

In place of our usual meditation on the Torah Portion and a sermon, I am going to give you a brief message about Purim and then we will have our reading play before we go downstairs for our Purim Oneg.

I encourage all of you to read the weekly Torah portion, along with the Haftarah and New Testament portions and to bring your comments and questions to our weekly yeshiva time on Thursday evenings. You could also email me your comments and questions and I would be happy to reply.

Let's read three passages from the Book of Esther and examine what lessons we can learn from this near tragic experience of our people under the Persian Empire.

Scripture: (Esther 3:5-7; 12,13, 4:13,14; 8:9)

When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bend the knee or prostrate himself before him, he was filled with rage, but he thought it was beneath him to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for he had been told which people Mordecai belonged to and he wished to destroy Mordecai's people, all the Jews who were found in the kingdom of Ahasuerus. In the first month, which is the month of Nissan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, which is to say "the lot (dice)" before Haman for each day and for each month and the lot fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

Then the king's secretaries were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps, and to the governors over all the provinces, and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language; it was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's ring. Letters were sent by couriers to all the provinces of the King, giving orders to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, young and old, little children and women in a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar and to plunder all their goods.

Mordecai made a response to Esther: Do not think that you alone will escape of all the Jews because you are part of the King's household; for if you remain silent, help and deliverance will rise up for the Jews from another source and you and the house of your father will perish. And who knows if it is not for such a time as this that you have come to the royalty?

The king's secretaries were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews and to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and in their language

You all know that I am not much of a conspiracy theorist and I am not impressed by all those people, both within the house of faith and outside in the world, who spend their time sniffing around looking to uncover secret global societies and their nefarious plots to bring about world

domination. However, over and above all this silliness and all the urban myths which pollute the internet, we need to acknowledge that there is a plot to overthrow world governments and achieve global domination. It is under the direct control of the adversary of our souls who hates Jews and Christians with a burning passion that will never subside until he is finally defeated at our L-rd's glorious return.

In the story of Esther, Haman hatches his evil plot for the genocide of the Jewish people on the first of Nisan, which is the same day when Moses proclaimed to Pharaoh the death of the Egyptian first born if he did not release our people from slavery. The enemy hates to be reminded of past defeats and he selected a day which proclaimed our people's liberty to decide upon which day we would all be liquidated.

It gets worse, on the day before the Passover Seder was to be celebrated, these letters proclaiming our people's planned destruction, were also sent out. He wanted to turn the day when we remember our great deliverance into a day when we would remember our people's complete destruction.

So our enemies had just under a year to plan for our destruction and Esther had to figure out a plan to thwart these evil intentions and give our people enough time to prepare for their defence and for the destruction of those who wanted to destroy us. The whole drama unfolded in a period of just over two months and our people were given adequate time to prepare to do to our enemies what our enemies had planned to do to us.

Instead of resulting in the destruction of our people, a close reading of Esther reveals that many people throughout the Persian Empire converted to Judaism, in perhaps as great numbers as those Egyptians who escaped with our people. The descendants of both groups of converts increased the number and the genetic diversity of our people and we are privileged to have two annual festivals which celebrate our people's deliverance.

Over the centuries there have been many plots to destroy the Jewish people and they are inspired by the same enemy who has been hounding us since the covenant promises were first given to Abraham. He will continue to conspire against us until the day when our Messiah shall return to establish G-d's eternal kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. His unrelenting attacks will always have a threefold focus: to destroy us, to destroy our faith and to destroy our spiritual morality.

He will try to infiltrate our ranks and sow deception and dissension and we are seeing it in the rise of so many theologically liberal synagogues and churches. The lie of evolution is now as well accepted as the truth about creationism was before the turn of the last century.

Sexual promiscuity and abortion have all but won the heart of popular culture and calls for the destruction of the Jewish people are on the rise again, especially in Muslim countries of the Middle East which are also continuing their genocide against their Christian minorities.

In what was once the Christian west, Christian faith is being eclipsed from the inside and criticized from the outside and Jewish people are not being spared the onslaught of these moral and theological Trojan horses. Amidst the rising tide of secularism, there is also a rise in the number of pernicious cults which want to overthrow traditional faith and replace it with a twisted version that has little or nothing to do with what the Bible teaches. This is also true within the

ranks of Judaism.

We must admit that our adversary is doing a good job in his three pronged attack and at this season of Purim, we need to ask ourselves how we should respond to this very sophisticated and well-orchestrated triple assault on us and our faith.

The title which I selected for my meditation says that nothing can separate us from the love of G-d in our blessed Messiah. In the rising tide of spiritual hostility we first need to understand that the final control of our blessed Messiah will always trump the attacks and incursions of the adversary and his henchmen. When Pharaoh plotted our demise, G-d raised up Moses and Aaron to guide us out of slavery and bring us to the Promised Land; when Haman plotted our genocide, the L-rd raised up Mordecai and Esther to thwart the evil plans of Haman.

I am not happy with the direction our society and our world are heading in, but I must never let my complete confidence in our Saviour be shaken or undermined by the gathering apostasy which is darkening the world. When Mordecai was made aware of Haman's plot, he reminded Esther that her positioning as the chief concubine was brought about for such a time as this. There is no direct mention of G-d throughout the book, because at this time His name was increasingly considered too holy to be directly referred to even in Mordecai's exhortation to his niece.

Once we realize that nothing and no one can separate us from the love of G-d in our blessed Messiah, next, like Mordecai and Esther, we understand that we are placed where we are for such a time as this. So despite all the plots and schemes which are brought against us by the henchmen of our adversary, the timing and the placement of G-d still trump all the activity of the enemy. So instead of being fascinated by all the schemes and plots which are always going to be formulated against us, we have to ask ourselves how it is that G-d would have us respond to it all from wherever it is we are located.

