

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 36** and ask **Question #1: What are some things we rely on for protection?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG page 37**. Explain how the American flag represents a banner of protection to those who serve in U.S. embassies in foreign countries.

SAY: “Today, believers live with the assurance that we are under the protective watch care of God.”

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 37: We are always covered by God’s protection.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to remind us of His promises to always be with us and for us.

SESSION 3 OUR BANNER



The Point

We are always covered by God’s protection.

The Bible Meets Life

“We stand better when we stand together.” “There’s strength in numbers.” We generally agree with those statements, but sometimes life can feel so insurmountable that

no amount of help and support makes a difference. Thankfully, God stands over the world, and He stands over every single issue we face. As the Israelites discovered, God is a banner over us, covering us with His protecting presence.

The Passage

Exodus 17:8-16

The Setting

Moving on from Elim, the Israelites journeyed to the Wilderness of Sin, where they again fell into grumbling against God’s spokesman Moses and his brother Aaron. In their hunger, they complained that Moses and Aaron had led them out into the wilderness to die of starvation; they also longed for their former life in Egypt where there was plenty to eat. God mercifully provided the Israelites manna to eat (Ex. 16). They then traveled on to Rephidim, where they again grumbled against Moses and complained of a lack of water (17:1-3). But in spite of the people’s insults and testing of the Lord, God again graciously provided for their needs (vv. 4-7).

Exodus 17:8-10

- 8 At Rephidim, Amalek came and fought against Israel.
- 9 Moses said to Joshua, "Select some men for us and go fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the hilltop with God's staff in my hand."
- 10 Joshua did as Moses had told him, and fought against Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

Verse 8. For those of us who are parents, one of our primary goals is to protect our children from all the potential dangers around them. We constantly watch to ensure our preschoolers do not put any harmful foods or objects into their mouths. We require our young children to hold our hands in parking lots and while crossing the street. We tell our children not to talk to strangers.

Like a loving, protective parent, God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt, delivering them from slavery. As the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness, God kept them both fed and safe from harm. God had demonstrated through His power, protection, and provision that the Israelites could stand against those who sought to do them harm. However, despite having seen and experienced God's protective care time and time again, the Israelites still had not learned to trust God completely for the protection and provision they needed. Rather than looking to God in faith for their needs, when they were fearful or hungry or thirsty they grumbled against and complained to God and God's spokesman Moses (Ex. 14:10-12; 15:24; 16:2-3; 17:2,7). At times even Moses was not immune from such emotions, approaching God in frustration and panic rather than faith (17:4).

1▶ The people of Israel were camped at Rephidim, where God had instructed Moses to strike a rock to provide water for the people (vv. 1-6). This is the last site mentioned before the Israelites came to Mount Sinai (19:1-2). While they were at Rephidim, they were attacked by a tribe of people known as **Amalek** (or the Amalekites). Genesis 36:12 contains a list of Esau's descendants and mentions Amalek as one of his grandsons. Though the tribe who attacked Israel is identified as Amalek (Ex. 17:8,10-11,13), these people are clearly the descendants of Esau's grandson. The Amalekites were nomads who ranged across part of the Sinai peninsula from

STUDY THE BIBLE

Exodus 17:8-10



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 42

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Exodus 17:8-10.

GUIDE: Refer members to **DIGGING DEEPER** on **PSG page 39** to provide information about *Amalek* or the *Amalekites*.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** on this page and page 44 to provide further background information about the origin of the Amalekites and other biblical references connected to this passage.

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 2 to give more details found in verses 9-10.

- First reference to Joshua
- Significance of God's staff

GUIDE: Refer group members

to **PSG page 39**, to the last paragraph in this Scripture section that mentions how the strategy of the Amalekites was similar to Satan's tactics in spiritual battle. Enlist volunteers to read the following verses:

- 1 Peter 5:8
- John 10:10
- Ephesians 6:12

DISCUSS: Question #2

(PSG, p. 39): What daily challenges often feel like we are in a battle?

(Alternate: When have you felt like you were under attack?)

the Negev to the border of Egypt. The Amalekites are first mentioned in Genesis 14:7 during the time of Abraham in connection with warfare around Sodom and Gomorrah.

