

## **“The Lord, Our Banner and Our Avenger”—Exodus 17:8-16**

Brandon Holiski

Southern Oaks Baptist Church

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com).]*

Take your Bible and meet me in Exodus 17...

I hope you have enjoyed this Veterans Day weekend thus far. This is a weekend set aside in our country to remember the sacrifice and service of the men and women in our armed forces, along with their families, past and present. Those of you who are Veterans among us, we want you to know how thankful we are for your service. We recognize that we live in arguably the most comfortable society in the history of the world and that is in large part because men and women have sacrificed for our freedoms. So we give thanks to God for you, even as we have gathered to exercise one of those freedoms—the freedom to worship. So I hope you will take the opportunity to thank the veterans in your life today and pray for those men and woman who are serving to protect your freedom all around the world at this very moment.

Today we are going to finish our consideration of Exodus 17. We only have one more sermon in this series after today. I'll let you know next week what the new series is going to be (not because I don't already know but because I know you love suspense). Since we are dealing with the same story as last week, let's begin by jogging our memory by reading the verses we have already considered. Look with me at verse 8 and following. You can follow along as I read. This is God's Word...

*“Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. <sup>9</sup> 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.’ <sup>10</sup> So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. <sup>11</sup> Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.” (Exodus 17:8-13)*

I won't rehearse everything we considered last Sunday. If you missed that sermon you can read it or listen to it on our website later this week. In a nutshell, we saw that, just like Israel, we have been delivered from bondage and are journeying to a land of promise. In our case, the bondage was to sin and God has us en route to glory. But in the meantime we will encounter many obstacles along the way and we saw last time that when we do we need to fight, we need each other, and we need the Lord. We need to fight, not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces that tempt us away from the Lord and the life of holiness He has called us to walk in. We need help from others in that battle, just like we saw in Moses' support of Joshua and then in Aaron and Hur's support of Moses. God puts us in community for this very purpose. And most of all we need the Lord. God is a God of means, but none of those means He calls us to employ are of any use unless God empowers them and shows up. To sum it all up we saw that...

### **The Lord Is the Victor for His People**

God is the source of every victory in the life of God's people. We need Him desperately to fight for us in salvation and with us in the tasks He assigns us in our sanctification. And He does as we depend on Him to

do so. Now, let's consider how the story concludes. Look at verse 14 and following...

*“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.’<sup>15</sup> And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner,<sup>16</sup> saying, ‘A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.’”* (Exodus 17:14-16)

This paragraph is an effort to encapsulate the major lessons from the battle. They are important lessons so it's not surprising that God would instruct Moses to write them down and have them recited to Joshua, who will eventually emerge as Moses' successor. It is quite possible that the “book” mentioned is the book of Exodus that we are reading from this morning.<sup>1</sup>

We are also told that Moses built an altar to commemorate the occasion. Altars were commonly built as expressions of gratitude and it is not unusual for the builder to attach a name to the altar (e.g., Gen. 33:20; 35:7). In this case, Moses calls the altar, “*The LORD Is My Banner*,” which is a rendering of the Hebrew *Yahweh-Nissi*. This leads us to the next thing our text is teaching us about our God...

### **The Lord Is the Banner for His People**

What is a “banner” (*nēs*)? When we hear the word “banner,” we tend to think of a piece of cloth or some other material that hangs from something else and communicates certain information. You may see a banner on the side of a building announcing a weekend sale or a banner in a church, like those in our northern foyer, with words that point to some truths about God to focus our worship. That's not far from the idea here, but in military contexts a *nēs* was a military standard, “a signal pole around which an army or army unit would rally, regroup, or return for instructions.”<sup>2</sup> That pole may or may not have had fabric attached to it, like a flag bearing some military insignia. But very often the top of the pole would have some shiny metal object attached to the top, making it easy to spot as it glistened in the sun. Some have even suggested that the word for “banner” in Hebrew may actually derive from another word meaning “to glisten.”<sup>3</sup>

