

Josephus's View of the Amalekites

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Josephus elevates Moses' role and diminishes the miraculous in the Amalek episode. In the Pentateuch Josephus, defensive about the charge that Jews preach genocide, omits the command to eliminate Amalek; rather, Moses predicts it. In 1 Samuel he explains that G-d so hated them as to order it. As to the parallel command to exterminate the seven Canaanite nations, this was necessary, says Josephus, for the national survival of the Israelites.

Key words: Agag, Amalek, Amalekites, Canaanites, David, holy war, Josephus, Joshua, Kenites, Moses, Nabateans, Pseudo-Philo, Rome, Samuel, Saul

THE IMPORTANCE OF AMALEK FOR JOSEPHUS

That the Amalekites are important for Josephus may be seen from the fact that, though he often, in his paraphrase of the Bible in his *Antiquities*, omits passages of lesser importance or passages that seem repetitious, he has seen fit to include no fewer than thirteen passages referring to them: *Ant.* 1.174 (= Gen 14:5-7), *Ant.* 2.5-6 (= Gen 36:40-41), *Ant.* 3.39-61 (= Exod 17:8-16), *Ant.* 4.304 (= Deut 25:17-19), *Ant.* 5.210 (= Judg 6:3, 6:33, 7:12), *Ant.* 6.129 (= 1 Sam 14:47-48), *Ant.* 6.131-55 (= 1 Sam 15:1-35), *Ant.* 6.323 (= 1 Sam 27:8-9), *Ant.* 6.336 (= 1 Sam 28:18), *Ant.* 6.356-67 (= 1 Sam 30:1-31), *Ant.* 6.371-72, 7:1-6 (= 2 Sam 1:1-16), *Ant.* 9.188--98 (= 2 Chr 25:5-20), and *Ant.* 11.209, 11.211, 11.277 (= Esth 3:1; 3:10; 8:3; 8:5; 9:24).¹ The seven major references to the Amalekites are *Ant.* 3.39-61, containing the account of the attack of the Amalekites on the Israelites in the wilderness; *Ant.* 4.304, containing the commandment to eradicate the Amalekites; *Ant.* 6.131-55, con-

1. Johann Maier, "Amalek in the Writings of Josephus," in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith* (ed. Fausto Parente and Joseph Sievers; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 109-26, lists and examines these passages briefly but does not focus, in particular, on the command to annihilate the Amalekites.

taming the account of Saul's campaign against the Amalekites; *Ant.* 6.356-67, containing the account of David's campaign against them in revenge for their sack of Ziklag; *Ant.* 6.371-72, 7:1-6, containing the account of the slaying of Saul by an Amalekite; *Ant.* 9.188-98, containing the account of the campaign of Amaziah of Judah against the Amalekites; and *Ant.* 11.209, 211, and 277, containing the references to Haman as a descendant of Agag, the Amalekite king.

It is surely significant that, whereas the most important passage about the attack of the Amalekites upon the Israelites (Exod 17:8-16) contains 119 words in the Hebrew text, Josephus's account (*Ant.* 3.39-61) has 1,039 words, 8.73 times as many (to be compared with a ratio of 1.20 for the account of Abraham [2.86 for the '*Aqedah*'], 1.04 for Isaac, 1.08 for Jacob, 1.63 for Joseph [5.45 for the episode of Joseph and Potiphar's wife], and 1.17 for Moses). Significantly, as we would expect from one who himself had been a general in the war against the Romans, Josephus stresses the military aspects of the war between the Israelites and the Amalekites. On the other hand, for the passage containing the commandment to eradicate the Amalekites (Deut 25:17-19), the Hebrew text has 47 words, whereas Josephus (*Ant.* 4.304) has 28 words, a ratio of .60 of Josephus to the Bible. For the passage concerning Saul's failure to carry out the commandment, the Bible (1 Sam 15:1-35) has 506 words, whereas Josephus (*Ant.* 6.131-55) has 1,119 words, a ratio of 2.21 to the Bible, apparently reflecting Josephus's general interest in and identification with Saul.² For David's campaign against the Amalekites, the Hebrew text (1 Sam 30:1-31) has 485 words, whereas Josephus (*Ant.* 6.356-67) has 547 words, a ratio of 1.13 to the Bible. For the account of the slaying of Saul by an Amalekite, the Hebrew text (2 Sam 1:1-16) has 229 words, whereas Josephus (*Ant.* 6.371-72, 7:1-6) has 366 words, a ratio of 1.60 to the Bible. For the account of King Amaziah's campaign against the Amalekites, the Hebrew text (2 Chr 25:5-20) has 307 words, whereas Josephus (*Ant.* 9.188-98) has 448 words, a ratio of 1.46 to the Bible. From this we may see that the episode that held the greatest interest and importance for Josephus was the Amalekites' initial attack upon the Israelites, and the episode that was second in importance was Saul's vengeful attempt to carry out the divine mandate to eliminate the Amalekites.

THE BIRTH AND ORIGIN OF AMALEK

Regarding the significance of the birth and origin of Amalek, the Bible (Gen 36:12) states that he was born to Timna, the concubine of

2. See my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 509-36, especially 509-11, 535-36.

Eliphaz, Esau's son. The fact, however, that he was a grandson of Esau is extremely significant, inasmuch as it connects Amalek with Edom (by which name Esau is known) and, quite probably, Rome, and will help to explain why Josephus, who was so indebted to the Romans, would be expected to be careful in his treatment of Amalek.³ The fact that he was born of a concubine does not in itself denigrate him, inasmuch as the forefather of the Hebrews, Abraham, had a concubine, Hagar, who is so denominated by Josephus (*Ant.* 1.214) and who is the mother of Ishmael.⁴

Josephus (*Ant.* 2.5), however, mentions the names of Amalek's father and mother and adds that he was a bastard (νόθος). The word *bastard* appears five times in the works of Josephus, all of them with a pejorative connotation. To refer to someone as a bastard definitely defames one, as we see particularly in Josephus's remark (*J.W.* 5.442-43) that it would be impossible to narrate the enormities of Simon bar Giora and John of Gischala; but to indicate the extremes to which they went he says that "they ended by actually disparaging the Hebrew race, in order to appear less impious in so treating aliens, and owned themselves, what indeed they were, slaves, the dregs (σύγκλυδες, 'washed together by the waves', 'promiscuous scum,' 'rabble') of society, and the bastard (νόθα) scum (φθάρματα, 'dregs') of the nation." That the word *bastard* had such a connotation is clear also from the fact that Eurycles, denouncing Alexander, Herod's son, to Herod, had claimed that Alexander had said that Herod was now proceeding to foist in a bastard (νόθα), Antipater, as his successor (*J. W.* 1.521). That the term is one of opprobrium is clear because Antipater was not a bastard at all, being the son of Herod by his wife (γυναικῶ) Doris, who is termed "a Jewess of some standing." Moreover, that the term indeed had such a connotation we may deduce from the fact (*Ant.* 2.89) that as soon as Archelaus was proclaimed king in succession to his father Herod, his first act was to massacre 3,000 citizens, "anxious apparently not to be taken for a bastard son of Herod." Finally, Josephus mentions that one of the sons of the judge Gideon was a bastard named Abimelech (*Ant.* 5.233). He is described in the most

3. On the connection of Esau, Edom, and Rome, and how this connection was treated by Josephus, see *ibid.*, 314-24.

4. Philo (*De Congressu Quaerendae Eruditionis Gratia* 11.55), as he so often does, sees an allegorical meaning in the name Amalek itself, remarking that it denotes the boiling of unreasoning passion that licks up and destroys all in its way. As to Timna, he says that the name means "tossing faintness" and signifies the soul's loss of power when receiving a surge driven on by unbridled appetite. Such allegorical interpretations are quite clearly intended to denigrate Amalek. Pseudo-Philo (8.5), who, in general, has an unusually high opinion of women, mentions merely that Amalek was the son of Eliphaz, the son of Esau, but does not cite his mother's name.

negative terms, as having killed 69 of his 70 brothers and having transformed the government into a tyranny, "setting himself up to do whatever he pleased in defiance of the laws and showing bitter animosity against the champions of justice" (*Ant.* 5.234). If, indeed, Amalek was associated with Rome, we may wonder why Josephus, who owed so much to his Roman hosts, should have depicted Amalek in negative terms. We may reply that Josephus was here, as elsewhere, treading a tightrope in addressing his two audiences, Jews and non-Jews,⁵ and that in this case, as in his essay *Against Apion* generally, he had to reassure his Jewish readers that he had not completely sold out to the Gentiles.

