselves 'in need'. We need a job, or a CT scan, or find ourselves needing a moment to deal with the tears that have suddenly come upon us. Suddenly we realize that we are not so independent after all. We need 'help' in some way. And so, anthropology meets theology!

The theme 'HELP' runs through to the end of chapter 18, but today we will study Exodus 17:8-16. The passage presents three realities about 'help' that we need to hear. Today we have a faulty view on mankind, and a faulty view of the 'help' that we need. We swim in endless seas of self-help, medical help, government help, and many others. But, the reams of help beg the question: Is any of that 'help' really helping? No. And so we need this chapter from the living God, from the living Word. Our concept of 'help' is off base, and therefore, we need to Biblically understand about 'HELP'.

I. HELP IS NEEDED: (vs 8)

Exodus 17:8

Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim.

So, Israel has left Egypt, and begun moving southward, on their way to Mt. Sinai. They are tired, and have now encamped at Rephidim. We know this is so from verse one.

Exodus 17:1

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim...

They are encamped, but they receive visitors. Amalek has come, and has brought his fighting men. Amalek is Esau's grandson by a concubine. He does not fear God, and these Amalekites have now attacked Israel. We read confirming details concerning this event in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 25:17-18

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God.

The people of Israel are God's people, God's chosen people, freshly delivered from Egypt people, but now are being 'attacked' under God's Sovereignty. 'HELP' is needed. The ones who need 'help' are God's chosen own, His own. Yes, the God associated, just delivered from Egypt, chosen ones, NEED HELP. Yes, that is correct. They need 'help' after their deliverance.

So what of us now? If Israel needs 'help' after their deliverance, do we also need 'help' after our salvation? Yes. We understand salvation. We have a 'right view' of salvation. We understand that salvation is by GOD ALONE. But we have a 'wrong view' of sanctification. We gain our salvation, and say, "I've got it, thanks", and suppose that we are off running. We are not ready to think that we need further 'help'. BUT NOTE: We are not immune to attack! To think that we are, is false theology. Christian, beware of the deadly, sneak attack. For Israel, fresh off deliverance comes an unsuspecting attack, and deadly attack. And this will not be the last time. This is Israel's history, and this is The Church's history. This is what it means for God's people. Further 'help' is needed. It was needed then, and how much more so for us today!

So, Amalek, who had no fear of God, came and attacked Israel. (vs 8) This was not just a pesky annoyance. This was a real and difficult trial for Israel. When you belong to God, this is what happens. We note the warning from Christ Himself on the night He was betrayed.

John 15:18

If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

The world will hate you because you are not part of this world. I chose you, I separated you out. They persecuted Me. They will persecute you. They will hate you! So why is this important to see and understand? Because Christian, you are chosen, called, regenerated, saved, meaning therefore:

- i) Eternal 'security' awaits you. God be praised.
- ii) Temporal 'suffering' awaits you. And that makes us uncomfortable.

A life of salvation means a life of trial. It means that Amalek is going to come upon you. If we don't see this, we will be miserable, frustrated, and exposed. We will resist these trials and testing, this suffering, for the sake of comfort and compliance, but God allows people to suffer. He allows the food to run out (chapter 15), and allows Amalek to attack (chapter 17), and allows people to suffer for making wrong choices (chapter 16). Why? Our loving Father allows the need for our own good so that we will recognize that the true God is Him, and that we need Him, not just for salvation, but for a lifetime of moments. WE NEED HIM FOR SANCTIFICATION! Therefore, abandon our foolish independence. Sanctification is not an act of the moment, it is a need forever. We need Him everyday, and every moment. If it was true for Israel, how much more true is it for us?

II. HELP IS DELIVERED: (vv 8-13)

Exodus 17:8-9

Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."

No gap exists between the two verses. 'Help' was identified as needed in verse 8, and 'help' was delivered in verse 9. Note the word 'so' links the two verses (in most translations). 'Help' is needed because the Amalekites are attacking. 'Help' for this first wave of battle comes from a number of sources. 'Help' is first delivered in the form of 'military prowess'. Enter 'Joshua' to the scene. This is our first glimpse of Joshua, though we will see more of him in later chapters. (But note, this is not Moses or Joshua versus the Amalekites. No. This is God, providing.) Joshua does not fight alone. Moses commands Joshua to 'choose men', choose help, from a group of men who will "go out and fight". But the help does not end there.

