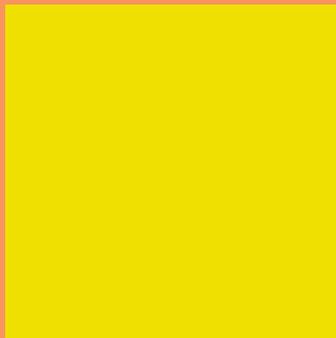


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ENCOUNTER WITH SACRED TEXTS:  
TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

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## MODULE TWO

# ENCOUNTER WITH SACRED TEXTS: TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

## 2.1 THE STORY



Figure 2.1  
The Video Clip

The story shows a conflict between two students: Levi and Lindsay. Levi is a Jewish boy who moved with his family to a new city. He goes to a new school, but feels like people are looking at him strangely, and he only hangs out with other Jewish children. Lindsay, a classmate of Levi's, sees him standing at the bus stop, and speaks to him. They get into a discussion. Levi calls Lindsay 'Amalek' out of anger. In his defence he refers to a passage from the Tanakh. Suddenly, an old rabbi named Ezra appears. With the magical bus Bunim, he takes the children on their way to Ancient Israel, in search of the possible meaning of this Amalek story.

## 2.2 READING SECTION

### 2.2.1 EXODUS 17:8-16

**ASSIGNMENT.** Read the next two passages. Then answer the questions on the following page.

[8] Then 'Amalek came and fought with Isra'el at Refidim.

[9] Moshe said to Y'hoshua, "Choose men for us, go out, and fight with 'Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with God's staff in my hand."

[10] Y'hoshua did as Moshe had told him and fought with 'Amalek. Then Moshe, Aharon and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

[11] When Moshe raised his hand, Isra'el prevailed; but when he let it down, 'Amalek prevailed.

[12] However, Moshe's hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aharon and Hur held up his hands, the one on the one side and the other on the other; so that his hands stayed steady until sunset.

[13] Thus Y'hoshua defeated 'Amalek, putting their people to the sword.

[14] Adonai said to Moshe, "Write this in a book to be remembered, and tell it to Y'hoshua: I will completely blot out any memory of 'Amalek from under heaven."

[15] Moshe built an altar, called it Adonai Nissi [Adonai is my banner/miracle],

[16] and said, "Because their hand was against the throne of Yah, Adonai will fight 'Amalek generation after generation."

### 2.2.2 DEUTERONOMY 25:17-19

[17] "Remember what 'Amalek did to you on the road as you were coming out of Egypt, [18] how he met you by the road, attacked those in the rear, those who were exhausted and straggling behind when you were tired and weary. He did not fear God.

[19] Therefore, when Adonai your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies in the land Adonai your God is giving you as your inheritance to possess, you are to blot out all memory of 'Amalek from under heaven. Don't forget.

**ASSIGNMENT.** Answer the following questions.

What event are these two passages referring to?

Is this event told in exactly the same way, or is there a difference in information between the two passages?

If there is a difference in information: what is the difference between the Exodus passage and the Deuteronomy passage? (You can also answer this question the other way around).

What is the essence of these passages:

- Remembering (Amalek's act)
- Fighting (against Amalek)

Who will fight/eradicate the memory of Amalek:

- G-d
- The people of Israel

According to you: who or what is Amalek?

## 2.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE AMALEK PASSAGES

### 2.3.1 EX. 17:8-16

This passage can be found in the **middle section of the Book of Exodus**, the second book of the Torah. The Book of Exodus can be divided into two parts: Ex. 1-18 and Ex. 19-40. The first part is the tale about the journey out of Egypt. The second part tells about the Covenant at Mount Sinai. So Amalek attacks the Israeli people just before they make the Covenant with G-d on Mount Sinai!

**The story of the journey out of Egypt** is well known. The people of Israel have been slaves of the mighty Egypt for years, where 'the law of the strongest' prevails. Then G-d comes, and He helps the Jewish people escape. However, in the desert, the people of Israel get hungry and thirsty, and they start to question the decision to leave Egypt. They even question their liberator, G-d: "Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Ex. 17:7) After this sentence, Amalek's attack occurs.

The place name **Rephidim** has a special meaning. The name consists of the verb 'rafah' and the noun 'jadim'. 'Rafah' means 'to become weak'. 'Jadim' means 'hands'. Rephidim thus means: 'the becoming weak of the hands'. This means that our courage can fail: our strength can, literally and figuratively, 'leave our hands'.