THE BIBLICAL PASSAGES ABOUT AMALEK'S ATTACK ON THE ISRAELITES

There are two passages in the Bible describing the attack of the Amalekites on the Israelites. In the first, Exod 17:8-16, we read, without any introduction, that Amalek came and fought with the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses then told Joshua to choose men to do battle with Amalek. In the meantime, Moses, Aaron, and Hur ascended a hill; when Moses raised his hand the Israelites were victorious, but when he lowered it Amalek prevailed. Thereupon Aaron and Hur supported his hands, and Joshua managed to weaken the Amalekites "with the edge of the sword." G-d then told Moses (Exod 17:14): "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." Moses then built an altar and called it "The L-rd is my banner (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, LXX καταφυγή ['refuge'])," saying that the L-rd will be at war with Amalek from generation to generation (LXX κειρὶ κρυφαίᾳ, 'with a secret hand'). In this passage, then, the war with Amalek is G-d's unceasing war, and it is G-d whose pledge and responsibility it is to eliminate the Amalekites.

In the second biblical passage, Deut 25:17-19, in his his review of the years that the Israelites spent in the desert, Moses tells the Israelites that they are to remember what Amalek did to them. We are given a few details, namely, that Amalek had attacked the Israelites when they were faint and weary and that he had cut off at the rear all those who lagged behind. Apparently, Amalek had no particular reason for going to war, since the Israelites would not be passing through his territory; nor were the Israelites seeking to acquire the land for themselves. Indeed, the patriarch Rabbi Judah the Prince at

5. See my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 46-50.

the end of the second century (*Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael Amalek 1*) notes the tradition that Amalek was so determined to attack the Israelites that he actually made his way through five nations to come to them. Similarly, the second-century Rabbi Nathan (*ibid.*) says that Amalek crossed 400 parasangs (approximately 1,400 miles!) in order to reach the Israelites. Moreover, he attacked the Israelites without previously seeking to find a solution to his differences with them and without previously giving warning to them. Thus, in his remark on Deut 25:17, the fifteenth-century commentator Isaac Abrabanel remarks that Amalek had absolutely no reason for going to war and sees significance in the fact that just before the account of Amalek's attack we have the statement (Deut 25:16): "For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the L-rd your G-d."⁶ Furthermore, because he was afraid to fight the Israelites face to face, he attacked those who were faint and exhausted (עֵיף וְיָגַע) and those who were weak (נֹחַשׁ לַיָּם) in the rear. Abrabanel then concludes that Amalek's attack on the Israelites was such an abomination and then generalizes that everyone who behaves thus "will be blotted out of the book of the living and not be written with the righteous."

The thirteenth-century commentator Nahmanides on Exod 17:16 justifies G-d's command to wipe out Amalek on the ground that, whereas other nations trembled when they heard what G-d had done to the Egyptians at the Sea of Reeds, Amalek defied G-d in choosing to attack the Israelites. Hence, it was G-d's honor that was at stake. This raises the question⁷ whether an act is right or wrong because G-d commanded it, or whether G-d commanded it because it is right or wrong. It is the second of these alternatives that is most widely prevalent in rabbinic literature.

Whereas according to Exod 17:14 G-d Himself tells Moses that He will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek, in Deut 25:19 it is the Israelites who are reminded by Moses that, when G-d has given the Israelites rest from all their enemies round about in the land that He has given to them as an inheritance, they are to blot out the remembrance of Amalek. Hence, the responsibility is theirs, rather than G-d's, as in Exodus. As Stern⁸ remarks, it makes little sense for G-d to promise to blot out the memory of Amalek when it is the Bible itself that has perpetuated his memory. Hence, he concludes that the word זָכַר, "memory," is equivalent to its Akkadian

6. Noted by Avi Sagi, "The Punishment of Amalek in Jewish Tradition: Coping with the Moral Problem," *HTR* 87 (1994) 325.

7. So *ibid.*, 327.

8. Philip D. Stern, *The Biblical Herem: A Window on Israel's Religious Experience* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991) 178.

cognate *zikru*, which means "name." Therefore, the command is to return Amalek to a state of nonexistence—that is, Amalek is to be drummed out of the world order. Significantly, Balaam's prophecy (Num 24:20) is apparently deliberately ambiguous about whose responsibility it is to eliminate the Amalekites, since we are told merely that Amalek's end will be eternal destruction, without any indication as to whose responsibility it is to bring about this destruction.

In summary, the biblical passages referring to Amalek's attack upon the Israelites, in view of the extraordinary command with which they close, are extremely brief and lacking in details regarding Amalek's motive.

JOSEPHUS'S VERSION OF THE AMALEKITE ATTACK ON THE ISRAELITES IN THE WILDERNESS

In the Hebrew account of the Amalekite attack on the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai, we hear absolutely nothing of the background of this attack: whether the sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness, who numbered in the hundreds of thousands and who had obtained arms from the Egyptians who had been drowned in the Sea of Reeds, might have aroused fears in the tribes that lived in that area; whether the fact that the Israelites were badly in need of food, water, and supplies for their multitudes might have aroused fear that they would make a preemptive attack on those who lived in the area; who Amalek was, what his military strength was, why he attacked, what preparations he made for the attack, what efforts he made to win alliances for the attack; to what extent it was the kings such as Amalek who were responsible for the hostility toward the Israelites and to what extent this hostility was shared by the peoples themselves; what efforts he or the Israelites made to come to peaceful terms before the attack; what knowledge, if any, the Israelites had of the forthcoming attack by the Amalekites; what reaction they had to the forthcoming attack; and to what extent the Israelites were prepared with weapons, food, and supplies. Josephus (*Ant.* 3.39-43), himself a resourceful general in Galilee during the war against the Romans, surely must have asked these questions as he pondered the biblical text; and, unsurprisingly, he supplies answers to all of these questions that he and readers generally would be likely to ask.

In the first place, Josephus gives us the added details that the news about the Israelites' sojourn in the wilderness had indeed spread in all directions throughout the area, that this had aroused great fear among the indigenous peoples, and that consequently they had sent embassies to one another to form alliances in order to ward

off (ἀμύνειν) and in fact destroy (διαφθείρειν) the Israelites (*Ant.* 3.39).⁹ Hence, the picture that is painted here is not of a classic case of anti-Semitism but of an attempt by the indigenous inhabitants to ward off those who had invaded their territory. Nevertheless, Josephus strives mightily to paint the Amalekites in the darkest colors,¹⁰ denominating them as the most warlike (μαχιμώτατοι, *Ant.* 3.40) of the peoples there; it is their kings (*Ant.* 3.40) who take the initiative in sending messages to the neighboring peoples to make war on the Israelites and who are determined to take the initiative in going to battle with the Israelites (*Ant.* 3.42). Josephus (*Ant.* 3.43) depicts Moses as expecting no such hostility at all, inasmuch as the Israelites had done nothing to provoke it; and Moses is consequently perplexed in the face of it, especially since the Israelites were in want of everything, whereas the indigenous nations were well equipped with everything. Thus Josephus emphasizes that the Israelites had done nothing to provoke the battle. Moreover, because of their inferiority in numbers, in arms, and in equipment, the victory of the Israelites will turn out to be all the greater. We thus have, in effect, a reprise of the situation that confronted the Israelites at the Sea of Reeds with the onrushing Egyptians and their chariots (*Ant.* 2.326).

