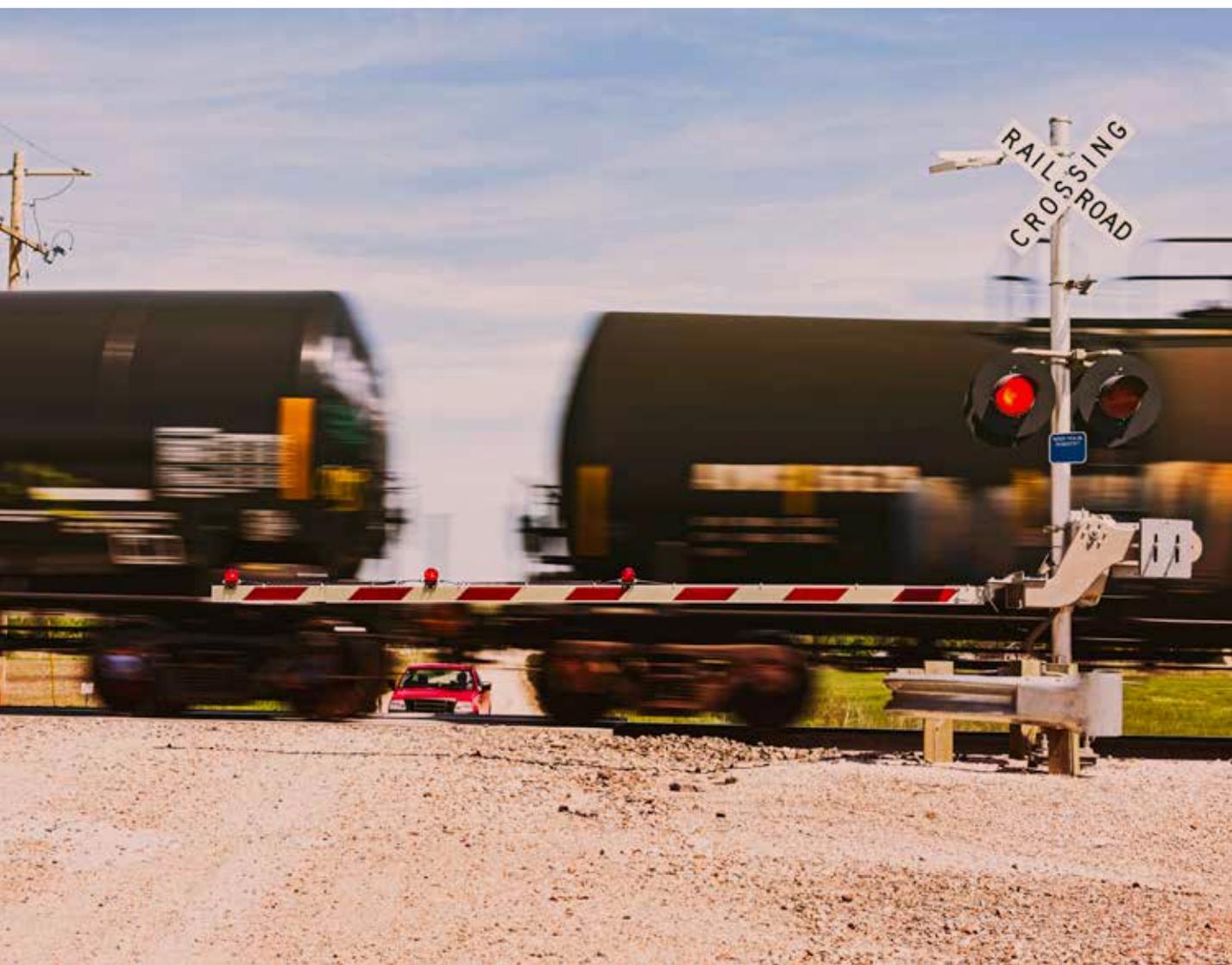


3

OUR BANNER



What are some things we rely on for protection?

QUESTION #1

We are always covered by God's protection.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The United States flag represents a lot of things to its citizens: freedom, democracy, justice, and home. Seeing the flag unfurled inspires a feeling of patriotism in many of us. For so many who served in the military or who lost a family member in war, the flag reminds them of courage and sacrifice.

For American citizens abroad needing assistance, the American flag also represents protection. When an American citizen steps onto the grounds of the U.S. embassy, the stars and stripes remind them they are now under the protection of the United States.

We face times when life throws us such a curve that we can feel alone and exposed—even when we're surrounded by others. In those moments, we feel vulnerable and under attack. In one moment of Israel's history, they too were vulnerable and under attack. But God Himself showed that He was on their side; He was their Banner, standing over them with His sovereign protection. We are not alone. We stand under another flag, a banner of protection: God Himself. He stands over every issue we face. God covers us with His protection.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Exodus 17:8-10

⁸ The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. ⁹ Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.” ¹⁰ So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill.

The Israelites were now camped at Rephidim, and again the people had no water to drink. (See Ex. 17:1.) Unfortunately, the people responded in their usual way: they grumbled. Although they were testing God, the Lord provided water by instructing Moses to strike the rock with his staff. As when the people had complained about an earlier water problem (see Ex. 15:22-27), God miraculously provided this time too.