The biblical text gives no reason for the Amalekites' attack on Israel, but like Rahab of Jericho they may have heard about the Israelites' escape from Egypt through the dry seabed (Josh. 2:8-10) and feared them. Perhaps they wanted to drive the Israelites from the wilderness sources of food and water, such as at Elim (Ex. 15:27), to keep from having to compete for resources. Apparently, the Amalekites were known as a heartless and vicious people (Deut. 25:17-18). Because of their attack on the Israelites during their journey, God told the Israelites that when they entered to promised land they were to "blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven" (Deut. 25:19). God later reemphasized His command through the prophet Samuel, who told King Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:1-3). Though the Israelites would defeat them in the battle described in the focal passage, the Amalekites continued to be a thorn in Israel's side through the time of David (1 Sam. 30:1-17). They were not defeated completely until the late eighth century BC (1 Chron. 4:43).¹ ◀

2 ▶ Verses 9-10. Joshua, who would later lead the Israelites into the promised land as the leader of God's people and the successor to Moses, is mentioned here for the first time in the Old Testament. Moses' confidence in him indicates that Joshua was apparently already a leader among the people. Scripture describes him as Moses' assistant (Ex. 24:13; Deut. 1:38). Moses told Joshua to gather some of the men in the camp and prepare to go into battle against the Amalekites the next day. Though previously in the Israelites' journey Moses had always been the leader in front of the people, he told Joshua that he was to lead the army in this battle. Instead of going out with Joshua, Moses said he would go up on a nearby hill with **God's staff** in his hand. This was the staff God had told Moses to use to convince the people that He had sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt (Ex. 4:1-5). God had also told Moses to use the staff to initiate several plagues against the Egyptians (9:22-23; 10:12-14) and divide the waters of the Red Sea so that the Israelites could escape from the Egyptians (14:15-16). God referred to the staff as "your [Moses'] staff" (v. 16), but now Moses referred to it as "God's staff," perhaps in acknowledgment that it was always God's power, not a stick of wood, that had accomplished the miracles. ◀

The next day Joshua led his soldiers into battle while Moses walked up the hill accompanied by his brother Aaron and another leader named Hur. This is the first time Hur is mentioned in Scripture. At a later point in Israel's journey, Moses left Aaron and Hur in charge of the camp while he and Joshua went up onto Mount Sinai to meet with God (24:14).

Exodus 17:11-13

11 While Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, but whenever he put his hand down, Amalek prevailed.

12 When Moses's hands grew heavy, they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat down on it. Then Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other so that his hands remained steady until the sun went down.

13 So Joshua defeated Amalek and his army with the sword.

3 ▶ Verse 11. Joshua obeyed Moses' order and led the Israelite army into battle in the valley against the Amalekites. As the battle progressed, it became clear that Joshua and the Israelites prevailed not because of their own strength, but because of God's presence and power. As Joshua and the army fought, Moses stood on the hill with God's staff in his hand. As long as Moses held up the staff, Joshua and the Israelites successfully pushed forward against the Amalekites.

However, the battle lasted until sunset. Obviously, Moses could not hold up the staff all day. When his arms became tired and he lowered the staff, the Amalekite army would start overcoming Joshua and the Israelites. ◀

Verses 12-13. In order to enable Moses to continue holding up the staff, Aaron and Hur placed a large stone into position so Moses could sit on it. To provide the additional support Moses needed, Aaron and Hur stood one on one side and the other on the other side of Moses to help support his arms as he held the staff in the air. Finally, the army of Israel was able to overcome the Amalekite army.

4 ▶ Why did God command Moses to go up on the hill and hold up the staff for the Israelites to defeat the Amalekites? Did the sight of Moses holding up the staff provide some kind of emotional or psychological boost for the Israelite army? No. Was there something special about this wooden staff? No. It

TRANSITION: "In the next verses we will see an unorthodox battle plan that demonstrated God was at work to bring about victory for His people."