Concerning the identity of the Amalekites, we are informed (*Ant.* 2.5) that the descendants of Esau, including Amalek, had dwelled in the area of Idumea called Gobolitis (*Ant.* 2.5). Maier¹¹ has called attention to the fact that this is unequivocally identical with Arabia Petraea and that at the time that Josephus was writing it was actually the realm of the Nabateans and other Arab tribes and was still outside the Roman Empire and, indeed, was a source of constant trouble for the Romans until the establishment of the province of Arabia under

9. Christopher Begg, "Israel's Battle with Amalek according to Josephus," *JSQ* 4 (1997) 203-4, suggests that Josephus may have found inspiration for this embellishment in the narrative of the reaction of the various peoples living west of the Jordan to Israel's advance in the book of Joshua (Josh 10:1-5 and 11:1-5). In his accounts (*Ant.* 5.54 and 63), however, of these latter incidents Josephus is not adding to the biblical text itself. More likely, for his addition to the Amalekite account here Josephus, who appears to be well acquainted with rabbinic traditions (see my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 65-73), was aware of the tradition (*Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* 1 [ed. H. S. Horowitz and I. A. Rabin, p. 176] and *Mekilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai* 81 [ed. Epstein, p. 119]) that Amalek organized a coalition against the Israelites, likewise noted, though with some diffidence, by Begg (p. 204).

10. Begg (ibid., 203) suggests that in thus characterizing the Amalekites as "the most warlike" of the area's peoples, while the Amalekites themselves are organizing a coalition against the Israelites, Josephus amplifies the threat to the Israelites and consequently emphasizes the greatness of the Israelites' subsequent triumph.

11. Maier, "Amalek in the Writings of Josephus," 117.

Trajan in 105 /106. It is these Amalekites who attempted to persuade neighbors to make a preemptive strike against the Israelites before they became even stronger and laid their hands on their possessions, and thus they themselves began the battle against them. There is no indication that the Amalekites had made any attempt to come to peaceful terms with the Israelites. Josephus thus arouses more sympathy for the Israelites, especially in view of the trouble that the geographical successors of the Amalekites, the Nabateans, were causing the Romans, who apparently composed a good part of Josephus's audience, during the period when Josephus was writing.

Josephus is concerned, it seems, to attribute hatred toward the Israelites on the part of, not peoples, but their kings; and it is these kings of the Amalekites who are blamed for sending messages to the kings of the neighboring tribes exhorting them to make war against the Israelites (*Ant.* 3.40). This is in contrast to Josephus's attitude toward Pharaoh and the Egyptians; there (*Ant.* 2.201-2) it is not the Pharaoh of the Exodus but the Egyptians who are at fault, their bitter disposition toward the Israelites being due to their envy of the latter's prosperity, brought about by the latter's work ethic, which they thought was to their own detriment.¹²

Regarding the preparedness of the Israelites, whereas in the biblical narrative the preliminaries to the battle occupy a single verse (Exod 17:9), in Josephus this takes up ten paragraphs (*Ant.* 3.43-52). It is Moses, in an extrabiblical addition (*Ant.* 3.44), who is given credit for calming them and encouraging them, calling attention to the fact that they had a large army and lacked nothing in military equipment, food, and other supplies; that it was the enemy army that was small, weaponless, and weak; that, above all, the Israelites had G-d on their side; and that they knew from past experience how much He had assisted them (*Ant.* 3.46). Moreover, in another extrabiblical addition he reminds them of the even greater difficulties that they had previously overcome and of the benevolence that G-d had shown them in the past.¹³

One may wonder why Josephus has Moses trying to convince his Israelites of their military superiority, since this would detract from their ultimate victory; but we must not forget that one major goal throughout his *Antiquities* was to build up the stature of Moses so that he would be comparable to leaders of other great peoples.¹⁴ Hence,

12. See my "Josephus's Portrait of the Pharaohs," *Syllecta Classica* 4 (1993) 60-62.

13. This scene is highly reminiscent of the one in which Aeneas, reminding his men that they have endured more grievous obstacles and bidding them to persevere (Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.198-207), consoles them after they land on the coast of Africa.

14. See my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 374-75.

Josephus felt a need to depict Moses' ability to inject self-confidence into his troops, so to speak. We clearly have a reprise, as we have noted, of the scene at the Sea of Reeds, where the Israelites were similarly faced with an enemy that far outnumbered them in arms and equipment.¹⁵ Though one would have expected in such a situation that Moses would have restricted himself to an appeal to the Israelites merely to show faith in G-d, he, practical leader that he was and possessor of insight into the motivations of people, presents as a reason why they should be courageous the fact that abundance of booty would be at their disposal if they should overcome the enemy. Indeed, whereas the biblical narrative declares that it is Joshua whom Moses approaches, bidding him to go out to fight Amalek (Exod 17:9), in Josephus Moses is referred to as a general (*Ant.* 3.47); and it is he who directly exhorts the juniors to obey their elders and exhorts the elders to hearken to him, whereupon both of them urge Moses to lead them instantly against the enemy. Consequently, in another addition to the biblical text, they urge Moses to lead them at once against the enemy and not to delay, since, they say, postponement would impede their eagerness. Clearly, Moses, far from being the leader with a speech impediment (Exod 4:10; 6:12), is so effective a speaker that he is able to arouse such a response from the Israelites.¹⁶

Whereas the biblical text (Exod 17:9) states very simply that Moses said to Joshua to go to battle with Amalek, without any indication as to who Joshua was and what his qualifications were for such an important position, Josephus (*Ant.* 3.49), aware of the importance of the fact that a great leader must show his ability to choose his subordinates carefully, informs the reader that, having selected from the multitude all those competent in war, he appointed Joshua as their leader. He then identifies him as the son of Nun and of the tribe of Ephraim and proceeds, in an editorial comment that has no biblical basis, to mention his five crucial qualities: a most courageous man, excellent in enduring toil, most capable in understanding, outstanding in speech,¹⁷ and most dutiful in worshiping G-d and in making

15. See Begg, "Israel's Battle with Amalek according to Josephus," 206.

16. On Moses' skill as a speaker, according to Josephus, see my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 400.

17. On the importance of skill in speaking for a military leader, see my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 104-5. This is in line with Thucydides' emphasis on Pericles' skill in persuasion (Thucydides 2.60.5). So also Joshua is said (*Ant.* 5.118) to possess supreme skill in expounding his ideas clearly to the multitude, a quality nowhere mentioned in the biblical narrative and again reminiscent of Pericles. The implication, in the case of both Joshua and Pericles, is that the masses are unreliable unless led and inspired by a competent leader and speaker.

Moses his teacher of piety toward Him. Consequently, he adds, he was honored among the Israelites.¹⁸

On the other hand, Josephus omits the name of the place, Rephidim (Exod 17:8), where the battle took place, as if to say that the particular place is unimportant, since this is a kind of universal battle.

Whereas in the Bible all that Moses does during Israel's conflict with Amalek is to hold up his hands (Exod 17:11), in Josephus (*Ant.* 3.50) he plays a much more active role, posting a small force of armed men around the water as a protection for the women and children and for the camp in general. Moreover, in another extrabiblical addition (*ibid.*), Moses is clearly in charge, in a supreme show of conscientiousness, staying awake all night instructing Joshua how to arrange the camp. His troops look to Moses for guidance, spending all that night in preparations, repairing those of their weapons that had been damaged, and being ready to rush into battle the moment that Moses orders them to do so. On the following day, in still another extrabiblical addition (*Ant.* 3.51), Moses again encourages Joshua and personally exhorts the most worthy of the Israelites individually and indeed stimulates the entire multitude and only then hands over the task of fighting Amalek to Joshua (*Ant.* 3.52). Moses is thus presented as the ideal commander-in-chief. As commander he takes his position on the hill before the battle begins (*ibid.*) rather than, as in the biblical text (Exod 17:10), after the battle begins.

When one considers how much Josephus has added to the biblical narrative, it seems surprising that he omits Moses' statement (Exod 17:9) that he intends to stand on the top of the hill with the staff of G-d in his hand on the following day. As Begg¹⁹ has noted, Josephus seems to have no difficulty with Moses' miracle-working "rod" as such, since he repeatedly introduces biblical references to it—for example (*Ant.* 3.37), where Moses strikes the rock with it to get water. We may explain this omission, however, by suggesting that Josephus did not want to diminish Moses' ability as a military general, since mentioning the rod would seem to indicate that the victory was due to a miraculous instrument in his hand. Perhaps he hints at the rod by noting that Moses set a guard "around the water," which he has just mentioned in the immediately preceding narrative (Exod 7:1-8 =

18. Compare this with the statement about Joshua by Josephus's presumed contemporary, Pseudo-Philo (*Biblical Antiquities* 20.2), who remarks that after the death of Moses G-d told Joshua to take the garments of Moses' wisdom and by putting them on to "become another man." For Josephus it is important that Moses choose wisely initially. Hence there is no transformation in Joshua: his intelligence is clearly innate; it is precisely because of Joshua's innate wisdom that Moses selected him as successor.

