

The Message of Purim Today

Shalom Aleichem, Haverim. This is the fourth year that I, Mordechai ben Ya'ir, of the tribe of Binyamin, have shared my story and the story of my heroic niece, Hadassah, better known as Ester, with this Fellowship, as we have celebrated Purim, the Festival of Lots; most of us are familiar with the story behind Purim, however, not all of us are aware of Purim's message for us in the 21st Century. Ask any Jewish person who Haman was and s/he will respond immediately. If they are younger and have no inhibition, you may need to cover your ears. There is no question of the story of Purim being well ingrained into the minds, hearts and collective memories of my people. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of the rest of the human race. Our task, as Messianic Believers, is to inform the world the time of Haman has not passed and that we have and will face many Hamans, before the Second Coming of Yeshua HaMashiach, the Messiah, the King of Kings.

Pray our hearts will be open to hearing the story of Mordechai, Esther/Hadassah and, especially, Haman.

The story of Esther and Mordechai will be told in its entirety this afternoon, after Oneg; I do hope you brought your groggers and other noise-makers. If not, we have some for you. You will need them.

What is a Haman? Moving away from the initial context of Purim and the Assyrian conquest of Judah, the Jewish people have witnessed the rise and fall of many Hamans, over the centuries. Each age has seen its Haman emerge as a threat to the existence of Jewish people and to their supporters. Just within the 20th and 21st Centuries, we have witnessed the rise and fall of Adolf Hitler, the

madman who attempted genocide against the Jews of Europe, and Joseph Stalin, whose attacks of systematic starvation against the Ukraine were focused on the large numbers of Jews who lived there. Indeed, it is estimated over a million Jews died in the Stalin Pogrom.

There are several ways in which the spirit of Haman lives with us today. A Haman is one who wishes to exterminate, enslave or otherwise entrap the Jewish people for no other reason than they are Jewish. This is anti-Semitism at its most virulent, a disease of the mind implanted and inflamed by hasatan in his vitriolic attempts to destroy Adonai's Chosen People and, therefore, annul the promises of Adonai Elohim Tzivaot to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov.

The spirit of Haman lives in those who would draw believers from their trust of and faith in the One True God, through false teachings and illegitimate authority. And they can be so seductive, so smooth in their approach. Be aware, I urge you, of Adonai Yeshua's warning to us, found in Matthew 7, *Beware of the false prophets! They come to you wearing sheep's clothing, but underneath they are hungry wolves!* ¹⁶ *You will recognize them by their fruit. Can people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?* (Matthew 7:15,16)

When Queen Esther told her cousin Mordechai to prepare their people for the threat of massacre, Mordechai, according to the ancient rabbis, gathered all the children of the region and taught them Torah and the culture of their people. During this period of time, some 3,000 years ago, the study of Torah was outlawed in the diaspora; children lost their sense of Jewishness, called today Yiddishkeit, and really had no understanding of their heritage. Unfortunately we see this happening today amongst our people, many of whom do not know Torah

and have little understanding of the rich heritage which has come to them from many centuries of struggles faced by Jewish people around the world. I look to my own grandchildren who are being raised in secular, non-spiritual homes, without an understanding of the rich heritage into which they were born. And this grieves me sorely.

However, Adonai Elohim has given us guidelines for survival, based in the study of Torah, as we read in Proverbs 4: *My son, pay attention to what I am saying; incline your ear to my words. Don't let them out of your sight, keep them deep in your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to their whole being.* (Proverbs 4:20-22) and, in Proverbs 9 we find: *For with me (Torah), your days will be increased; years will be added to your life.* (Proverbs 9:11) Before we go further, do I need to remind you the study of Torah is insufficient for these promises to come to fruition? When Adonai caused these words to be scribed by Solomon, He meant more than just studying, He meant doing. All along, our great Abba wanted us to be doers of Torah, applying the lessons of God's life instructions to our lives. When we lose sight of the guidance and instructions of Torah we enter into trouble and strife, as evidenced by many throughout the world who have ignored the life-giving guidance found within Adonai's life manual. For example, the instruction to show love to your neighbour, found in Leviticus 19:18, is further reaching than the obvious desire to ensure the safety of our neighbours; contained within this life instruction is the foundation of fellowship and community welfare. If we concern ourselves with the welfare of our neighbours, regardless of their ethnicity or beliefs, we are ensuring the sanctity of not only our community but also our society. I find no coincidence in

the arising of Hamans in almost every generation in which my people have forgotten their covenant with Adonai Tzivaot and no longer fulfill their commitment to show love to their neighbours.

In our generation, we have seen the rise of many Hamans; counted among these have been Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani, the past and current presidents of Iran, Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas, the past and current presidents of the Palestinian Authority and countless others within and outside the Middle East.