STUDY THE BIBLE **Exodus 17:11-13**



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Exodus 17:11-13.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** to point out the significance of God's power and presence, represented by Moses standing on a hill overlooking the battle with his arms raised and holding the staff of God in his hand.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Refer to the practice of wearing a car seat belt for protection. A seat belt does no good unless you put it on. Similarly, God gives us weapons for our spiritual protection, but we must use them to receive the benefit. Refer to Ephesians 6:13-18, in which the apostle Paul instructed us to put on the full armor of God.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 40-41**, and point out the many ways the staff of God had been used in the Book of Exodus to demonstrate God's power:

- *Staff turned into a snake* (Ex. 4:1-5)
- *Parting of the Red Sea* (Ex. 14:15-16)
- *Striking the rock to provide water* (Ex. 17:5-6)

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary **4** on page 45 and this page to provide more insight into the significance of Moses' staff.

was just a stick of wood. To understand the meaning of God's command to Moses to hold up the staff during the battle, we need to recall Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush (Ex. 3:1-4:17). After God told Moses He had chosen him to go to Egypt and lead His people to freedom, Moses expressed concern that the Israelites might not believe him when he told them God had appeared to him (4:1). God responded by asking Moses, "What is that in your hand?" (v. 2). Moses replied, "A staff" (v. 2). It was a piece of wood that had been crafted into a tool which Moses used to guide and protect his sheep. God told him to throw the staff down. When Moses obeyed, the wooden staff turned into a snake. Then God told him to pick the snake up "by the tail" (v. 4), not usually a wise thing to do with a snake; but, Moses obeyed and the snake turned back into his staff. God was not putting on a magic show: He was assuring Moses that His power was unlimited as well as giving Moses a sign to use to convince others that he came at God's command and spoke with God's authority (v. 5).

In a similar way, the staff was a symbol of the power that God had supplied and would continue to supply to enable the Israelites to conquer their enemies and take control of the promised land. It was an object lesson for the Israelites that dependence on and trust in God, not their own strategies or strength, was what would win their battles.

Today, we often have spiritual symbols in our church buildings and in our homes. For example, we use empty crosses to remind us both of Jesus' sacrificial death and His resurrection. However, we do not bow down to a cross; we bow down to a risen Savior. We don't wear crosses as means of protection but as signs to us and to others of God's presence and power that are in us through our faith in His Son. Only through our faith in Jesus do we have the power to prevail in our spiritual battles with Satan and sin. ◀

A couple more points can be made about this episode in Israel's journey from Egypt to the promised land. Joshua's presence leading the Israelites into battle demonstrated that God could use anyone He chose as the Israelites' leader. Though Scripture says that Moses was "unparalleled for all the signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do against the land of Egypt" (Deut. 34:11), he would not always be with the Israelites. Joshua, not Moses, would lead the people into the promised land (31:1-3). By calling on Joshua to lead the Israelites into battle, it gave Joshua an opportunity to further develop and prove the leadership skills he would eventually need when it came his time to lead the Israelites.

5 ▶ What about the significance of Aaron and Hur? Why did Moses take them up the hill with him? Although Scripture does not say, it's very possible that Moses took them with him because God told him to do so. While there would be a great struggle in the valley, there would also be a great struggle on the hill and Moses would need these two men in order to achieve victory. Moses' need for support is also demonstrated in the next chapter, which describes how Moses' father-in-law Jethro observed Moses giving judgments in disputes among the people. Jethro watched as "they stood around Moses from morning until evening" (Ex. 18:13). Then he gave Moses some wise advice: "What you're doing is not good" (v. 17). He encouraged Moses to select other qualified leaders to assist him. The roles of Aaron and Hur in the battle with the Amalekites and the wise counsel of Jethro demonstrate the truth that one leader is never enough in the ongoing journey of God's people. Another example is the apostle Paul. God set him apart to be the apostle to the Gentiles, but did not send him out alone. Paul always had a team of helpers—including Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and Luke to name just a few. Paul also appointed leaders in all the churches he planted. While God calls and equips some individuals to serve in unique places of leadership, He also calls countless others to support the primary leaders and to carry on the work when necessary. ◀

Exodus 17:14-16

14 The LORD then said to Moses, "Write this down on a scroll as a reminder and recite it to Joshua: I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven."

15 And Moses built an altar and named it, "The LORD Is My Banner."

16 He said, "Indeed, my hand is lifted up toward the LORD's throne. The LORD will be at war with Amalek from generation to generation."

KEY WORDS: **The LORD Is My Banner** (v. 15)—Banners were used to identify families and tribes. Having the Lord as their banner associated the Israelites with their covenant God, Yahweh.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 5** to explain the roles Aaron and Hur played in this event.