19. Begg, "Israel's Battle with Amalek according to Josephus," 208 n. 20.

Ant. 3.33-38), describing how Moses was able to bring forth water at Rephidim from a rock by striking it with his staff.

Josephus has considerably embellished (*Ant.* 3.53-59) the account of the battle of the Amalekites with the Israelites,²⁰ thus enhancing the military reputation of the commander-in-chief, Moses, and his designated general, Joshua. An apparent exception to his usual demphasis on miracles²¹ seems to be Josephus's account of the battle (Exod 17:8-13), in which the Israelites are victorious only as long as Moses holds his hands erect (*Ant.* 3.53); this seems to diminish the credit to be given to Moses himself for the victory. But here, too, Josephus explains the victory in rational terms: he dwells at length, as we have seen, on the military preparations, omits the fact that Moses held the rod of G-d in his hands (Exod 17:9), and adds that Moses withdrew to the mountain, committing the battle to G-d and to his commander, Joshua.²² Again, whereas in the biblical text (Exod 17:12) it is Aaron and Hur who take the initiative to put a stone under Moses to sit on (to relieve his weariness so that he may raise his hand, the means by which he may control the battle successfully), in Josephus (*Ant.* 3.54) it is Moses who takes the initiative to order Aaron and Hur to support his hands so that he does not become weary. Moreover, Josephus further exaggerates the extent of the Israelite victory by remarking that all of the Amalekites would have perished had not night intervened to stop the carnage.²³

The Bible gives the result of the battle in a single sentence of eight words (Exod 17:13): "And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." This has been elaborated by Josephus (*Ant.* 3.55-61) in no fewer than seven paragraphs, thus embellishing his portrait of Moses as a conquering general. In particular, he adds that the Israelites, with their most noble (καλλίστην) and most timely (καιριωτάτην) victory, terrified the neighboring nations

20. On a number of occasions Josephus adds vivid touches to his descriptions of battles. See, for example, Abram's battle with the Assyrians (*Ant.* 1.177-79). Similarly, in his description of the battle with Amalek, Josephus adds that the adversaries met in a hand-to-hand contest and fought with great spirit and mutual shouts of encouragement (*Ant.* 3.53). Henry St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus* (LCL; London: Heinemann, 1930) 4.345 n. a, points out that in the description of the battle there are Thucydidean touches. Thus, the phrase "the battle was hand to hand" is reminiscent of Thucydides 4.43. Likewise, the phrase "showed eagerness and shouted encouragement," as Thackeray (ibid.) remarks, comes from Thucydides 4.11 and 7.71.3.

21. See my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 209-12.

22. See David L. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1972) 227.

23. Similarly, in another extrabiblical addition, we find that night saves the Israelite army from disaster (*Ant.* 5.157) after 22,000 have perished at the hands of the Benjaminites.

and, in the process, acquired vast plunder, which Josephus describes at length. He makes a special point of noting (*Ant.* 3.56) that with this victory they enslaved not only the individuals but also the spirit (φρονήματα) of the Amalekites. On the other hand, Moses is described as so inspiring a leader that the Israelites became filled with confidence in their courage and strove for virtue with so much toil that they became convinced that all things were obtainable for them. Moreover, whereas the Bible (Exod 17:13) gives no casualty figures, Josephus (*Ant.* 3.59) reports that not a single one of the Israelites was slain, whereas the enemy's dead were past numbering. Aware of the advisability of rewarding his soldiers, Josephus, though elsewhere (*Against Apion* 2.212) he forbids the spoiling of fallen combatants, here (*Ant.* 3.59) asserts that Moses ordered the corpses of the enemy to be stripped²⁴ and collected all their armor. By emphasizing the sheer quantity of the booty, as Begg²⁵ notes, Josephus is not merely stressing the size of the Israelite victory but is also answering the charge frequently brought by pagan writers that Jews are poor beggars.²⁶ Furthermore, he gives honors to those who had distinguished themselves and praises the general Joshua, whose deeds, he states, were attested by all the army.

After the battle the Bible (Exod 17:15) declares that Moses built an altar that he called "The L-rd is my banner," or perhaps "G-d is my miracle" (יְדִי).²⁷ Josephus (*Ant.* 3.60) says that he called not the altar but G-d Himself "Giver of victory (νικαίον)," clearly recalling the goddess of victory, Νίκη (Hesiod, *Theogony* 384; Pindar, *Isthmians* 2.26),

24. So also (*Ant.* 4.93) after the victory over the Amorites and (*Ant.* 4.162) after the victory over the Midianites.

25. Begg, "Israel's Battle with Amalek," 211. Similarly, whereas the Bible (2 Sam 5:25) says simply that David smote the Philistines and says nothing about plunder, Josephus (*Ant.* 7.77) specifies that when David plundered the Philistines' camp he found great wealth in it.

26. Similarly, we may note that Lysimachus, in the first century BCE (apud Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.305), makes retroactive this association of the Jews with beggars when he declares that in the reign of Bocchoris, king of Egypt, the Jews, afflicted with leprosy, made their exodus from Egypt and lived a mendicant existence. To Josephus's contemporary, the epigrammist Martial, at the end of the first century (12.57.1-14), the Jew taught by his mother to beg is a proverbial figure among the many nuisances in the city of Rome. It is the satirist Juvenal who pours the most scorn upon the Jews as beggars, noting bitterly (3.10-16) that the grove, once holy to King Numa Pompilius, the successor of Romulus, has now been let out to Jews if they have some straw and a basket, so that the forest is swarming with beggars. Later in this satire (3.296), Juvenal describes a beggar as hanging out in some synagogue with Jews. In still another satire (6.542-547) he speaks of a Jewess leaving her basket and soliciting alms, while playing on the credulity of others by telling fortunes and interpreting dreams.

27. Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 1.39.219) follows the Septuagint (Κύριός μου καταφυγή, "The L-rd is my refuge") in calling the altar "Refuge of G-d" (θεοῦ καταφυγήν).

and the epithets of Zeus, $\nu\iota\kappa\acute{\alpha}\iota\omicron\varsigma$ (Dio Cassius 47.40), and of Pallas, $\nu\iota\kappa\acute{\alpha}\iota\alpha$ (Demosthenes, *Pant.* 623). The Bible (Exod 17:16) then follows with the enigmatic explanation, "For the hand is on the throne of G-d," which Josephus, whether the statement had some secret significance that he did not wish to share with his readers or whether he did not understand it in the first place, omits completely.

After the statement of the defeat of Amalek by Joshua, the Bible (Exod 17:14) continues with G-d's directive to Moses: "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out ($\text{הָחַמְסֵם הָחַמְסֵם}$) the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." This clearly indicates that it is G-d rather than the Israelites who has undertaken the responsibility to wipe out Amalek and his descendants. The final statement in the narrative of this war in Exod 17:16 is that "the L-rd will have war with Amalek from generation to generation," implying that the wars of the Israelites with the Amalekites will continue without end. In Deuteronomy (25:17-19), when Moses reviews the history of the Israelites during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, he recalls, in particular, what Amalek had done to them, particularly to those who were faint and weary in the rear lines. He thereupon promulgates, as a commandment, "you shall blot out (הָחַמְסֵם) the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget" Here it is the Israelites who have the responsibility to wipe out Amalek and his descendants. We might reconcile this apparent contradiction by saying that the command is G-d's but that it is to be carried out by the Israelites, just as in the Utuhegal inscription the command is Enlil's but is to be carried out by Utuhegal.²⁸ Josephus (*Ant.* 3.60) resolves the contradiction by speaking neither of G-d's nor of the Israelites' responsibility to wipe out Amalek. Rather (*ibid.*), he has Moses predict that the Amalekites will perish with utter annihilation and that not one of them will be left. He gives as the reason for this dire judgment on the Amalekites the reason cited in Deuteronomy (25:17-19), namely, because the Amalekites had attacked the Israelites while they were in the desert and exhausted.