In any case, soldiers would look to whatever was raised upon the pole for inspiration or a sense of identity. It reminded them who they were and helped them keep their bearings on the battlefield. It provided a rallying point. And it gave them courage to persevere. “As long as their banner is still flying, they know that the battle is not lost.”<sup>4</sup> They look to the banner and derive hope and assurance that victory and deliverance is within reach. As the Psalmist stated of the Lord:

*“You have set up a banner for those who fear you, that they may flee to it from the bow. Selah<sup>5</sup> That your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer us!”* (Psalm 60:4, 5)

In Exodus 17 the staff of God that Moses lifted up on the hill in the sight of Israel's army served as their banner. Yet when Moses speaks of that event he makes it clear that it is not the staff, but God Himself, that is the true Banner. Hence the name Moses applies to the altar—“*The LORD Is My Banner*.” What does that mean? It means that in times of confusion and danger and uncertainty, God's people look to the LORD to get their bearings. We look to Him to be reminded of our source of strength and victory. We rally to Him. We rely on Him. We remember that He is with us in the battle and has promised to not forsake us. We look to Him like a banner in battle and derive our courage to continue the fight that He has called us to engage in for His glory. We look to Him and we are reminded that He is our Victor before whom every one of His people's enemies will eventually fall. We don't look to ourselves for such assurances. We look to Him. That's what it means for the *LORD* to be our Banner.

The unfortunate reality is that many people don't look to God as their banner, but the fact remains that every person looks to some banner as a source of identity, hope, and security. Perhaps you have heard of the literary classic by Dante known as the *Divine Comedy*. The first part of that famous poem is known as the *Inferno*. In it Dante describes one of the inner circles of Hell as inhabited by people who were engaged in endless pursuit of a banner. He writes, "I saw a banner there upon the mist. Circling and circling, it seemed to scorn all pause. So it ran on, and still behind it pressed a never-ended rout of souls in pain."<sup>5</sup> This is another illustration of Dante's insight into human nature. What's he trying to say? In the words of Phillip Graham Ryken, "People need a standard, something to look to for their identity and security. Some people spend their whole lives chasing after it, without ever reaching a place of rest."<sup>6</sup> Does that sound like you?

"What is your banner? What is the emblem of your hope? Where do you look for courage in times of difficulty and despair? Moses had the best answer. He said, 'The *LORD* is my Banner. Whenever I am under attack I rally to his side.'<sup>7</sup>

What a rally cry that is! But it takes on new significance for us because of the work of Christ, which itself was anticipated in the Old Testament. Hundreds of years later the prophet Isaiah would write these words about a coming Messiah,

*"In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious."* (Isaiah 11:10)

That chapter begins by describing the Messiah as "*a shoot from the stump of Jesse,*" which is to say that the Christ would be a descendent of David because Jesse was David's father. And, sure enough, the first verse of the New Testament points out that Jesus was indeed a descendant of David. But the word translated "*signal*" in the ESV is *nēs*, the word for "banner" (cf. NIV; HCSB; CSB; NKJV; et al). So Isaiah anticipated a time when the anointed Savior of God's people would serve as a banner, not just for Israel, but for all the nations. And, indeed, that is exactly who Christ has proven to be—our Banner. He too was lifted up on a hill to accomplish the victory over our enemies—sin, death, and Satan. As Jesus Himself said, "*the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him*" (John 3:14, 15; NIV). He didn't lift a banner. He is the Banner, the rallying point for all God's people from every nation, and His hand never falls. We look to Him for our victory, courage, hope, support, and identity. He is our Banner, our Standard, our Sign of victory. As the old hymn highlights,

Onward Christian soldiers  
Marching as to war  
With the cross of Jesus  
Going on before.

Christ the royal master  
Leads against the foe  
Forward into battle  
See His banners go.<sup>8</sup>

So as Christians we look to Christ and draw courage from His presence. We can face whatever He puts before us because He goes before us. We rest our confidence and our hope in Him. We look to Him for our defense. And this leads us into another truth about God...

