

PURIM (EXODUS 27:20-30:10)

Who ARE our Friends in Washington?

2015 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplovitz

Fast of Esther

Wednesday, March 4, is a fast day. The Fast of Esther commemorates the war of the Jews of the Persian Empire against their enemies that took place on that date. In keeping with Jewish tradition, the Jews repented and fasted in hope for G-d's assistance in battling their enemies. Let us pray that He will continue to watch over us and protect us.

The fast begins Wednesday at dawn, (72 minutes before sunrise.) It ends at dusk, (25-72 minutes after sunset, depending upon local custom.) For sunrise and sunset times for your community [click here](#).

Purim

Wednesday night and Thursday will be Purim, the most festive day on the Jewish calendar.

Learn about Purim by reading this brochure. (Better still, print out copies and give it to your friends!)

“Who ARE our Friends in Washington?”

It is a frightening world in which we live.

A madman in Iran is bent on “*L’hashmid laharog ul’abeid – to slay, to destroy, to exterminate...*” (Esther, 3:13) – the total destruction of every man, woman and child of the Jewish faith. It would be nice if we had a dependable friend in the White House, but very little that we have heard from the Obama Administration provides any assurance that he’s got our back.

This is not the first time a Persian lunatic has threatened our existence.

“Who is the person who would dare to do such a thing?” asked King Achashveirosh.

Esther responded, “Ish tzar v’oyeiv – an adversary and an enemy...” (Ibid, 7:6-6)

The next words in the verse identify the evil Haman. But our Sages tell us that Queen Esther was actually referring to the king himself, and only due to the influence of an angel, did she change her mind and say Haman instead.

King Ahasuerus was not an innocent pawn in the Purim story. He was an enemy of Israel who celebrated the Temple's destruction by desecrating the holy vessels and vestments at his party. Even when promising his beloved queen half the world, he included the disclaimer that rebuilding the Temple was not on the table.

Haman was an Amalekite – a descendant of Esau and a member of a nation of sworn enemies of Israel. But putting all the blame on Haman the Amalekite is a mistake. After all, he served at the king's whim. It was the Persian king who elevated Haman, (Ibid, 3:1) and in the end, it was the Persian king who eliminated Haman. (7:9)

The enemy was Ahasuerus. You don't have to be an Amalekite to act like one.

There is no shortage of Amalek-wannabes in the Middle East, Europe, or Washington.

(No, I am not comparing Obama to Haman or Amalek or Ahasueros. However much of his words and actions -- and non-actions -- evoke nostalgic memories of previous, friendlier Administrations. I can't envision ANY previous President treating an Israeli Prime Minister with such disrespect.)

As long as the world engages in the double standard of criticizing Israel for everything and blindly promoting the "Palestinian Cause" we see that Amalek is alive and well. And, as long as the world is not prepared to take on Iran in a serious and meaningful way, that means that once again, Israel may have to go it alone.

But ARE we alone?

The Talmud asks why Esther invited Haman to her party. Why didn't she just tell the king to get rid of Haman, and that would have been the end of it?

One reason given is that Esther didn't want her brethren to get overconfident: "We have a sister in the palace. She'll take care of everything!"

Once the Jews of the kingdom saw that Esther was socializing with Haman, they feared that she had sold them out. They saw that they had no "*protectzia*." (Israeli slang for "influence.") They had no political connections to help them out.

They saw that they had nowhere to turn but to their Father in Heaven. They saw that they needed to pray their hearts out to the Guardian of Israel to save them from their enemies.

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Whom can we rely upon? Obama? The UN? The EU?

The Israel Defense Forces???

Prime Minister Netanyahu recently stated that "... my supreme responsibility as prime minister of Israel is to ensure that Israel remains the master of its fate."

I understand the point that he was trying to make, but I wish he had used a different choice of words.

No, Mr. Prime Minister. Israel is NOT the master of its fate. The Master of the World is the Master of Israel's fate.

By all means, we need to be politically active and Israel needs to be militarily prepared. And the time may come when Israel may need to decide to take military action, with, or without, American cooperation.

But we are not the masters of our fate. We are merely the masters of our DECISIONS. How those decisions work out is determined by a Power greater than ourselves.

We only have One reliable Protector. That's the Protector Who acted behind the scenes in the Purim story, and continues to watch over us to this very day.

In this Purim season let us turn our prayers toward Heaven and pray that our Father will once again save us from the Amalekites in Persia/Iran and all over the world.

Have a great Shabbos and a happy Purim. Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

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