It seems to be significant, however, that Josephus (*Ant.* 4.128) omits Balaam's prophecy (Num 24:20), "Amalek was the first of the nations, but in the end (וְאַחֲרַיִתוֹ) he shall come to destruction." If indeed, as Bacher notes,²⁹ Amalek is a code name for Rome, according to the rabbis, this would be an eschatological prediction of the fall of

28. See Samuel N. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 325; W. H. P. Römer, "Zur Siegesinschrift des Königs Utuhegal von Urug," *Or n.s.* 54 (1985) 274-88; Stern, *The Biblical Herem*, 70-72.

29. Wilhelm Bacher, *Die Agada der Tannaiten* (Strassburg: Trübner, 1903) 1.146 n. 3, citing *Mekilta* on Exod 17:12, where the sinful realm is Rome.

Rome at the end of an era. Although, as we have seen, Josephus (perhaps for the sake of those in the reading audience who are Jews) might have made ambiguous references to the fall of Rome, the fact that this prediction was put into the mouth of a non-Jewish prophet (and the most renowned at that) and that it referred explicitly to the end of an era would probably have been dangerous for one such as Josephus who owed so much to the Roman emperor.

Moreover, the command to write the account of Amalek in the Book and to recite it in the ears of Joshua (Exod 17:14) seems to be contradicted in the same verse by the statement ascribed to G-d that He will erase the memory of Amalek. Surely, as we have noted, the command to write is contradicted by the command to erase. Likewise, the command (Deut 25:19) given by Moses to wipe out the memory of Amalek is contradicted by the command to write it in the Book and to tell it to Joshua. Indeed, the fact that the account of Amalek is in the Bible guarantees that it will not be forgotten. Josephus resolves this problem by omitting the command to write it, the command to recite it, and the command to wipe out the memory of Amalek (*Ant.* 3.60), and by stating merely that the Amalekites will utterly perish. Significantly, moreover, Josephus omits the passage in Balaam's prophecy (Num 24:20) predicting the destruction of Amalek.

In sum, Josephus has vastly revised, both in additions and subtractions (and much more than he usually does) the account of Amalek's attack upon the Israelites. His chief interest is twofold: elevating the role of Moses as a leader and elaborating the military details of Moses' victory over Amalek. He has avoided the most sensitive portion, namely, the command to wipe out Amalek.

SAUL'S FAILURE TO CARRY OUT THE DIVINE COMMAND
TO EXTERMINATE THE AMALEKITES
(1 SAMUEL 15 = *ANTIQUITIES* 6.131-56)

In order to appreciate Josephus's treatment of Saul's failure to exterminate the Amalekites, it will be of value to examine how his alleged contemporary, Pseudo-Philo,³⁰ deals with this incident. Pseudo-Philo, who greatly elaborates the period of the judges and of Saul, cites (58.1) G-d's instructions to Samuel, spoken (as he adds in an extra-biblical remark) with zeal (*sub zelo meo*), to tell Saul that he has been sent to destroy every one of the Amalekites, in fulfillment of the

30. See my "Prolegomenon" in the reprint of M. R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (New York: Ktav, 1971) xxvii-xxxii; and Howard Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 1.199-210.

words that Moses spoke³¹ (1 Sam 15:1-3). However, he does not give a reason for this command, as we find it in the Bible, that the Amalekites had beset the Israelites without provocation in the wilderness; nor does he specifically indicate, as does the Bible (1 Sam 15:3), that this command includes the elimination of men, women, and children; nor does he mention that the animals also are to be destroyed. Hence, the divine command of genocide is simply divine fiat.

We then read (58.2) that Saul fought against Amalek but allowed Agag, the king of the Amalekites, to live because, as we learn in an extrabiblical comment, Agag promised to show Saul some hidden treasures. This is a totally new point and clearly reflects badly on Saul as having been, in effect, bribed; whereas, in Josephus (*Ant.* 6.137) Saul has aesthetic motives for sparing Agag—namely, admiration for his beauty and stature.³² We hear nothing in Pseudo-Philo about the fact that, except for Agag, Saul destroyed the entire Amalekite people (1 Sam 15:8). Nor do we hear (1 Sam 15:9) that Saul and the people were responsible for allowing Agag to be spared. Nor do we hear that they had also spared the Amalekite animals. The blame is solely Saul's. Whereas the Bible (1 Sam 15:10-11) indicates that G-d told Samuel that he regretted having chosen Saul as king and that Samuel was aggrieved by this and cried out to G-d all night long, Pseudo-Philo (58.3) declares G-d's displeasure with the fact that Saul had been corrupted by silver. Whereas the Bible speaks only of Saul's sparing the king of the Amalekites, Pseudo-Philo mentions that he had allowed both the king and his wife to live (58.3). Pseudo-Philo then adds G-d's permission for Agag to cohabit with his wife that night and for his wife to be kept alive until she bears a male child, whereupon she too is to die. He then predicts that the child born of Agag's wife is to become a stumbling block for Saul³³ and instructs Samuel himself to kill Agag on the following day (58.3).

31. According to the manuscripts of Pseudo-Philo, G-d tells Samuel to instruct Saul to fulfill the words that Moses spoke saying, "I shall destroy the name of Amalek from the earth." In his monumental commentary, Jacobson (*ibid.*, 2.1160-61) says that there is something wrong with the text, because it seems strange to say that Saul will fulfill Moses' words, as if it is Moses who said that he would destroy the Amalekites. Actually, according to Exod 17:14, it is G-d who said that He would erase the memory of Amalek. Nevertheless, it is G-d who is speaking to Samuel, and Moses was quoting G-d; hence, the text can stand as it is found in the manuscripts. Indeed, in Exod 17:14 G-d does say that He will erase the memory of Amalek.

32. Jacobson (*ibid.*, 2.1162) notes that, according to 1 Sam 15:9 and 15:19, since Saul and the people spared the best of the animals and destroyed only the inferior ones, they did so out of greed. He suggests that Pseudo-Philo represents Saul as sparing Agag, again out of motives of greed.

33. This statement that a descendant of Agag will cause ruin to the Jews is connected with the tradition that Haman, who is termed an Agagite in the book of Esther

On the following day, whereas the Bible (1 Sam 15:12) says that Samuel went out to meet Saul, Pseudo-Philo (58.4) says that Saul went out to meet Samuel. Whereas in the Bible (1 Sam 15:13) Saul tells Samuel that he has fulfilled G-d's command, which is not completely true, in Pseudo-Philo (58.4) Saul tells Samuel that G-d has lived up to His promise to deliver the enemies of the Israelites into their hands. Again, the focus is on G-d and on the fact that He is true to His word. In the Bible (1 Sam 15:14) Samuel asks Saul to account for the fact that the Amalekite cattle have been spared, and Saul explains that some of them were spared so that they might be offered as a sacrifice to G-d but that the rest were destroyed. Samuel then tells Saul that G-d has decided to reject him as king, and Saul confesses that he has sinned and begs forgiveness. Samuel then turns away from Saul, but Saul asks him at least to honor him in the presence of the Israelites, whereupon Samuel eventually returns (1 Sam 15:26-31). Samuel then tells Saul to bring Agag to him, and Samuel then proceeds to kill Agag (1 Sam 15:32-33). Pseudo-Philo omits Samuel's question, Saul's explanation, Saul's confession, and Saul's request that he be forgiven and be honored in the presence of the Israelites. In Pseudo-Philo's version (58.4), Samuel says that the Israelites acted badly in demanding Saul as their king, that Saul has transgressed the will of G-d, that Agag is now to die, that Agag will not show Saul the hidden treasures that he had promised him, and that the child that will be born of him will prove to be a stumbling block to Saul. The focus here is on the immediacy of G-d's punishment of people who have transgressed His commandments. Then, as in the Bible (1 Sam 15:33), but unlike Josephus (*Ant.* 6.155, where Samuel orders Agag to be killed without actually committing the act himself, presumably because he himself is a Nazirite and hence prohibited to come into contact with the dead [but see *b. Nazir* 4b]), Pseudo-Philo says that Samuel kills Agag (58.4).