Exodus 17:10-13

So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. 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. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

The 'chosen men' run to the valley to fight. But Moses, and Hur, the chief elder (so identified in chapter 24:14) and Aaron, the priest, go to the top of the hill. These three, while not in the valley fighting with swords, yet are still at war, are still contributing to the battle. We learn that when Moses holds his hands up, Israel prevails, but when his hands are down, then Amalek prevails. Therefore it is necessary for Moses to keep his hands in the air in order for Israel to win this battle. However, Moses, being human, grew weary holding his hands in the air. The job became too difficult for him to complete on his own. He needed 'help'. He needed his 'helpers' Hur and Aaron to 'help' keep his arms steady. Victory depended on the outstretched arms. Outstretched arms by Moses were required until the 'going down of the sun', an all day requirement, too difficult for one to do on their own. Yes, Moses required 'help'. 'Help' was delivered, and Joshua and the chosen men were victorious over Amalek.

We pause to consider the layers of 'help' delivered. 'What' is needed comes 'when' it is needed. This is 'providence'.

1. The Help of Joshua: Joshua is the 'young' military leader; he becomes Moses' assistant, his helper, and ultimately his successor.
2. The Help of the Men: These are not angels; the mass number of fighters added were 'human', flesh and blood individuals, 'chosen' by Joshua, to 'help'.
3. The Help of Aaron and Hur: Aaron and Hur are 'leading men', helping Moses so that he is not standing alone. They are 'helping hands', sharing the responsibility of leadership.

We are seeing 'helping hands' with swords, 'helping hands' outstretched, and 'helping hands' holding up hands.

4. The Help of the Staff of God: (Most important of all.) Moses, God's chosen leader declares, "I will stand on the top of the hill with 'the staff of God in my hand' (vs 9). This is God Himself. The staff of God was the instrument that demonstrated God's omnipotence, His power over all things, back in Egypt. By the staff, Moses was able to turn the staff to a snake and back, the water to blood, the rock to water. The staff of God is the symbol representing the 'might and power' behind all other 'helping hands'. This is Almighty God; this is YHWH. He is the only one who needs 'No Help'. It is not just Moses outstretching his hands that brings victory. No. Extended hands tire Moses. Without God's underpinning, Moses' efforts would have failed. GOD, the One Above, GOD ALONE, is the only ONE who does not need help. The Helping Hand of God is manifested through the 'helping hands' of others, namely HIS PEOPLE. God chooses to show His might through humanity. The staff of God, therefore, was lifted by the hands of Moses, and Moses' hands were lifted by Aaron and Hur. This is the economy of God.

We too are a body of 'helping hands', physical hands, physically lifting others up, going into the valley of battle, active, close together, arms linked with arms, covered with blood, purposeful 'help'. This is action that goes beyond helping words, helping slogans, helpful phone calls, memes, posts, texts and emails. This is 'hands on help'. This is risky help, tiring help, enduring help, close together help, not distanced help. It is active, hands dirty help, exposed help, even dangerous help. Only today, in such times as these, would it seem helpful to stay home and isolate. We need a law for this. With so much misunderstanding of what is lawful these days, let us be reminded of the law we are always subject to, the Law of Christ:

Galatians 6:2

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

And so 'help' was delivered on the hill.

III. HELP REMEMBERED: (vv 14-16)

Exodus 17:14-16

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." And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, saying, "A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

The battle is over, but 'help' is not over this side of glory. God's people need continual help to remember that they 'need help'. God knows that this is so, and has provided three emblems to 'help' people to recall.

1. Written:

Exodus 17:14a

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it..."

A memorial book, that is, GOD'S WORD. Reading and recalling 'helps' us to remember the theology of help. It 'helps' us to remember when tempted to fight on our own.

2. Spoken:

Recite this Word. Speak of God's 'help'. Tell the story. Pass the message on to others. Tell the message to others or you will forget it. Tell the generations of God's Word. Tell them that as Christians you will need 'help'. Tell them to expect that Christianity will not be comfortable. Christians have not been told that suffering is to be expected. Tell them. Know that you will be attacked and will suffer.

Exodus 12 (The Passover Commands) The people are to pass them on to their children, a memorial for the generations.

Psalm 78 (Tell the Coming Generation)

Incline your ear to the words of My mouth...

He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers to teach to their children ...

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes, You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

3. Visual:

Moses built a memorial altar, a signal pole, a military picture for the future generations to remember by. This was not an altar for sacrifice. No. It was a stone of 'help', an Ebenezer, a memorial of God's help.

Exodus 17:15

And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, saying, "A hand upon the throne of the LORD!"

Other memorials were also created and noted in Scripture; 'remembrance altars', memorializing significant points of time with God, and 'help' from God.

Genesis 8:20 (In this case the altar was used for sacrifice.)

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

Genesis 12:6-7

Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 26:23-25

From there he went up to Beersheba. And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not; for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.