Figure 2.2  
Amalek

### 2.3.2 DEUT. 25:17-19

In the end, G-d declares war on Amalek. G-d takes on **responsibility!** Moreover, it is not a one-off battle, but it will take place from generation to generation.

This passage can be found in the **middle section of the Book of Deuteronomy**, the fifth and last book of the Torah. The Book of Deuteronomy can be divided into three parts: Deut. 1-11, Deut. 12-26, and Deut. 27-34. The first part consists of Moses' opening words to a new generation of Israelites. The second part consists of a collection of laws on how to structure life in the Promised Land. The third part consists of Moses' last words and his passing. This means that the Amalek passage lies at the end of the middle part: the collection of laws!

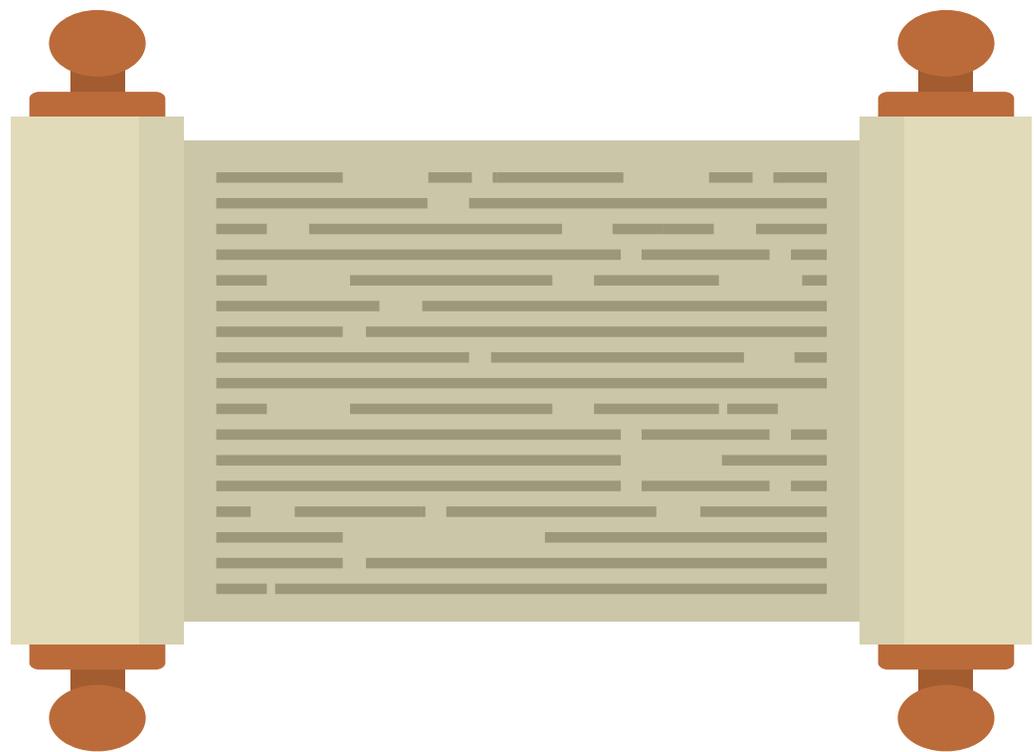


Figure 2.3  
Image: Adobe Stock

The Deuteronomy Passage on Amalek gives us **new information** on the battle:

1. Amalek attacked while the Jewish people were **“by the road”**. The Torah means the path of liberation, leading from Egypt to the Promised Land. The people of Israel didn't have a home yet, lived in uncertain times, and were very vulnerable.
2. Amalek attacked **“in your rear”**. The 'rear' means the people at the back of the line, who consisted of the most vulnerable and weak. Amalek's attack was twice as cruel: among an already vulnerable people, he attacked the most vulnerable.

3. It says: **“He did not fear God”**. Translations here often refer to Amalek. The sentence thus means: Amalek did not fear G-d. But it’s not that simple! The Hebrew language leaves open the possibility that it could be Israel that did not fear G-d. The sentence is somewhat isolated, and grammatically it is possible.
4. We read that Israel also bears **responsibility**. It is a commandment or mitzvah: an obligation given by G-d. Israel has the obligation to wipe out the memory of Amalek. And at the same time, the attack must be remembered. “You must not forget it!”



