

Keep Those Arms Up, Moses!

by Edward F. Sylvia, M.T.S.

Imagine a general who could affect the outcome of a battle by the length of time he could hold his arms up in the air. When his arms are raised up, his army gains the upper hand. But once he lowers his arms, things would begin to go bad for his forces.

This was the situation for Moses in Exodus (17:9-13). When Moses raised his arms, Joshua was successful during the battle. When he lowered his arms, Amalek, the enemy, gained the upper hand.

This biblical scenario is a real “head-scratcher.” How long can you hold up your arms? Sure, Moses was holding the “rod of God” and both Aaron and Hur were standing at his side to help him keep his arms up (until evening) but why would this make any difference out on the battlefield?

Perhaps something deeper and more meaningful is being expressed in this narrative. Perhaps the battlefield is actually taking place within the human heart and mind. Perhaps Scripture is describing a *spiritual* battle that we must all eventually face—a battle between our faith in God and our faith in ourselves.

That would certainly make Scripture quite relevant in today’s world of self-centeredness, and the waxing preference of human prudence over God’s wisdom. Could the human propensity for self-delusion be represented by Amalek? And could Joshua represent God’s challenge to each of us to embrace divine truth and conquer our real enemy—our own harmful compulsions?

If so, that would change the whole ballgame of biblical interpretation (exegesis). Let’s see where this unique (and non-Orthodox) thesis takes us.

I think we can all agree that the “rod of God” represents divine power. But have you ever pondered where Divine power comes from? If God is Infinite Love, then Divine power can only come from TRUE LOVE. God’s rod has its power from GOODNESS (not brute strength or physical force). Religion is a battle between good and evil, and truth over falsity. This does not require an exchange of blows. God wants to “win over” our hearts and minds.

We need to choose God as our guide. Raising one’s arms upwards represents an acknowledgement and acceptance of the Lord God’s Divine power from Infinite Love. Lowering them represents the human inclination to fall back on its own worldly views and proclivities. Therefore, if Amalek represents our worldly and corporeal nature, we gain the upper hand over this influence when our arms are raised upwards towards God—that is, seeking God’s instruction (which is the essence of religion).

There are many more spiritual revelations hidden within the details of this story, in fact, in all the narratives of the Old Testament—continuing through the stories and parables about Jesus’ life in the world, and even throwing greater light on the true nature of His return!

These deeper, purely spiritual interpretations of Scripture are available to everyone from the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

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