Genesis 35:1, 5-7, 9a, 12-15

God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.

And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, and there he built an altar and called the place El-Bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother.

God appeared to Jacob again...

"The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you." Then God went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with Him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

And so Moses builds an altar, and calls it 'The LORD is My Banner'. In the original, that is JEHOVAH-NISSI. That literally means, the LORD is my banner, OR signal pole. In ancient times, a 'banner' or 'signal pole' was used and raised by armies to gather and rally troops. Just as it is here for Israel. This is Moses declaring, The Lord is our banner and behind Him we rally. His great Name is our rally. We rally and carry on as we look to our banner --- JEHOVAH.

Is 'Jehovah-Nissi' your help? Is the LORD your banner today? Are your eyes fixed on Him, on the things above, or are they fixed on the things of earth?

ALL THE HELP THAT YOU NEED, GOD GIVES IT TO YOU. This is the message. Moses, write it! Moses, speak it! Moses, build it! They had Joshua. They had leaders. They had men. But in the end, the victory was the Lord's. Moses points only to the LORD as being the victor. 'A hand upon the throne of the LORD!' The banner of the LORD.

When God speaks, it is truth, and it comes to be. God speaks of there being war. And the battle must be endured. The battle must be fought. But the battle and the victory belong to the LORD. The Amalekites are powerful warriors, and an ongoing pain to Israel for generations (sometimes alone, and sometimes with others); an evil, corrupt, and rebellious people who are against God, and against His people. Israel fights them repeatedly, but in their own efforts are unable to defeat them. They required God's help, God's power, to do so.

Judges 3:12-15, 20-21, 26-30

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and went and

defeated Israel. And the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, and the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjaminite... And Ehud came to him (King Eglon) as he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. And Ehud said, 'I have a message from God for you.' And he arose from his seat. And Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.... Ehud escaped... to Seirah. When he arrived, he sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim. Then the people of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he was their leader. And he said to them, 'Follow after me, for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand.' So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites and did not allow any to pass over. And they killed at that time about 10,000 of the Moabites, all strong, able bodied men, not a man escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel And the land had rest for eighty years.

Judges 6:1-2a, 3, 7-8a, 10, 14. 7:22-23

The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian overpowered Israel... For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. When the people of Israel cried out to the LORD on account of the Midianites, the LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel. And he said to them. "Thus says the LORD.... I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But you have not obeyed my voice."

And Gideon is called by the Lord. "And the LORD turned to him (Gideon) and said, 'Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?'"

Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian." Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you and my son will not rule over you; The LORD will rule over you."

I Samuel 15:1-3, 7-9, 17-19, 32-33

And Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey'"... And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur which is east of Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

And Samuel said.... "The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed. Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?'"

Then Samuel said, "Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites," and Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." And Samuel said, "As your sword

has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

I Samuel 30:1-2, 8

Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag and burned it with fire and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way... And David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?” He answered him, “Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue.” And David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled. David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken.

Esther 3:1, 9:24-25

After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite (a descendent of Agag, king of the Amalekites), the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him.

...Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, cast lots), to crush and to destroy them. But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he had devised against the Jew should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.

While the Amalekites have been powerful warriors, and have proven a big problem to Israel through the years and generations, God promises that He will 'utterly' blot them out of memory forever.

Exodus 17:14

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.’”

God will, in future, bring ultimate defeat over them. Utter destruction is coming for ALL those who reject God. We read of the rejoicing that comes when Christ avenges and defeats those nations and individuals who have come against God, and His people. Christ returns, and His total and final victory will be accomplished.

Revelation 19:1-2

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven crying out, “Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for His judgements are true and just;
for He has judged the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth with her immorality,
and has avenged on her the blood of His servants.”

Revelation 19:19-21

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against Him who was sitting on the horse and against His army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of Him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

And this is 'the help' we need against evil. More evil will not help, and we cannot wipe out evil from our earthly lives, but we still need to 'fight the battle' against evil. And to do so, we 'need help'. We don't need empty false claims of help. WE NEED GOD! Yes, we need medicine sometimes, but ultimately it is God who helps us with our needs. The government, sinners, and lawbreakers all need His help also. Government orders and laws can be helpful, but not when they are made by sinners, and they break God's laws, for then they are not helpful.

THE LORD IS YOUR BANNER! He is your standard.

We will be judged by the standard that we live by, the standard by which we trusted, the standard by which we placed our hope for eternal security. Is it our own banner that we live by, or is it His Banner that we live by? Are you looking for His beacon of help today? We will be victorious, even today, but only by the LORD'S Hand. HE IS OUR RALLY.