

Dear Friends,

Exodus 17: 8-9

“And came Amalek and did battle with Israel”.

The people of Israel are on a journey through the wilderness which is taking them from slavery to the Promised Land. They have already faced many threats. They have been hungry and God has fed them with bread from heaven. They have been thirsty and God has given them water from a rock to drink. Perhaps they began to think, “We’re no longer hungry, we’re no longer thirsty, we’re done with the threats”. Sadly, in this life, we are never done with the threats and here comes the next one. “And came Amalek and did battle with Israel”.

Who is Amalek? Well, Amalek is a nation. They are the Amalekites. And actually, the Israelites and the Amalekites are from the same family. The Israelites are descended from Jacob and the Amalekites are descended from Jacob’s twin brother Esau. How tragic that we end up harming and destroying each other when we could be living together in peace as sisters and brothers in the human family.

This story, however is not only about two nations who fight against each other, it is also about two nations who each represent a different way of living. We are very close now to the moment when God will give Moses the Ten Commandments. They sum up what Israel is at least meant to represent. The way of the Amalekites is a complete contrast. We learn about their way later. Then the writer will look back at our story and say this, “Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way, when you were faint and weary, and struck down all who lagged behind you”. The Amalekites attacked from behind. At the back were the weakest and most vulnerable people. They targeted them. Our story will end with the strong statement that God “Will have war with Amalek from generation to generation”. Amalek will keep rising again. Amalek rises again wherever the most vulnerable are attacked and denied justice. Whenever that happens God wages war against the injustice. For God is the God of the faint and weary, the God of those who get left behind.

And God calls for those who will share in the work of overcoming the aggression. Moses hears that call. He realises that he and his people need to stand against Amalek. He chooses one of the young men in whom he sees promise. The young man is Joshua. This is the first time that we meet Joshua. He will become one of the key characters in the story. It will be Joshua who will lead the people across the river Jordan into the Promised Land. But all that is for later, for now Joshua’s task is to lead the Israelites into battle against the Amalekites.

So far in the story God has fought Israel’s battles. It was God who overcame the forces of Pharaoh leaving them washed up on the beach. The Israelites only had to stand still and watch. But as Joshua prepares for the battle, he knows that on this occasion he is going to have to be brave and put his own life at risk. Perhaps that night he prays and asks for God’s help. Maybe God speaks to him, maybe even

using the same words that will be used when Joshua is about to lead the people into the Promised Land. On that occasion God will say, "Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go".

How well did Joshua sleep that night? What dreams did he have of what the next day would bring? Eventually the morning came. He got ready and then led Israel's fighters into the valley where they would face Amalek.

God bless you,

Tony