

### 1. Exodus 17:8-15 -

- Hebrew *Nes* = standard, ensign, banner, pole, sign, standard
  - generally means a rallying point or standard which drew people together for some common action or for the communication of important information
  - a signal pole, sometimes with an ensign attached, could be raised as a point of focus or object of hope.<sup>1</sup>
- Hebrew *Nissi* = “My Banner” (Ex. 17:15)
- Associated with –
  - something conspicuously displayed, lifted up
  - you can’t miss it!
- Modern Hebrew *Nes* = Miracle

### 2. Egyptian background of *Nes* –

- standards (banner, ensign) – were commonplace in Egyptian worship.<sup>2</sup>
- Served as a repository for the power of the god/Pharaoh.
  - Pointed to the god/Pharaoh under which you stand.
  - Imbued with the power of that god/Pharaoh
  - Represented the god and ultimately became an object of worship.
  - More than merely symbolic.
- Similar to the symbolic nature of the flag of the United States. The flag represents much more beyond and is, in some sense, an object of worship/reverence.
- God takes the idea of the standard from Egypt to communicate to the Israelites
  - The LORD is Your Banner (*Nes*)

### 3. Dynamics of Egyptian standard or Hebrew *Nes*:

- **Phenomenological** – how we experience God as human beings
  - God (order, peace, holiness) is up
  - Chaos (disorder, profane) is down

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<sup>1</sup> Marvin R. Wilson, “1379 ִנִּסִּי,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 583.

<sup>2</sup> Currid, John D. *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1997, pp. 149-155.

- Our language expresses the notion of up or down.
- **Psychological** (mind, body, spirit) –
  - Objects of worship are “up.”
  - They are intended to lift us up through worship.
  - Embodiment of these dynamic through ritual or design.
    - Ritual = embodies the belief.
    - Design = a standard causes you to look up; a church sanctuary draws your focus up.

“Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts **on things above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your **minds on things above**, not on **earthly things**.”

Colossians 3:1-2

#### 4. Moses and his staff act as a *Nes* (standard, banner) and point to God:

- when Moses lifts his hands, the eyes of the Israelites are lifted toward God, and they prevail.
- When Moses lowers his hands, the eyes of the Israelites are lowered, and they lose.

God uses a concept from Egypt that the Israelites would understand to communicate something about Him as they begin their journey through the wilderness.

On this spiritual journey the LORD is your *Nes* (banner, standard, ensign). Keep your focus on the LORD.

#### 5. Rabbinic Interpretation – Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8

“And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.” It may be asked: Did the hands of Moses make war when he raised them or break war when he lowered them? Rather, the verse comes to tell you that as long as the Jewish people turned their eyes upward and subjected their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they prevailed, but if not, they fell.”