In the account of Saul's death, the Bible (2 Sam 1:8) identifies the one who slays Saul as merely a nameless Amalekite. Pseudo-Philo (65.4) identifies him as Edabus, the son of Agag, the king of the Amalekites, clearly seeking to teach the lesson that Saul had to pay for his failure to fulfill the divine command to kill the Amalekites utterly. This lesson is indeed not lost on Saul who, in an extrabiblical addition, recalls the words of Samuel that "He who will be born of Agag will be a stumbling block for you" (65.4).

(3:1), was a descendant of the Amalekites and sought vengeance on the Jews for this reason. In this, Pseudo-Philo parallels Josephus (*Ant.* 11.211; cf. *b. Meg.* 13a, and *Targum on Esther* 3.6).

In summary, Pseudo-Philo's version is the bluntest theological statement of the divine command of genocide, no mention being made at all of Amalek's attack on the Israelites in the desert and no reason being given for the command other than that G-d ordered it. Whether or not he was aware of the equation of Esau and Amalek, he does not mention or hint at it or at the equation of Amalek and Rome. He is interested not in political matters but in theological matters and only in stressing his point that G-d rewards the virtuous and punishes the wicked. His concern is not with the sins of non-Jews but with the sins of Jews, such as the concubine who had relations with an Amalekite (45.3). Similarly, Saul's failure to fulfill the command completely is condemned in the strongest terms: not only is he castigated for failure to execute this divine command, but he is even further denigrated by Pseudo-Philo's extrabiblical statement that he was deterred from doing so by a bribe. Moreover, there are a number of instances where Pseudo-Philo has altered the biblical account to make his point that Jewish sinners against G-d's commandments are ipso facto punished. Thus, whereas no reason is given in the Bible (Judg 20:19-25) for the double defeat of the Israelite tribes in their battle against the Benjaminites, Pseudo-Philo (45.6) presents the moral judgment that the tribes were defeated because they had failed to resist Micah's idolatry:³⁴ If Samuel the Nazirite kills Agag the Amalekite, he does so as the prophet of G-d, fulfilling G-d's commandment to eliminate totally the Amalekites.

In Josephus (*Ant.* 6.132-33) this passage, as in the Hebrew (1 Sam 15:2-3), begins with the prophet Samuel reminding King Saul that, in view of what Amalek had done to the Israelites in the wilderness, it is now G-d's command to avenge this action in war by destroying everything that he had. He must "deal death to all of every age"—men, women, and infants, sparing neither beasts of burden nor any cattle—thus blotting out (ἐξάλειψαι) the name of Amalek. Surely, in our own age, even if we did not have difficulty understanding a command to wipe out men of military age, we would be shocked by a command to eliminate women and, especially, innocent children. The biblical statement commands killing men, women, infants, and sucklings, in that order, without indicating their age. However, Josephus goes further in specifically stating that the Israelites are to kill all of every age; moreover, the massacre is actually to begin with women and infants. Furthermore, whereas the biblical statement specifies that they are to kill oxen, sheep, camels, and donkeys, Josephus adds specifically that they are to spare neither beasts of burden nor any

34. For further examples, see Frederick J. Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo: Rewriting the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 247-48.

cattle at all for private possession or profit. Whereas the passage in Samuel quotes G-d as giving the command without specifically recalling the passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy, Josephus has G-d remind Saul that this is to be done in compliance with the behests of Moses (cf. *Ant.* 4.304); and whereas the Hebrew commands that he strike down Amalek, Josephus goes beyond even the passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy, which declare that they are to wipe out the memory of Amalek, and states that they are to eliminate the very name of Amalek.

Josephus adds one further element to this command, namely, that he is to devote (ἀναθεῖναι) everything to G-d. We find a similar statement in connection with the sword of Goliath that David dedicated (ἀνέθηκε) to G-d (*Ant.* 6.192, 244); and in connection with the objects, including the gold and silver, that he had taken from the conquered cities and nations (sent by his ally, Thainos) and that he carried away and dedicated (ἀνατίθησι) to G-d (*Ant.* 7.108). Such a concept as devoting everything to G-d might well have reminded Josephus's Roman readers of the tradition of a famous event in their history in which, beset by the Gauls (Livy 5.41), the pontifex maximus Marcus Folius led the curule magistrates in the recital of a vow by which they devoted (*devovisse*) themselves to death on behalf of their country. Similarly, in the tremendous battle against the Latins, when the Roman front line gave way, the consul Decius asked the pontifex maximus to dictate to him the words by which he could devote himself in the army's behalf. Then, donning his armor, he leaped upon his horse and rode headlong into the midst of the enemy, thus throwing the front line of the Latins into disorder (Livy 8.9).³⁵

Again, the biblical text (1 Sam 15:5, 7) states that Saul fought and struck down the Amalekites. However, Josephus, reflecting his military interests and experience in the war against the Romans in Galilee,³⁶ adds a number of specific details (*Ant.* 6.135-36): Saul posted numerous pickets and ambushes around the ravine, in order not only to molest the Amalekites in open warfare but also to fall upon them unexpectedly on the roads, whereupon he routed the enemy and pursued the fugitives, destroying them all. Josephus adds that he then attacked the cities of the Amalekites, storming them all with his

35. Compare *se diis* or simply *se*, "to devote oneself to death": Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2.3, *De Finibus* 2.19.61, *Philippics* 11.6.13; *se pro patria Quiritibusque Romanis*, Livy 5.41.3, 9.4, 9.17, 10.39; Virgil, *Aeneid* 12.234; Horace, *Odes* 4.14.18; Lucretius 4.533; Valerius Maximus 6.2.2 and passim; "to devote to the infernal gods," that is, "to curse, execrate": Nepos, *Alcibiades* 4.5; Ovid, *Fasti* 6.738; Quintilian 5.6.2; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 5.102, 8.234; Horace, *Odes* 3.4.27, *Epodes* 16.9 and passim.

36. On Josephus's emphasis on Saul's military prowess as reflecting his own military experience in Galilee, see my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 514-24.

engines of war and with mining operations. The biblical text (1 Sam 15:8) states that Saul destroyed the entire people by the edge of the sword. Josephus (*Ant.* 6.136), apparently aware that his readers might be critical of the slaughter of the women and infants, defends his action by remarking that the Israelites did so, deeming nothing therein cruel or too savage for human nature to perform. He presents two reasons for this action: (1) the Amalekites were enemies; (2) the Israelites were fulfilling a divine commandment, which, he says, it was dangerous to disobey.

Like the Bible (1 Sam 15:8), Josephus (*Ant.* 6.137) mentions that Saul captured Agag, the king of the Amalekites, but he adds the extrabiblical detail that he took him alive out of admiration for his beauty and stature.³⁷ Whereas the biblical text states that the people likewise shared in the decision to spare Agag, Josephus (*Ant.* 6.137), in a rare personal, editorial touch, comments that in doing so Saul was "no longer acting in accordance with the will of G-d, but giving way to feelings of his own, and yielding inopportunistically to compassion where it was not permitted to him without peril." Again, aware that his readers might regard the extirpation of the infants as unduly cruel, Josephus (*Ant.* 6.138) shows that it did bother his conscience. He explains that "G-d so hated the race of the Amalekites that He had ordered him to spare not even the infants," admitting that it is more natural to show pity to infants. He then criticizes Saul for having more regard for the beauty of his enemy than for the memory of what G-d had enjoined. He does not totally blame Saul, however. He states (*Ant.* 6.139), following the biblical text, that the people shared in his sin by sparing the beasts and the cattle and carrying off all of the chattels and riches.