### **The Lord Is the Avenger for His People**

Look again at verse 14. The Lord tells Moses that He will “*utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.*” And then Moses grounds the name he gives the altar in the statement in verse 16—“*A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.*”

The first half of that statement has generated a lot of discussion among scholars because the Hebrew is quite ambiguous.<sup>9</sup> It literally reads, “Hand towards/against the throne of the *LORD.*” Whose “*hand*” is being referred to and what is that hand doing in relation to God’s throne? The ESV, which we tend to use at Southern Oaks, preserves the ambiguity and forces the reader to make an interpretation based on the context (which is one of the reasons I like the translation). It simply says “a hand upon the throne” without specifying whose hand.

Some take the text as referring to the Lord’s hand resting upon His own throne, a picture of either God’s attentiveness to the situation or perhaps God raising a hand as though swearing an oath on or by His throne. This latter interpretation stands behind the KJV’s rendering—“the LORD hath sworn...” (cf. NASB). The Hebrew original does not have those words. That’s an interpretation. However, one of the problems with that translation is that it doesn’t really fit with the preposition that comes before the word “throne,” so it’s all but been abandoned by modern English translations.

Another possibility is that the hand refers to Moses’ hand being lifted up on the hill during the battle. Those who believe the outstretched hands of Moses were a picture of prayer tend to go with this interpretation, visualizing Moses’ prayers ascending to God’s throne. The new CSB translation goes with this interpretation when it renders Moses words, “Indeed, my hand is lifted up toward the LORD’s throne” (so also HCSB). The problem with that interpretation is that it doesn’t make the connection between the first half of verse 16 and the second half very clear.

The final possibility is that the hand belongs to Amalek. The preposition can mean “upon” or “against.” If Moses is referring to Amalek’s hand, then the image is that of the Amalekites lifting their hand against the Lord’s throne when they attacked Israel. It’s a hand of defiance. I think that’s the right idea and it helps us to see the fitting irony of the second half of the verse. The Amalekites lifted their hand against the Lord in an act of war, so the Lord responds in kind by waging war against them. The NIV conveys this with the translation, “Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the LORD, the LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation” (similarly, NLT).<sup>10</sup>

Don’t miss the force of the conclusion then. An attack against God’s people is an attack against God’s throne. God takes it personally. Do you remember how Saul (Paul) once persecuted Christians? When the resurrected Jesus appeared to Him on the road to Damascus, do you remember what Jesus said? “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?...I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting*” (Acts 9:4, 5). Saul was persecuting the Church, but Jesus made it clear that an attack against the Church is an attack against Him. As David Strain observes,

“It is never safe to stand against the people of God, to attack the church or threaten its freedoms. The church, remember, is the bride of Christ and He will defend her. Isn’t it easy in these days of widespread indifference to the claims of the Christian Gospel to adopt a stance of urbane superiority and cultured disdain toward the church of Jesus Christ? It’s easy to mock her worship, to deride her principles, to disdain her ethics. Easy to exclude her voice from the public square. Easy to marginalize and exclude and vilify and denounce the people of God as backward and regressive and narrow-minded—the enemies of free thought and forward progress. And the world will applaud and think you terribly wise for adopting such a perspective....The truth is, to stand against the church of God and the cause of God and the Gospel of God is to find yourself opposed by Almighty God. The Lord will fight against you.”<sup>11</sup>

Exodus 17 is saying something similar. God stands with His redeemed people and against those who mean them harm.<sup>12</sup> He avenges them. As one commentator puts it, “when we lift our hands against the throne of the LORD, he lifts up his hands against us.”<sup>13</sup> And in this way the passage is bookended with the same contrast. It begins in verse 8 with Amalek making war against God’s people and ends in verse 16 with the Lord declaring war against Amalek.