In our Messiah we have been given an agenda to fulfil which is to be salt and light as we talk about our Messiah to a dying, darkening world, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. We are called to dialogue with people who are spiritually blind and not to be awed or threatened by the complicated, sophisticated plots which are being hatched against us.

As long as we see things through the lens of the Scriptures and as long as we respond according to this same mandate, we will overcome our enemies, even through times when great numbers of us may suffer persecution and pay the ultimate fate for our faith and our morality. This is such a small price to pay in light of eternity!

Lastly, I feel sorry for those people who seem to think that we will be suddenly spirited out of danger just before the final confrontation with the forces of the adversary and his antichrist. The whole scenario of a literal seven year final tribulation and a literal thousand year reign by believers on earth before the last battle, when the enemy is unchained for a short time, does not have the support of the Scriptures. And when things do not unfold as too many believers feel that they must, there will be a lot of disappointed, confused believers trying to survive a very traumatic time which they thought they would be exempt from. Do not be deceived!

G-d never exempts His people either from trials or temptation, He shows us how to overcome and endure as part of what it means to walk with Him. I find both the survival of the Jewish

people and their constant persecution as the template for how G-d will continue to deal with His people worldwide, both Jew and Gentile.

While He will never leave us nor forsake us, large numbers of our ranks will fall away from Him and abandon the faith as they are sucked back and assimilated into the world. There will always be a constant warfare between the children of light and the children of darkness and yet these troubling times will always function under the control and protection of the L-rd who will always permit us to go through them. Trials and tribulations are part of the furnace He uses to perfect our faith and remove all dross and imperfections from our hearts and lives.

We should count it all joy when we fall into trials and temptations of any kind, not because we have a death wish or because we enjoy the pain and sorrow we shall encounter, as if we were spiritual sadomasochists; we count it all joy because of the victory we experience going through the trials and temptations and because of the ways of escape which He will always provide us with.

Noah and his family were spared the total destruction of the world by taking sanctuary in the ark and riding out the storms which tore our planet apart for slightly over a calendar year. In the same way the L-rd will shelter us through the spiritual storms which are trying to tear our world apart, but this time He will not just flood our planet, He will dissolve the entire cosmos and create a new heaven and a new earth.

So I am not afraid of any supposed islamification of the western world and the threats of increased terror attacks worldwide do not really frighten me. These misguided souls are only victims who have fallen under the influence of the great adversary.

And as long as I do not suffer a similar fate by also coming under this same malicious influence, I shall become more than a conqueror, whether I live to fight on, proclaiming the truth, or whether I lose my life in defence of the One who holds my eternal soul safely in the palm of His hands.

In our Messiah it is always a win-win scenario, not because we escape from any trial or are spared from any temptation, but because there is no one and nothing which will be able to separate us from the love of G-d in our blessed Messiah.

You see, in the grand scheme of things we are truly dead with our Messiah and our life is hidden with Him in glory and we are on a generational pilgrimage towards that glory. It may be our lot to stand up and speak out like Mordecai and Esther and it may be our lot to wallow in the grinding slavery of Egypt until the time of our deliverance arrives.

This is the message of Purim – we are always placed where we are for such a time as this and even when they fed us into ovens or burned us because of our faith, we were on the winning side. This is because the only defeat which has any consequence before our King and Saviour is spiritual defeat and I talked to you about that last week.

I refuse to allow my faith to be eaten by the birds of doubt – I am not an evolutionist and hold firmly to the clear teachings of the Scriptures, whether to do so is deemed politically correct or not. Those who succumb to the false Gospel of relativistic humanism or evolutionary materialism have become dupes of the trash of the adversary as they stumble around in the

dark, looking for life on other planets and evidence for the big bang which never happened.

I also refuse to let myself lose my roots in the rocky soil of temptation and become part of the revolting sexuality which is falsely called a sexual revolution. I also refuse to sell out my spiritual birth right for a potage of materialistic lentils which promises me instant gratification and personal power beyond my wildest dreams. It never profits any man or woman to gain the whole world and lose their soul.

This is closely related to the choking weeds where the cares and pleasures and riches of this world render believers sterile and permanently immature in the true things of G-d. We could all be run over when we are crossing the street or succumb to some new super bug or lose our shirt in yet another economic crash. Our country could be invaded or bombed into submission and we will definitely not be able to prevent our children and our grandchildren from encountering deadly spiritual enemies who will try to lead them away from saving faith in our Messiah.

There are also so many fun and interesting things to do which could distract us from consolidating our spirituality as the primary focus of our life's time and energy and G-d will never spare us from having to face any of this by virtue of having come to faith.

Purim proclaims our victory in and through trials because greater is He who is in us than He who is in the world and all the trials and temptations we could ever encounter are nothing more than crown fodder which we can use for His glory as we build up treasures for the life which is to come, where neither thief nor moth nor politically correct vultures can break in and steal that which we have committed to Him against that day.

We have always lived on the edge of eternity and the last days began when our L-rd rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven and they will end the moment He leaves the Holy of Holies to bring about the final cosmic meltdown of this sorry universe we inhabit. In the meantime, whenever we live and wherever we live and whatever we are going through, it is our privilege to participate in the cosmic struggle for the souls of all mankind, as we stubbornly determine to remain salt and light and to keep trusting in the One who endured such opposition against Himself, so that He could teach us to do the same as we build up an eternal weight of incomparable glory, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Chag Purim, campers. May His inseparable love be the place we take shelter as we delight in the storms of life which He brings our way as we move from glory to glory in His grace and love and peace. Amen.