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AMALEK, AMALEKITES.

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Position and Connections. —Biblical Data:

Name of a nomadic nation south of Palestine. That the Amalekites were not Arabs, but of a stock related to the Edomites (consequently also to the Hebrews), can be concluded from the genealogy in Gen. xxxvi. 12 and in I Chron. i. 36. Amalek is a son of Esau's first-born son Eliphaz and of the concubine Timna, the daughter of Seir, the Horite, and sister of Lotan (Gen. xxxvi. 12; compare Timnah as name of an Edomite chief or clan, verse 40). On the other hand, Gen. xiv. 7 speaks of Amalekites, in southern Palestine, in the time of Abraham. That they were of obscure origin is also indicated in Num. xxiv. 20, where the Amalekites are called "the first of the nations."

The Amalekites were the first to come in contact with the Israelites (Ex. xvii. 8), vainly opposing their march at Rephidim, not far from Sinai (compare Deut. xxv. 17, "smiting the hindmost, all that were feeble behind," and I Sam. xv. 2). Consequently, they must be considered as possessors of the Sinaitic peninsula, of the modern desert et-Tih, or at least of the northern part of it. According to Num. xiii. 29, xiv. 25, which speaks of Amalekites defeating the Israelites in the lowland (verses 43, 45), they occupied also southern Palestine, partly together with the Canaanites; see also Gen. xiv. 7 (Amalekites in "En-mishpat, which is Kadesh"). The extreme south seems to be meant, the pasture lands of the Negeb, not the arable parts.

The relation of the [Kenites](#) to the Amalekites is not quite plain. According to I Sam. xv. 6, they live with them (or at their side; compare Judges, i. 16; Num. xxiv. 21), while elsewhere they are associated with Israel (I Sam. xxvii. 10) or even specially with the tribe of Judah (I Sam. xxx. 29; I Chron. ii. 55). This would indicate that the Kenites formed a connecting-link between the Israelites, or their southern tribes, and the Amalekites. Gen. xv. 19, which foretells dispossession of the Kenites by Israel, would agree with this (see [Cain](#); [Kenites](#)). A similar relationship might be assumed for the [Kenezites](#).

Enmity to Israel.

The Amalekites themselves always appear as hostile to Israel. Thus (Judges, iii. 13), together with the Ammonites, they assist Eglon of Moab, and (Judges, vi. 3, 33, vii. 12) they aid the Midianites and the children of the East against Israel. Ps. lxxxiii. 7 refers to both occasions. It is on this account that Saul leads an expedition against them (I Sam. xv.). The defeat and capture of the Amalekite king, Agag (the only Amalekite name preserved), by Saul seem to be referred to also by Balaam (Num. xxiv. 7). It is not known what locality is meant by "the city of Amalek," which evidently was situated "in the valley"—that is, the plain (I Sam. xv. 5). One would not expect that the settlements of such a wandering nation would deserve the name of a city.

Fate of Amalek.

David waged a sacred war of extermination against the Amalekites, who retaliated (I Sam. xxx. 1) by a successful surprise of Ziklag. David, however, followed and caught the Amalekites on the retreat, regaining their captives and spoils. On this occasion the Amalekites, like all desert warriors, made their raids upon camels. After this defeat Amalek disappears, so that it seems as though the nation had actually been exterminated by the wars with Saul and David. I Chron. iv. 42-43 states that in the time of Hezekiah five hundred Simeonites annihilated the last remnant "of the Amalekites that had escaped" on Mount Seir and settled there in the place of Amalek. Thus the related tribes Amalek and Edom were united again at the end.

W. M. M.—In Rabbinical Literature:

Amalek—the first foe to attack the people of Israel after they had come out of Egypt as a free nation; twice designated in the Pentateuch (Ex. xvii. 14-16, Deut. xxv. 19) as the one against whom war should be waged until his memory be blotted out forever—became in rabbinical literature the type of Israel's arch-enemy. In the tannaitic Haggadah of the first century Amalek stands for Rome (Bacher, "Ag. Tan." i. 146 *et*

seq., 211 *et seq.*); and so does Edom (Esau), from whom Amalek descended (Gen. xxxvi.). A kinsman of the Israelites, Amalek nevertheless displayed the most intense hatred toward them: he inherited Esau's hostility to his brother Jacob. When other nations hesitated to harm God's chosen ones, his evil example induced them to join him in the fray. "Like a robber he waylaid Israel"; "like a swarm of locusts"; "like a leech eager for blood"; "like a fly looking for sores to feed on"; Amalek ('*am laḳ* = the people which licketh) hurried over hundreds of miles to intercept Israel's march:

(Tan. Ki Teze, ix., and Pesik. iii. 26*b*)

"Having taken the list of the tribes from the archives of Egypt, he arrayed his hosts in front of the Israelitish camp—over which God's glory rested in the sheltering pillar of cloud—and called the names of the tribes aloud, one after the other, and pretending to have business negotiations with them, he treacherously slew the last, or, rather, the guilty ones among them, those chosen by lot".

According to some he also used witchcraft to secure victory for his men (Yalk. Reubeni, and Chronicle of Jerahmeel, xlvi. 13). "Moreover, he mutilated their bodies, making sport of the Abrahamic covenant" (see Pesik. *l.c.* and Pesik. R. xii., Mek. Beshallaḥ).