That Saul did show concern for those who were not his enemies is to be seen in the fact that he spared the Kenites (1 Sam 15:6) because they had acted kindly to all the Israelites when they went up from Egypt. In Josephus (*Ant.* 6.140), where they are referred to as Sikimites, they are spared because they are kinsmen of Raguel (Jethro). Spilsbury³⁸ suggests that Josephus's main concern was to eradicate any connection between the descendants of Moses' kinsmen and the hated Amalekites. Therefore, the reason that he gives for the sparing of the Kenites is that they were kinsmen of Moses'

37. See Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 58.2, who explains that Saul spared Agag because the latter promised to show him hidden treasures. This would indicate that greed was a motive, just as it presumably was in Saul and the people's sparing of the superior animals and goods (1 Sam 15:9).

38. Paul Spilsbury, *The Image of the Jew in Flavius Josephus's Paraphrase of the Bible* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 172. See Christopher Begg, "Saul's War with Amalek according to Josephus," *Laurentianum* 37 (1996) 396-97 nn. 73-74, 79.

father-in-law Raguel (Jethro) rather than that they had helped the Israelites when they went up from Egypt. However, the biblical passage (Num 10:29-32) to which the text is here referring does not mention the Kenites at all, nor does it mention any aid given to the Israelites. Rather, it refers to Hobab, the son of Reuel (another name for Jethro), and it mentions that Moses invited Hobab to join the Israelites, promising to treat him well. When Hobab declined, Moses asked him not to forsake the Israelites, "for you know how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us." There is no indication from this text or from the other references to the Kenites, as they are later referred to (Judg 1:16; 4:11), that they had actually accepted Moses' invitation or that they had, in fact, helped the Israelites. Josephus, apparently realizing this, concluded that the reason why they were spared was not that they had actually helped the Israelites in the wilderness but rather that they were the kinsmen of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who had indeed helped Moses. There were many tribes in the desert, and they were clearly distinct from one another. The Israelites certainly would not have condemned a tribe simply because they were neighbors of the Amalekites. What Josephus means when he says that Saul warned them to withdraw, "lest they should share the fate of the Amalekites," is that they should not remain geographically in that area, inasmuch as the Israelites intended to wipe out the Amalekites utterly; and if they remained, there would be the danger of confusion with them.

In the Bible (1 Sam 15:10) G-d tells Samuel that he regrets having made Saul king because he has not fulfilled G-d's commandment to eliminate the Amalekites. Samuel then, aggrieved by this, cries out to G-d the entire night, presumably attempting to influence G-d to change His mind. When Samuel arises early the following morning to meet Saul, Saul tells him that he has fulfilled the word of G-d (1 Sam 15:13), whereupon Samuel confronts him with the fact that he hears the sound of sheep and cattle. Saul's explanation is that the people took pity on the best of the animals in order to bring them as offerings to G-d. In Josephus (*Ant.* 6.141) the order of events is that first Saul returned home exulting in his military success and in the belief that he had neglected none of the injunctions that he had received from Samuel. Then we are told (*Ant.* 6.142) of G-d's displeasure at his sparing the life of Agag and at the people's taking of cattle as plunder; God has repented of having chosen Saul as king. Then we hear that Samuel is sorely troubled and stays up all night beseeching G-d to be reconciled with Saul. In an extrabiblical comment (*Ant.* 6.144), Josephus explains G-d's decision not to pardon Saul as due to His conviction that those who seek a reputation for kindness and mildness are

unwittingly the begetters of crime. G-d, therefore, refused Samuel's entreaty and declined to modify his decision (*Ant.* 6.145).³⁹

On the following day, according to Josephus (*Ant.* 6.145), Saul embraces Samuel and tells him that he has fulfilled the commands that G-d has given, whereupon Samuel asks him to explain the sounds of cattle. Saul explains that it was the decision of the people to save the cattle in order to offer them as sacrifices to G-d (1 Sam 15:21; *Ant.* 6.146). As for Agag, according to Josephus (*Ant.* 6.146), Saul declares that he has preserved him so that he and Samuel might take counsel together concerning his fate. Samuel rejects this explanation and declares that G-d rejects such gifts as tokens of iniquity rather than of piety (*Ant.* 6.148). How, he asks in an extrabiblical remark, could G-d look upon a sacrifice offered from things that He doomed to destruction, unless Saul regarded the sacrifice of them to G-d as equivalent to destroying them (*Ant.* 6.150). At this point Saul confesses his sin (1 Sam 15:24; *Ant.* 6.151). He explains that he feared the people, and Josephus (*Ant.* 6.151) further remarks that he did so from fear and dread of his soldiers if he had prevented them from plundering the spoils. When Saul sought to detain Samuel and to get him to beseech G-d to change His mind, Samuel in an extrabiblical addition (*Ant.* 6.153) replies that "change and reversal of judgement were part of human frailty and not of divine power." When Agag was brought to Samuel, he ordered him instantly put to death (*Ant.* 6.155; in the Bible [1 Sam 15:33] Samuel himself kills Agag).⁴⁰

Begg⁴¹ raises the question why Josephus did not omit the narrative of 1 Samuel 15, just as he did the account of the Golden Calf and its aftermath (Exodus 32-34), on the grounds that it does not conform with the image of the history of the Israelites that he is attempting to convey. In fact, Josephus actually expands the story of Saul's Amalekite war. In answer, Begg points to the overall moral that Josephus sets forth near the beginning of the *Antiquities* (1.14): "The main lesson to be learned from this history . . . is that men who conform to the will

39. Manuscripts MSP and the Latin version read $\mu\eta$, indicating that G-d had not modified His decision to deprive Saul of the kingship. Niese omits $\mu\eta$ indicating that G-d had decided to repent, but this does not seem to be in accord with the statement that G-d had refused to heed Samuel's prayer to reconsider His decision.

40. Begg ("Saul's War with Amalek," 409 n. 161) suggests that Josephus's modification of the biblical account of Agag's death reflects his concern that Samuel not appear as one of the bloodthirsty Zealot leaders whom he depicts in the *Jewish War*. We may suggest that the main factor was that Samuel was a Nazirite (see *Ant.* 5.344) and hence was forbidden to come into contact with the dead. So also it is not Elijah himself, as in the Bible (1 Kgs 18:40), who kills the prophets of Baal but rather the Israelites witnessing the contest (*Ant.* 8.343). See my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 505.

41. Begg, "Saul's War with Amalek," 413.

of G-d and do not venture to transgress laws that have been excellently laid down, prosper in all things beyond belief and for their reward are offered by G-d felicity; whereas, in proportion as they depart from the strict observance of these laws . . . whatever imaginary good thing they strive to do ends in irretrievable disasters." To his Jewish readers this is a crucial moral.⁴² On the other hand, non-Jewish readers would appreciate the depiction of Saul as a capable general (*Ant.* 6.135-36), who admired physical beauty (*Ant.* 6.137-38), and as the protagonist of a tragic drama from which there is no escape.⁴³

An apparent parallel to the command to exterminate Amalek is the command given by Moses, in his farewell to the Israelites before his death (Deut 7:1-2), to exterminate totally the seven nations of Canaan,⁴⁴ clearly implying that this includes men, women, and children, though there is no mention of animals, as there is in the command to eliminate the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:3). The Bible, moreover, even goes to the extent of commanding that the Israelites destroy the Canaanite altars, pillars, Asherim, and graven images and gives the reason (Deut 7:6) for this extreme command: "for you are a people holy to the L-rd your G-d; the L-rd your G-d has chosen you to be a people for His own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth." This command to destroy the Canaanites unconditionally and to refuse to offer them terms of submission is repeated in Deut 7:16: "You shall destroy all the peoples that the L-rd your G-d will give over to you; your eye shall not pity them." The command to destroy all the religious objects of the Canaanites is repeated in Deut 12:2-3: "You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, upon the high mountains and upon the hills and under every green tree; you shall tear down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and burn their Asherim with fire; you shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy their name out of that place." Yet again, Moses repeats this command and the reason for it in Deut 20:16-18: "In the cities of these peoples that the L-rd your G-d gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites

42. See my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 649-52.

43. See my "Josephus's Portrait of Saul," *HUCA* 53 (1982) 96.

44. In Deut 20:17 the list consists of six nations, the Girgashites being omitted. As Stern (*The Biblical Herem*, 90) remarks, this same list, with the variation noted here, appears 20 times in the Bible, from Genesis to Chronicles. Deut 7:1 states that these nations will be thrust away (וַיִּנְשָׁא), which seems to imply that they will be expelled rather than exterminated, but in Deut 7:2 we read that they are to be utterly destroyed (תַּחֲרִים).

and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the L-rd your G-d has commanded; that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices which they have done in the service of their gods, and so to sin against the L-rd your G-d." From this statement we can see that the objection is not to the beliefs of these tribes but rather to their practices, presumably such practices as child sacrifice (Deut 12:31) and divination, soothsaying, augury, and sorcery (Deut 18:9-14).