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 40): **Who plays the roles of Aaron and Hur in your life?**

DISCUSS: Question #4
(PSG, p. 41): **How do you maintain your reliance on God's power when the battle is long?**

(Alternate: How can we intercede for others who need God's presence and power in their lives?)

TRANSITION: "In the next verses we will see God's command as a result of this battle and a reminder of His promises to His people."

STUDY THE BIBLE **Exodus 17:14-16**



15 minutes

READ: Read Exodus 17:14-16.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 6** to show God's clear words of judgment against the Amalekites.

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on page 47 (**PSG, p. 42**) to explain the name *The LORD Is My Banner*.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 7** to provide further explanation about the meaning of *The LORD Is My Banner*.

LEADER PACK: Distribute copies of **Item 3: Coat of Arms** Handout. Explain that a coat of arms functions like a banner by using a visual design consisting of a shield, crest and motto to herald the identity of a family. Direct each person to create a personal coat of arms to illustrate how *The LORD Is My Banner* is displayed over your life.



6 ▶ **Verse 14.** Through their victory over the Amalekites, God had demonstrated to Israel that He is forever over His people as their banner of protection. To emphasize this, the Lord commanded Moses to write on a scroll, **“I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven.”** God gave two reasons for His command. First, His words were to serve as a **reminder**. While on this particular occasion the army of Israel defeated the army of the Amalekites, as stated earlier the Amalekites continued to be major adversaries even up to the time of King David (1 Sam. 30:1-17). At times during their conflicts with the Amalekites, the people of Israel may have wondered if they could ever completely remove this constant enemy. God’s promise to erase the memory of the Amalekites gave the Israelites both a reminder and hope that they would be victorious over this enemy through God’s power and protection. Similarly, as followers of Jesus we have the promise of complete victory over our arch enemy Satan (Rev. 20:10).

The second reason for God’s command was that God’s words were to be recited to Joshua. This is another indication that Joshua would serve as the successor to Moses as leader of the Israelites. Part of his responsibilities would be to guard against further assaults by the Amalekites.² ◀

7 ▶ **Verse 15.** After such a great victory, Moses took time to build an altar. Most altars served as places of worship where sacrifices were offered to God. However, this was to be a different kind of altar; it was to serve as a memorial for the people of God. Moses gave a special name to this altar: he called it **“The LORD Is My Banner.”** The Hebrew transliteration is *Jehovah-Nissi* or *Yahweh-Nissi*. In this time period a banner might have been a flag or some kind of image carved in wood or metal, like the bronze serpent on a pole which God ordered Moses to make later in the exodus when the Israelites sinned and God sent serpents to punish them (Num. 21:4-9). Banners were used to identify families and tribes (2:1-2; 10:11-28). They were also used as signals to call people to action (Isa. 13:2; 49:22).

Although the Israelites had seen Moses use his staff, “God’s staff” (Ex. 17:9), in the plagues upon the Egyptians, in their escape and deliverance from the Egyptian army at the Red Sea, when they had needed water in the wilderness, and most recently now in the defeat of the Amalekites, through the building of this altar Moses was teaching the people

that it was not him or this staff that had accomplished all these victories and miracles. **The LORD** was the One—the only One—who had done all these things for the Israelites. God did not need a physical **banner** to identify His deity and sovereignty, but the Israelites needed to be reminded time and time again that, as the psalmist wrote, “My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:2). All the people had to do was to trust God for all their needs and to obey His commands. ◀

Verse 16. In the first part of verse 16 Moses added to his declaration about the Lord being his (and Israel’s) banner: **“Indeed, my hand is lifted up toward the Lord’s throne.”** The Hebrew text is difficult to translate. Some interpret the words to mean Moses was saying his hand was lifted toward God’s throne in heaven in continued prayer. Another option is that Moses was saying lifting up the staff during the battle was symbolic of the presence of God on His throne being with the Israelites, through which they had won the battle. A third option is that the Hebrew could be translated, “the hand is against the throne,” suggesting Moses was talking about the hand of the Amalekites being against God Himself as they attacked His people. Perhaps this view is better in light of the remainder of the verse that describes the continuing warfare between Israel and Amalek: **“The LORD will be at war with Amalek from generation to generation.”** Whatever option one chooses in translating this verse, the emphasis is that though the fighting of this initial battle and future battles involved the Israelites, God Himself would be fighting on their behalf against the Amalekites.