Amalek got the first taste of what it means to be on the wrong side of the Lord on that day. But the consequences of their sin were far more dire than what is recounted in this chapter alone. The conflict, in Moses’ words, would wage “*from generation to generation.*” So I think it’s important for us to see this struggle within the larger biblical timeline in order to see how God would keep His word and “*blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.*”<sup>14</sup> To really understand this we have to look backward and forward.

Looking backward, we discover that Amalek, according to Genesis 36, was the grandson of Esau. You may recall that Esau was the older brother of Jacob (who was later called Israel). The story of Jacob and Esau is one of conflict. Jacob swindled his brother out of his birthright and his father’s blessing. Esau vowed to kill his brother. That hostility trickled down through their descendants on into the present day. But God had chosen to bring His promised redeemer through the line of Jacob, not Esau. A threat against Jacob was a threat against God’s plan of salvation, which is something God will not tolerate. And in setting himself against Jacob, he and his descendants were setting themselves against the Lord by extension. As prophet Malachi and the Apostle Paul both remind us, the Lord related differently to both of them and God’s language is strong: “*Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated*” (Malachi 1:2-3; Romans 9:13). This is election language in the Bible. Set in the context of this familial struggle, Exodus 17 is seen as another chapter in this struggle between two brothers. And really it stretches back further to the Garden of Eden and the struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, so this is yet another chapter in the even larger story of God’s people and those who oppose them.

Looking forward from Exodus 17, we see that there are several more installments in the Israelite-Amalekite epic. In fact, this “enmity between Israel and Amalek is a running theme through the next centuries of history.”<sup>15</sup> Months later the Israelites reached the border of the Promised Land and they encounter the Amalekites again (Numbers 13:26-33). Instead of looking to their Banner and deriving confidence for battle, the Israelites (for the most part) cower in fear and unbelief. As a result the Israelites lose in battle against the Amalekites (Numbers 14) and spend the next several decades wandering in the wilderness until a new generation is ready to trust God for their victory. Even after that generation enters the Promised Land, the Amalekites continue to be a thorn in Israel’s side throughout the book of Judges (3:13; 6:3, 33; 7:12; 10:12).

The next opportunity to defeat the Amalekites decisively would come during the reign of Saul, Israel’s first king. The Lord told Saul to destroy the Amalekites completely (1 Samuel 15:1-3). But Saul disobeyed and he spared the life of Agag, the Amalekite king, so that he could gloat over him in victory. The prophet Samuel was furious and killed the Amalekite king himself (1 Samuel 15:32, 33), but as a result of Saul’s disobedience some of the Amalekites apparently survived. David would eventually have his own struggles against them (1 Samuel 30). Many believe that the Amalekites were not completely destroyed until the days of King Hezekiah (1 Chronicles 4:42-43). But there is reason to believe that they were not absolutely annihilated until much later.

There is a book in the Old Testament called Esther, which tells the story of the Israelites who were in exile when the Persian Empire was at the height of its dominance. The antagonist in the story was a man named Haman who really despised a Jew by the name of Mordecai, who was related to a beautiful young woman named Esther. Esther caught the eye of the Persian king who eventually made her queen. Long story short, Haman hatched a plan that seemed to make a royally sanctioned genocide against God’s people inevitable all because of his hatred for Mordecai. God, however, had positioned Esther in the palace “for such a time as this” and used her to help foil Haman’s plan and deliver God’s people. It’s a very memorable story that provides explanation for the Jewish celebration known as Purim.