Figure 4.4  
Image: Video Clip

## SUMMARY

1. Ex. 17:8-16 teaches us:
  - G-d will wipe out the remembrance of Amalek
  - G-d will wage war against Amalek from generation to generation
2. Deut. 25:17-19 teaches us:
  - Emphasis that the Jewish people were ‘by the road’: the road to liberation from confinement in Egypt to freedom in the land of Canaan.
  - Amalek attacked Israel at their weakest point
  - Israel must blot out the remembrance of Amalek
  - It is a mitzvah: a religious commandment

**ASSIGNMENT.** Answer the following questions with help from the explanation above.

Where do the passages in their book take place:

- Always in the middle section
- Always at the beginning
- Always at the very end

Who's to wipe out the memory of Amalek?

- The people of Israel
- G-d

Who did not fear G-d?

Explain, using your own words, the meaning of the place name 'Rephidim'.

In the Deuteronomy passage, it says: "He did not fear God." This sentence can grammatically also refer to Israel. Why would Israel not fear G-d? What could this mean?

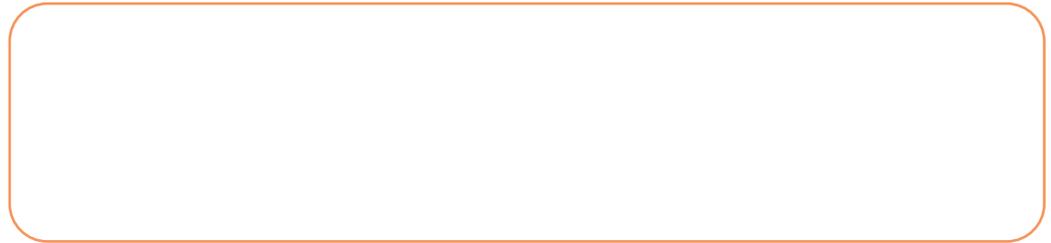


Amalek's attack was an act of war. Is the commandment to erase the memory of Amalek a matter of self-defense (to survive), or a matter of revenge?



Read this sentence again: "Adonai will fight 'Amalek generation after generation." (Ex. 17:16)

Do you think "generation after generation" means that the battle is eternal, or do you think it refers to specific generations?



Do you think the commandment to blot out the remembrance of Amalek still applies today?



## 2.4 GLOSSARY

In this glossary you will find more information on certain terms.

### **Amalek**

In Hebrew, the term 'Amalek' can refer to both a person, Amalek, and a people, the Amalekites. This module uses both meanings interchangeably.

### **Genocide**

The term 'genocide' means the deliberate extermination of an ethnic group. International law regards this act as a horrific crime.

### **Canaan**

According to the Hebrew Bible, Canaan is the land promised to the Jewish people. This area lies between the Mediterranean Sea in the West and the Jordan River in the East. This area is now made up of Lebanon, Israel, a part of Syria, and Jordan.



Photo: © Annie Spratt | Unsplash

## 2.5 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

### 1 INT KITCHEN DAY

We see a father sitting at the kitchen table. It's morning. His son enters with his school bag and walks straight towards the door.

Father: Good morning! Leaving already?

Levi: Yeah. I don't have time for breakfast, sorry.

Father: I wanted to ask you about your new school. How's it going? It has been a week now... Have you made some friends in class yet?

Levi: Not really. But there are some other Jewish kids in school, though.

Father (confused): Why don't you hang out with your classmates?

Levi: Why would I? They always look at me, like I'm from outer space... Sorry, I really have to go now.

We see Levi quickly leaving the house.

### 2 EXT BUS STOP DAY

Levi arrives at the bus stop early. There is another kid, Lindsay. The other kid sees him.

Lindsay: Hi! I'm Lindsay. We're in the same class, right? Isn't your name Levi?

Levi: Now you care to talk to me?

Lindsay: What do you mean?

Levi: I've been here a week. No one talks to me. If you think I don't belong here, just say so.

Lindsay: Look, you're the one that is not talking to anyone. We see you Jewish kids grouping together all the time, what do you expect from us?

Levi: Ah forget it. You're just like Amalek.

Lindsay (confused): Who?

Levi: 'sighs' Of course you wouldn't know...Have you ever even opened the Bible?

Lindsay: euh... who has? But what are you saying?

Levi: Amalek hurt the people of Israel just when they moved out of Egypt and were vulnerable, like my family... We just moved here, too. But you wouldn't understand and why would you,... you don't even want us here.

Lindsay: Oh come on man...Comparing me to that Amak...