Josephus is clearly aware (*Ant.* 4.191) that the attitude of the Israelites to the seven nations seems to contradict his highlighting elsewhere of Moses' mercy (*Ant.* 4.300); hence, it is not surprising that he mentions and attempts to justify this injunction: it is necessary for sheer survival of the Israelites as a people since, if they allow the Canaanite tribes to survive, they might destroy their ancestral constitution, "having had a taste of their manner of life" (*Ant.* 4.191). The fact that Josephus's (*Ant.* 4.310) and the Bible's objection is not to the Canaanites as such but to their practices is clear in the statement that, if some Israelites undertake to abolish the constitution based upon the laws, the other Israelites should utterly destroy the rebellious city down to its very foundations. Any admirer of the Spartan constitution or of Plato's ideal in the *Republic* and of the care that these documents take to preserve the status quo would appreciate such counsel.

Inasmuch as Josephus (as we have noted)⁴⁵ does omit from his rewriting of the Bible a number of embarrassing episodes, we may wonder why he chooses to include so many references to commands to wipe out whole peoples. Apparently, he felt that the reason that he has given, namely to maintain the integrity of the Jewish people and their constitution, was one that Roman readers would appreciate.⁴⁶ Surely, this was also important to him personally, in view of the numerous accusations against him that had been made by Jews who envied him his good fortune (*Life* 424-28); and he consequently made every effort, it seems, to prove his loyalty to the Jewish people. Moreover, as we suspect, he was concerned not only not to offend his Roman hosts but also to be responsive to his Jewish readers, who were perhaps more numerous, at least in the Diaspora. This may explain the fact that he chose, as we have noted, to include his ambiguous statement about Balaam's prophecies, where he speaks in the vaguest terms of the calamities that will befall cities of the highest celebrity, some of which (presumably the vague reference is to Rome) had not

45. See my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 37-38.

46. On Josephus's appeal to his Roman readers, see my *Studies in Josephus's Rewritten Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 556-60.

yet been founded in the time of Balaam (Num 24:17-18; *Ant.* 4.125).⁴⁷ This is likewise perhaps the reason that he chose to include the ambiguous reference to the stone (Dan 2:44-45; *Ant.* 10.210) that, in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, destroyed the kingdom of iron; it would imply the overthrow of Rome.⁴⁸

DAVID'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE AMALEKITES
(1 SAMUEL 30; *ANTIQUITIES* 6.356-67)

While David was aiding the Philistines, the Amalekites attacked Ziklag, northwest of Beer-Sheba (1 Sam 30:1; *Ant.* 6.356), and burned it. The biblical text (1 Sam 30:2) states that they had captured the women and all who were in it, from small to great. The Bible (1 Sam 30:5) and Josephus (*Ant.* 6.357) specify that they held captive two of David's wives and the wives of his comrades along with their children. David and the people with him wept bitterly, and Josephus adds that he rent his clothes (*Ant.* 6.357). The people were ready to stone David, holding him responsible for what had happened (1 Sam 30:6; *Ant.* 6.358). According to the Bible (1 Sam 30:7-8), David asked Ebiathar the priest to bring the ephod to him so that he might inquire of G-d whether he should pursue the Amalekites and, if so, whether he would be successful. In Josephus's version (*Ant.* 6.359) David asked Abiathar to put on his priestly robe, and it was Abiathar who inquired of G-d. The reply of the oracle was that he would succeed in overtaking the Amalekites and in rescuing the women and children (1 Sam 30:8; *Ant.* 6.359).

David and his soldiers thereupon rushed off and came upon an Egyptian straggler who had been abandoned by his master and who is identified as an Amalekite in the Hebrew text (1 Sam 30:13). It was this Egyptian who led David and his men to the Amalekites. Josephus (1 Sam 30:16; *Ant.* 6.362) elaborates on the state in which David found the Amalekites, drunk and relaxed with wine, regaling themselves with their spoils and booty. He adds that they were an easy prey, because they were unarmed and were not expecting the sudden attack (*Ant.* 6.362). Josephus (*Ant.* 6.363) adds a number of details about the massacre that ensued: "some, being surprised at the outspread tables, were massacred beside them, and their streaming blood swept victuals and food away; others were drinking each other's health when he slew them; still others, under the influence of strong drink, were plunged in sleep; while those who had been quick enough to put on their armor and make a stand against him—these too he cut to pieces

47. See my "Josephus's Portrait of Balaam," *Studia Philonica Annual* 5 (1993) 59-61.

48. See my *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 649-51.

with no less ease than those who lay defenseless on the ground." David recovered his wives, together with those of his companions, as well as the booty that the Amalekites had taken (1 Sam 30:18-19; *Ant.* 6.364). Josephus omits the statement (1 Sam 30:20) that David took all the sheep and cattle of the Amalekites.

That this was a holy war ordained by G-d is to be seen from the fact that, when David sends some of the spoils to the elders of Judah, he indicates that these were spoils from "the enemies of G-d" (1 Sam 30:26). When David and his men came to the 200 men who had been too exhausted to join him in his campaign and who had been left behind to guard their baggage, the 400 who were with him were unwilling to share with them the booty that they had taken (1 Sam 30:21-24; *Ant.* 6.365). In the biblical text (1 Sam 30:23-24) David is mild in berating the 400, but in Josephus David is much more vehement in pronouncing their view wicked and unjust (*Ant.* 6.366). He decrees that henceforth those who guard the baggage should share equally in the spoils with those who do the actual fighting (1 Sam 30:25; *Ant.* 6.367).

The important point of this episode is that it reiterates that the war against the Amalekites is not an ordinary war; rather, it is a holy war, decreed by G-d Himself, crucial to the very existence of the Israelites.

SUMMARY

An indication of the importance to Josephus of the attack by the Amalekites upon the Israelites is its sheer length as compared to the biblical narrative. If, as there is some reason to think, Amalek was associated with Rome, we may wonder why Josephus, who owed so much to his Roman hosts, should have depicted Amalek in such negative terms. One explanation is that the Nabateans, the geographical successors to the Amalekites, had been causing the Romans so much trouble during the period that Josephus was writing.

Josephus emphasizes that the Israelites had done nothing to provoke the battle with the Amalekites. In his account of the battle between the Amalekites and the Israelites, Josephus aggrandizes the role of Moses and elaborates on the military details of Moses' victory. He diminishes the miraculous element and explains the victory in rational terms.

In the Pentateuch Josephus speaks neither of G-d's nor of the Israelites' responsibility to wipe out Amalek but has Moses *predict* that the Amalekites will be annihilated. Whereas his contemporary, Pseudo-Philo, views the divine command to annihilate the Amalekites as divine fiat, Josephus in his version of Saul's failure to exterminate them in 1 Samuel, goes even further than the passages in the

Pentateuch. Aware that his readers might regard the annihilation of the Amalekites as unduly cruel, he explains that G-d so hated them as to order this. Josephus explains G-d's decision not to pardon Saul for sparing the king of the Amalekites as due to His conviction that those who seek a reputation for kindness are unwittingly aiding crime.

A parallel to the command to exterminate Amalek is the command often repeated in the Pentateuch to exterminate the seven nations of Canaan. Though this seems to contradict Moses' reputation for mercy, as stressed by Josephus, the command is necessary, says Josephus, for the sheer survival of the Israelites as a people, since the Canaanites threatened the ancestral constitution of the Israelites. The objection to the Amalekites, as to the Canaanites, is not to the people as such but to their practices, which would undermine the very foundation of the Israelites.

Finally, David's war with the Amalekites is a holy war against those who aim to destroy the fundamentals of Judaism, as indicated by the reference to them as "enemies of G-d."