The Israelites were about to face a new—and perhaps greater—challenge to their faith. Thirst was the least of their worries because the Amalekites confronted them at Rephidim. The Israelites and the Amalekites had been enemies for generations. The Amalekites were the descendants of Amalek, a grandson of Esau. (See Gen. 36:12.) Even though they were direct descendants of Isaac, they became enemies of Israel, a constant threat to their spiritual and national life. Forty years after the events in Exodus 17, Moses still described the Amalekites as people who “had no fear of God” (Deut. 25:18).

It was obvious how the Amalekites’ viewed God because they attacked His people all along the way after they left Egypt. Clearly, however, God was with the Israelites. He had performed miracle after miracle in His work of delivering the people from slavery. God’s hand was on the Israelites, but the Amalekites didn’t care. They still attacked.

Thankfully, we are not left on our own in our struggles and battles. As we will see in the next few verses, the Israelites were not alone—and neither are we.

What daily challenges can make us feel like we’re in a battle?

QUESTION #2

Exodus 17:11-13

¹¹ As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. ¹² When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. ¹³ So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

The battle plan to defeat the Amalekites may seem a bit unorthodox but it was certainly effective. Moses commissioned Joshua to select men to join him in battle as they confronted the enemy. While Joshua was leading the troops, Moses, Aaron, and Hur stood on the top of a nearby hill. Moses had God's staff in his hand.

Nothing indicates any fear or confusion, which might have been expected, among the Israelites as they faced Amalek. These were wandering people, ill-equipped for battle, yet as long as Moses held up the staff Israel prevailed. But when his arms grew tired and he let his hand down, Amalek had the upper hand. Ultimately, Aaron and Hur supported Moses' hands "so that his hands remained steady till sunset." As a result, "Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword."

What made the difference? It was not simply Moses' visible presence and dramatic posture on the hilltop with his hand in the air that inspired confidence in his troops; it was that he was holding up God's staff. Though this staff was likely nothing more than a shepherd's staff, God used it as an object lesson to show all Israel His power to accomplish His work.

This staff became a visible sign that God was with Moses. This simple staff became the staff of God that Moses used to bring various plagues, part the Red Sea (see 14:15-16), and strike the rock to provide water for the thirsty Israelites. (See 17:5-6.)

How can we maintain our reliance on God's power when the battle is long?

QUESTION #3

GOD OUR BANNER

Use the space below to draw a banner that represents how you feel about God. Include your favorite Bible verse, attributes of God, or significant milestones in your walk with Him.

Write a prayer of praise to the Lord acknowledging His work of protection in your life.

"The safest place in all the world is in the will of God, and the safest protection in all the world is the name of God."

—WARREN WIERSBE

The staff in Moses' hand was an ordinary implement any shepherd would carry. It had nothing magical about it and no inherent power in it. It was simply a sign of God's presence and power to accomplish His work among His people. Israel prevailed in battle when Moses' hand lifted up the presence of God for all to see. We also prevail in our spiritual battles when God's presence and power are in our lives. It is critical to note that, before we put on our spiritual armor, we are given clear instruction about the source of our strength. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (v. 10).

We must never underestimate the craft and cunning of our spiritual adversary nor overestimate our own strength. We cannot win spiritual battles in our own strength. We can walk in victory over sin only when we stand under God's banner of protection and put on the spiritual armor He has provided.



Exodus 17:14-16

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven." ¹⁵ Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. ¹⁶ He said, "Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the LORD, the LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation."

What does God's banner of protection look like in your life?

QUESTION #4

After the victory, God's first command was for Moses to write and recite to Joshua His declaration: "I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven." The Israelites would have other encounters with the Amalekites, whose atrocities were such that God later commanded King Saul to completely annihilate them. Unfortunately, Saul was disobedient. (See 1 Sam. 15:2-9.) The Amalekites were not completely defeated until the eighth century BC, in the days of Hezekiah. (See 1 Chron. 4:41-43.)

In response to God's work, Moses built an altar and called it "The LORD is my Banner." God had shown Israel yet another aspect of His character. Israel had already discovered that God was their healer (*Jehovah Rapha*). Now they understood He was also their banner of protection—their *Jehovah Nissi*.

The staff or banner in Moses' hand was a visible image of the protection and the power of God, who provided the victory over Amalek. The Israelites were to understand that their victory was because God was a banner over them. He was their protection.

One of the most famous banners in the Old Testament also appeared while the Israelites were in the wilderness. Once again, the people grumbled about the lack of bread and water. "Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them" so that many of them died (Num. 21:5-6). They confessed to Moses their sin against the Lord, and he interceded for them before God.

"The LORD said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.' So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole" (Num. 21:8-9).

Jesus referred to the banner in His conversation with Nicodemus about the need to be born again to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus told him, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (John 3:14-15).

Jesus is "Our Banner" who provides forgiveness of sin and eternal life. He "covers" us with His protection and victory.

How can our actions and attitudes demonstrate that we serve the God who protects?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How will the truth that Jesus is “Our Banner” make a difference in your life? Consider these suggestions:

- ▶ **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 relationship or assignment from God, step out in trust because Christ goes with you. Rest confidently in His presence and protection.

As awesome as it is to look up to the flag of the great country in which you live, there is something even better when you trust in Christ. You can live a victorious Christian life as you stand under *Jehovah Nissi*, God Our Banner.

My thoughts