Because Jesus has come as God’s fullest revelation, we can look both backward and forward in God’s salvation history and see the full meaning of God as our banner. Isaiah wrote that one day “the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples” (Isa. 11:10). With our clearer view, we know that Isaiah was talking about Jesus. Our foe the Devil will continue to tempt and attack us until Jesus returns, but like the people of Israel we can remain confident that the Lord stands with us to both protect us and fight our battles—and one day our Lord will bring us with Him into complete and final victory.

1. LeBron Matthews, “Amalekite” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. ed. (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 52.

2. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 399.

GUIDE: Refer members to the following paragraph on **PSG page 43** to show that Jesus is the ultimate banner of protection.

Jesus, of course, is our ultimate banner of protection. “On that day the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples. The nations will look to him for guidance, and his resting place will be glorious” (Isa. 11:10).

DISCUSS: Question #5 (PSG, p. 44): How can our actions and attitudes demonstrate that we serve the God who protects?

(Alternate: What does God’s banner of protection look like in your life?)

DO: Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity **“Your Worst Enemy”** on **PSG page 44**.

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:**
We are always covered by God's protection.

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 45)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Encourage group members to reflect on their life experiences to recall ways that God provided protection for them in the past. Remind them that today and in the future God will provide protection in their time of need.

PRAY: "Father, thank You for Your faithfulness in providing for our protection. Help us to look to You first when we need Your power and presence to see us through."

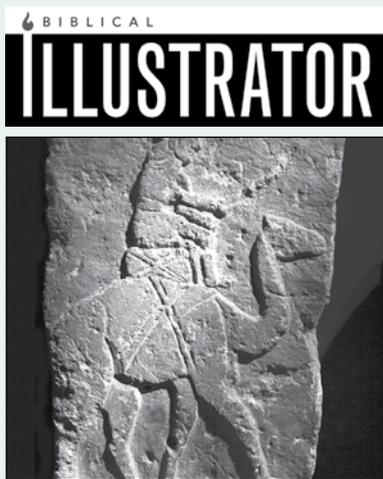
LIVE IT OUT

What are some things you can do this week to walk under the banner of God and identify yourself as belonging to Him? How will the truth that Jesus is "Our Banner" make a difference in your life?

- ▶ **Trust.** Have you accepted Jesus as your banner of forgiveness? If not, commit your life to Him and trust Him for salvation.
- ▶ **Pray.** Specifically pray for individuals this week to experience the presence and protection of Christ in their lives. Pray also that these people would be keenly aware Christ is the One who goes with them.
- ▶ **Be bold.** If you're facing a difficult assignment from God, step out in trust because Christ goes with You. Rest confidently in His presence and protection.

You can live a victorious Christian life as you stand under God's Banner. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37).





Dated to the 10th–9th centuries BC, this limestone plaque from Tell Halaf (Northern Syria) depicts a rider with a staff seated atop the hump of a dromedary camel. The Amalekites joined with Midian; together they made camel raids against the farming communities of Israel (Judges 6:1-6).

Less than three months after His people left Egypt, God pledged, “I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven” (Ex. 17:14). Just before Moses died he warned the generation that was about to take possession of Canaan, “Blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven. Do not forget” (Deut. 25:19).

According to the biblical record, the Amalekites were a nomadic tribe that inhabited the desolate

wasteland of the northern Sinai Peninsula and the desert regions of the Negeb. No ancient texts except the Bible mention the Amalekites. No archaeological data concerning these people has been discovered to date.

The Amalekites were the first hostile people the Israelites encountered after leaving Egypt. The first encounter occurred at Rephidim, where God provided water through the miracle of Moses striking the rock (Ex. 17:1-7). At Rephidim the Amalekites savagely attacked Israel (vv. 8-16). The text offers no explanation for their hostility toward Israel. Evidently the Amalekites had been attacking stragglers since the crossing of the Red Sea. On this occasion, however, they abandoned their hit-and-run tactics and launched a major assault against the Israelites. The fight was a seesaw struggle that Israel eventually won only through divine assistance.

The excerpt above is from the article “Who Were the Amalekites?” (Summer 2016), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

God our Banner covers us with His love and grace. Trusting in Christ for salvation protects us from the penalty of sin and death.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, “Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All,” on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.



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