Ezra: You mean 'Amalek'.

Lindsay: Yes, exactly. Huh -

The kids turn around in surprise. They see an old, strange looking man, scratching his head.

Ezra: Shalom Aleichem!

Levi: Aleichem Shalom... I'm sorry... Who are you?

Ezra: My name is... Wait, hold on, I have a bad memory... Uhm... Oh, yes, it's Rabbi Ezra! I've come to help you! But tell me, what is all of this about Amalek?

Lindsay: He is calling everyone who is not Jewish that! It's ridiculous!

Ezra: Aha! Well, let's recall the passage... Wait, I've got a bad memory... Oh! Why don't we go and take the bus? I said I've come to help! Or I think I said that...

The kids look confused.

Lindsay: Uhm... How is a bus ride going to help us?

Ezra (laughing): aahhh! It'll take us of course! Come on!

The kids look confused. Ezra taps with his walking stick on the floor. Suddenly in a purple cloud of dust, a bus arrives at the bus stop.

Ezra: I couldn't think of a good name for this bus, so I called him Bunim! He can take us everywhere, so let's go to ancient Israel!

Levi: Wait... You mean back in time? But that's just a bus?

Ezra: That's exactly what I mean! Let's go!

Ezra taps his stick again, and suddenly they are all sitting in the bus. The bus starts driving.

We see the bus disappear in a purple fog.

### 3 EXT ANCIENT ISRAEL DAY

The bus stops in ancient Israel. Lindsay, Levi, and Rabbi

Ezra get out.

Levi: Where are we?

Ezra (proudly): Well, young ones, welcome to Ancient Israel, just like in the Bible! These are the plains of Moab. You wanted to look up what Moses exactly said, right? Bunim took us there! Now, it's kinda like a live concert!

Levi and Lindsay are bewildered.

Levi: So, we travelled through time??

Ezra: You got it! Look!

We see a long line of people, looking tired and wearisome, all moving towards one gathering place.

Ezra: Quickly, quickly. I don't want to miss the speech.

The company walks towards the front. They mix in with the rest of the people. No one seems to notice them. We then see Moses standing in front of a mountain. He is speaking passionately with his arms raised. One of his arms is holding a walking stick. He has long white hair and a long white beard.

Ezra: I wish I had that stick... Oh, listen! Moses is about to mention Amalek!

Moses: Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt — how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear.

Levi: See!

Lindsay looks disappointed.

Ezra: Hmm. You're a bit hasty. Why are you so sure Amalek is a person or group?

Levi: Because Moses just said so?

Ezra: Did he? Did you know that the Torah always has a deeper meaning? We can understand the writings in different ways.

Lindsay: How so?

Ezra: Well, Amalek first appeared right after the people were complaining about the lack of water, and they were doubting their decision to leave Egypt and follow God. For this reason, some Rabbi's think Amalek symbolizes our inner doubt. They think 'destroying the memory of Amalek' means destroying the part in us that doubts God and ourselves!

Levi: So, he's like a mirror to the bad parts of us?

Ezra: So, they think! But this 'bad part' can be many different things besides doubt, like 'not protecting the vulnerable', 'indifference', ... Amalek can symbolize all of these things!

Levi: But can't it be a person, too?

Ezra: Perhaps. You're thinking about your self-defence? But some Rabbi's think that if Amalek were a people, they only existed in ancient Israel. Then other Rabbi's think Amalek will only arrive in the future.

Levi: All of this about a couple of sentences...

Ezra: Look around. There are as many ways to understanding the Bible, as there are people standing here listening to Moses.

Ezra: All right, I think it's time for us to leave. [taps stick] You've got school, remember!

Levi: How do we get back?

Ezra: I don't know, but Bunim does!

Ezra, Levi and Lindsay walk towards the bus and get on. The bus drives to the present day bus stop.

## 4 EXT PRESENT DAY BUS STOP DAY

Levi and Lindsay get out.

Levi: Thank you, Rabbi Ezra –

Levi and Lindsay turn around and see that they are alone. The bus and Ezra are gone.

Lindsay: That was strange...

Levi: Yeah, it was... Look, I'm sorry. Calling you Amalek was weird, ... But it doesn't change the fact you are treating us like aliens.

Lindsay: It's okay, I understand. It must be hard to feel so unwelcome... We should have started talking much earlier.

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## EDUC8 Consortium



This book was funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund – Police.