But there's a very subtle detail of the story that people often overlook. It has to do with the way Haman and Mordecai are introduced. Mordecai is introduced in chapter 2 as "*a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin*" (NIV) and as a descendent of "*Kish*" (Esther 2:5). Who was Kish? Kish was the father of Israel's first king, Saul. When Haman is introduced he is called "*the Agagite*" (3:1), which suggests that he was a descendant of Agag, the king of the Amalekites that Saul took hostage when he was commanded to eliminate all the Amalekites but failed to do so.<sup>16</sup>

With this background in mind, the conflict in Esther can be seen as yet another chapter of this ancient struggle. But now instead of the son of Kish struggling against Agag, it is the descendant of Kish being pressured by Agag's descendant.<sup>17</sup> This perspective makes sense out of many of the details of Esther's narrative. No longer does one need to speculate as to why Mordecai would not bow before Haman. The Jews obviously learned from Saul's mistake (1 Sam. 15:21ff.) since they refused to "lay their hands on the plunder" of their defeated foes (Est. 9:10, 15, and 16).<sup>18</sup> When at first it seemed that the Amalekite descendants would destroy the vulnerable Israelites, God intervened through a series of "coincidences," turning the table on the enemies of Israel. It is God who provides the victory. It is God who delivers His people yet again. And why? Because He is faithful! In His grace, He remembered His covenant with His people, Israel. He remembered His promise (e.g. Deut. 25:19) and delivered Israel's enemies into their hands. By the end of the story, Haman and all of his descendants are eliminated and this seems to be the final fulfillment of the prophecy in Exodus 17. God "*utterly blot[ted] out the memory of Amalek from under heaven*" (Exodus 17:14).

What we learn from this is that God's vengeance may be slow in coming (sometimes owing to the disobedience of His people), but He will bring judgment down on those who oppose His people in the end. Make no mistake about it—the Lord is the Avenger for His people.

Now I originally planned on preaching one sermon with three points showing how the Lord is our Victor, our Banner, and our Avenger. But toward the end of last week I decided to save those last two points for this Sunday and, just like that, one sermon became two. Between that decision and this sermon, several of our brothers and sisters were murdered at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas, a few hundred miles from us. It's been all over the news and on our minds ever since it happened. Every Christian who entered a sanctuary in our great state has had terrible thoughts cross their mind this morning and I just hate that. Every church, including us, has been forced to take a renewed interest into matters of security. You should know that we are taking that seriously as well and have had several meetings this week to make sure we are taking necessary steps to help ensure the safety of our people whenever we gather. Pray for us as we seek God's wisdom in this area. Pray that no such tragedy would ever strike our Tyler community. Pray for our brothers and sisters in Sutherland Springs as they mourn these great losses.

I don't need to tell you how tragic and wicked that act was. What I may need to remind you, however, is that that tragedy was part of the same cosmic struggle our text this morning is about. The same struggle that put Jesus on a cross. The same struggle that has put Christians ever since on the receiving end of persecution.

So how should we respond? It's not our job to retaliate. We can protect the vulnerable, but it's not our job to respond to anyone with vengeance. Instead, we must look to our Banner, Jesus Christ. That's why we are here. We don't need to live in fear. We need to look to our Banner and remind ourselves that He is our sure victory in life and even in death. We look to our Banner and remember that all our hope and security rests on Him and nothing can separate us from His love and purpose for us. We look to our Banner and remember that He will take up our cause and no enemy that rises against us will have the final word. They will either bow the knee in repentance of faith one day or bow the knee in forced subjection of judgment one day. But we will rise because our Banner remains high and lifted up. We look to our Banner and remember that Jesus is coming back and will make the enemies of His people His footstool so we don't need to fear or lose heart.

We don't rejoice in the destruction of the wicked. We know we deserved the same severe judgment of Hell before we were touched by God's grace. So we can bless those who curse us, pray for those who persecute us. We choose not to return evil for evil, but overcome evil with good. We forgive as we have been forgiven. We entrust vengeance to the Lord and His perfect timing and in the meantime we pray that sinners would repent and trust in Christ and His death and resurrection of Christ to save them from His wrath.

We look to our Banner and cry out, "Maranatha!" "Come, Lord Jesus!" And we rejoice because He will one day. And He will wipe away all the tears, so we need not fear. We rejoice in knowing that He is our Victor, the Banner we rally under, and the Avenger who will make things right one day. And all God's people said? Amen!

Let's pray...