Evidently the colors for this picture are drawn from the palette of later experience. Accordingly, in rabbinical literature stress is rather laid on the moral lesson of the episode. Amalek was but the scourge in the hand of God to punish the people of Israel, who had become "faint and weary" in the observance of God's commands and "feared not God." They lacked the power of faith (play on the name "Rephidim" = *rafu yadayim*, "the hands became weak"), and therefore said: "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Ex. xvii. 7, 8). Like a wayward child that runs back to its father when a dog comes snarling along, the Israelites were unmindful of God's doings until like a dog Amalek came to bite them. Then Moses fasted and prayed, saying: "O Lord, who will in the future spread Thy Law, if Amalek succeeds in destroying this nation?" And with uplifted arms, holding the staff and pointing heavenward, he inspired Joshua and the people with his faith until the victory was won (Mek. *ib.*).

Harsh as seems the command to blot out Amalek's memory, its justification was seen in the leniency shown by King Saul, the son of Kish, to Agag, the king of the Amalekites (I Sam. xv. 9), which made it possible for Haman the Agagite to appear (Esth. iii. 1); his cruel plot against the Jews could only be counteracted by another descendant of Kish, Mordecai (Pesik. R. xiii.). Every year, therefore, the chapter, "Remember what Amalek did unto thee" (Deut. xxv. 17-19), is read in the synagogue on the Sabbath preceding Purim.

With regard to the remarkable oath, "Truly the hand upon the throne of Yah! the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Ex. xvii. 16: A. V. is not literal here); the rabbis say: "Never will the throne of God—the Lord of Truth, Justice, and Love—be fully established until the seed of Amalek—the principle of hatred and wrongdoing—be destroyed forever (Pesik., *l.c.*, and Targ. Yer. I. and II. to Ex. *l.c.*). Henceforth "Amalek" became the popular term for Jew-hater.

K.—Critical View:

Modern critics have seen in the genealogy of Amalek a mere indication that Amalek was closely allied to the Edomites, but very inferior in power to them (compare the lowly station of Timna, merely a concubine). In Judges, vi. 3, 33, vii. 12, the mention of Amalek is considered as a later gloss by Budde. Nöldeke ("Ency. Bibl." i. 128) considers the account of Saul's expedition to be exaggerated in the figures, and in the geographical definition. Winckler's view ("Gesch. Israels," p. 211) stands rather isolated. He considers, for example, Judges, iii. 13 as impossible (because the Amalekites did not touch upon Moabitish territory), and regards most passages quoting Amalek as parts of mythological or mythical stories (including even the larger part of the lives of Saul and David). Thus he comes to the conclusion that "probably the nation of Amalek rests on a mythological idea." On Egyptian and Assyrian monuments, various points of contact with the nomadic tribes of the Sinaitic peninsula in war or commerce are reported or even represented; hitherto, however, the name Amalek has not been discovered on them.

The territory ascribed to Amalek in I Sam. xv. 7, "from Havilah until thou comest to Shur," is perplexing. If Havilah is the same land mentioned in Gen. ii. 11, x. 29 (compare I Chron. i. 23), and xxv. 18 (hardly that of x. 7)—that is, the extreme eastern country of the wandering desert tribes, on the borders of Babylonia—then one would have to identify the Amalekite territory with northern Arabia, from Egypt to the Euphrates. It would embrace the land of the Midianites and other "sons of the East," but would hardly leave room for Edom. Therefore, the modern commentators either understand here another Havilah, or they change the text. So, *e.g.*, Wellhausen ("Text der Bücher Samuelis," p. 97), who changes "from Havilah" to "mi-Telem," that is, "from (the city of) Telem" in Judah (Josh. xv. 24) which (in I Sam. xv. 4) is mentioned as the starting-place of Saul's expedition. Certainly, Amalek appears elsewhere always as an insignificant robber nation, and the same correction seems necessary also in I Sam. xxvii. 8, where the Amalekites (with the Geshurites and Gezrites) are "the inhabitants of the land which [reaches] from Telem [read "mi-Telem" with the better manuscripts of the Septuagint, instead of the traditional "me'Olam" (of old)] as thou goest to Shur." If this be so, Amalek had no territory east of the Edomites.

As to the presence of alleged Amalekites in Palestine proper, such colonies have been assumed on the basis of Judges, v. 14 and xii. 15. The first passage speaks of "Ephraim whose root is in [A. V. "was against"] Amalek"; in the second, the judge Abdon is stated to have been "buried in Pirathon [southwest of Shechem], in the land of Ephraim, in the hill-country of the Amalekite." The Septuagint, however, in both places, seems to have read (at least in the Codex Alexandrinus and in the recension of Lucian) "the valley, the lowland ('*emek*)" instead of Amalek, so that these two passages are, to say the least, unsafe authority. The existence of single Amalekites in the midst of Israel, such as the Amalekite, the "son of a stranger" (II Sam. i. 8, 13), is not surprising, and may possibly explain the expression "the mount of the Amalekites" in Judges, xii. 15. Thus, it is unnecessary to assume a northern branch or remnant of the Amalekites.

Arabic writers have attached great importance to the name of the Amalekites, and have invented many stories about this primeval nation, which they fancied to have ruled over Arabia and the surrounding countries, especially over Egypt. Nöldeke ("Über die Amalekiter," Göttingen, 1864) has fully shown the fictitious character of all these tales.

W. M. M.

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