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Merida adds, "They needed to write it down because God knew that the people were going to be dealing with the Amalekites again, as well as other enemies of God. So God made them write it down so everyone might know that God fights for His people." Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus* (Christ-Centered Exposition; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 110.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Exodus* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 400.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Ken Hemphill, *The Names of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 114.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (PTW; Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 466.

<sup>5</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto III, lines 52–54, cited in Ryken, 466.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 467.

<sup>8</sup> The hymn is titled, "Onward Christian Soldiers," by Sabine Baring-Gould.

<sup>9</sup> For those interested in exploring this ambiguity further and see greater explanation of the interpretive suggestions, see Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus* (4 Vols.; Historical Commentary on the Old Testament; Kampen: Kok, 1993-2002), 2:388; Stuart, 401; Willem Hendrik Gispen, *Exodus* (Bible Student's Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 171; John I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1987), 233, 234; John L. Mackay, *Exodus: A Mentor Commentary* (Ross-Shire: Mentor, 2001), 306, 307.

<sup>10</sup> There is further ambiguity connected to the word translated "throne." As the ESV footnote mentions, a slight change in one of the Hebrew letters could change the word from "throne" to "banner." While some scholars prefer the latter rendering because of its consistency with verse 15 (see, e.g., NRSV), there is no reason to amend the text.

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<sup>11</sup> David Strain, “The LORD Is My Banner,” a sermon preached at First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi, on April 19, 2015, which was accessed as of November 12, 2017, at the following website: <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/the-lord-is-my-banner--2>.

<sup>12</sup> “In [the Amalekites] attempt to exterminate the people of God, they were seeking to destroy God’s attempt to save the world. Though they were part of his creation, they were determined to receive nothing from God and, indeed, to kill him if he insisted on opening his arms to them. To attempt to thwart the love of God is as deadly as cutting through a high-voltage electric wire.” John N. Oswalt, “Exodus,” in *Genesis, Exodus* (CBC 1; Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 417.

<sup>13</sup> Tim Chester, *Exodus For You* (Denmark: The Good Book Company, 2016), 134.

<sup>14</sup> The Hebrew is emphatic here: “I will surely erase...”

<sup>15</sup> Chester, 132.

<sup>16</sup> The fact that he is an Agagite is a point of emphasis in the narrative (Esther 3:1, 10; 8:3, 5; 9:24). However, it is at least possible that he was not a descendent of Agag physically but more a descendent in the spirit of Agag. Karen Jobes makes the following observations: “Over the centuries after Saul spared Agag’s life, other perennial enemies of Israel were called Agagites, even though they had no ethnic relationship to the Amalekites. In the first century of this era, for example, Jewish writers referred to the Romans as Agagites. In our own time, the Palestinians in Israel are sometimes referred to by that ancient appellation.... Rabbinic tradition held that Haman was in fact a descendant of Agag. However, as the use of the appellation illustrates, Haman need not have been genetically descended from the Amalekites to have earned the name *Agagite*. By using this term, the author is characterizing him as anti-Semitic, an enemy of the Jews. The original readers would have understood this one clue as introducing yet another episode of the age-old conflict between Israel and the powers that sought to destroy her. God’s promise to protect Israel and to be at war with Amalek in every generation was given within the context of the Sinai covenant (Ex. 17:8–16). But would that promise still stand for the Jews living in exile precisely because they had violated that covenant? Could they expect God to be faithful to his covenant promises when they had failed to keep theirs? In other words, was the covenant between God and his people still in effect? This is the underlying question that would have generated plot tension in the minds of the original readers.” Karen Jobes, *Esther* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 120-121

<sup>17</sup> Mark W. Chavalas comment, “...the writer of Esther has stated the strongest case for the religious significance and survival of the Jewish people in the ethnic sense.” Mark W. Chavalas, “Esther, Theology of,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 208; for other comments on the issue of anti-Semitism see William Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 541; Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 297-298.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Jobes, 42; Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 196-197; Chavalas, 208.