What I have encountered in my life is the reality of the spirit of Haman alive and well in our society today. This spirit has become generalized from the experiences of the first Haman to our generation and has come to mean a spirit of rejection, of abandonment, of ridicule and of harm upon others, merely for the perception of not being respected or treated with the dignity and status one believes to hold, either through an office or through a recognized accomplishment. This is a spirit of division and acts to divide and ultimately destroy community. We often see this spirit flourishing within churches, synagogues and, indeed, potentially within any spiritual-based fellowship. Why does this occur?

Donald Arthur Carson, a Montreal born pastor, teacher and prolific writer, shares with us his understanding of the rise of the spirit of Haman within our congregations today, from his work, *For the Love of God: The one whose spirit has been captured by Haman has his focus on power. It is not enough for him to be rich and powerful; he must be richer and more powerful than others. Doubtless some readers suppose that such temptations do not really afflict them, because they*

do not have access to the measures of wealth and power that might make them vulnerable. This is naive. Watch how often people, Christian people, become unprincipled, silly, easily manipulated, when they are in the presence of what they judge to be greatness. One of the great virtues of genuine holiness, a virtue immaculately reflected in the Lord Jesus, is the ability to interact the same way with rich and poor alike, with strong and weak alike. Beware of those who fawn over wealth and power and boast about the powerful people they know. Their spiritual mentor is Haman.

Indeed, we read in James 2, *Suppose a man comes into your synagogue wearing gold rings and fancy clothes, and also a poor man comes in dressed in rags. If you show more respect to the man wearing the fancy clothes and say to him, "Have this good seat here," while to the poor man you say, "You, stand over there," or, "Sit down on the floor by my feet," then aren't you creating distinctions among yourselves, and haven't you made yourselves into judges with evil motives?* (James 2:2-4) Beloved, when we show partiality to those who are more attractive, have better clothes or have more appealing personalities, we are demonstrating the spirit of Haman is within us, for the thin edge of the wedge is as dangerous as the wide part, which holds the door to sin wide open.

Rav Sha'ul speaks to us very clearly of the seductive nature of the Spirit of Haman, as he writes in Colossians 2, *Watch out, so that no one will take you captive by means of philosophy and empty deceit, following human tradition which accords with the elemental spirits of the world but does not accord with the Messiah.* (Colossians 2:8) There are those who visit us regularly and try to seduce us into joining different cults within the city and the province. Some of these will

attempt to entice you to turn over all your assets to them, assuring you they will provide for your every need. Others will lead you away from the true spirit of Messianic Worship and into a legalistic image following Torah. They are very smooth. We must always be on our guard against these cultist philosophies for, by following them, we run the risk of sacrificing our souls and the salvation for which Adonai Yeshua gave so much.

In Matthew 24, Adonai Yeshua warned us, *(M)any will come in My Name, saying 'I am the messiah' and they will lead many astray.* (Matthew 24:5) It is interesting to find in Talmud the following comment, *Our rabbis taught that the following would happen during the seven years, the end of which the Son of David is to come. . . . (amongst other events) the Torah will be forgotten by its talmidim.* (Sanhedrin 97a) Could it be we are in that seven year period now, given so many of my people have moved away from Torah and to the rulings of the rabbis?

Through the years we have witnessed many false teachers come among us. Each has proclaimed to have been anointed by Adonai Elohim Himself and, therefore, lays claim to be a messiah. In the 19th and 20th Centuries we have seen the likes of (a) Charles Taze Russell, who ushered in the Jehovah Witnesses, a cult which claims Adonai Yeshua is actually the Archangel Michael, even though he retains the Name Jesus, and denies the existence of the trinity, (b) Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, Mormonism; this cult believes and promotes Adonai Elohim is actually an exalted human, with a physical body of flesh and bone. They also believe Adonai Yeshua's death and resurrection has paved the way for adherents of all faiths to achieve immortality and (c) the church of scientology, founded by L. Ron Hubbard, which teaches the exact nature of

Adonai Abba is determined by each individual person, the nature of Adonai Yeshua is fully human, without universal divinity and in the reincarnation of the soul. Each of these cults has a common theme, Gnosticism, the collection of false theologies and doctrines which draws people away from the true nature of our Beloved Abba, our Blessed Saviour and the Holy Spirit of God.

How might we recognize the spirit of Haman amongst us? The spirit resides within anyone who seeks to have or actually uses power and control to manipulate people into doing what s/he desires. Have you ever been faced with or overheard these particular plays for power - *If you take this action, we will withhold our tithes and offerings, submit to me, or you won't have a spiritual covering and If you don't see it my way, I will just pull out and you can deal without me and all the work I prepared I will keep?* Each one of these comments represents a person who thirsts after power and will stoop to intimidation and coercion in order to achieve or hold onto power and control, as did the Agagite Haman.

Rav Sha'ul, in 2 Corinthians 10, warns us, *For although we do live in the world, we do not wage war in a worldly way; because the weapons we use to wage war are not worldly. On the contrary, they have God's power for demolishing strongholds. We demolish arguments and every arrogance that raises itself up against the knowledge of God; we take every thought captive and make it obey the Messiah. And when you have become completely obedient, then we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience.* (2 Corinthians 10:3-6) In his letter to the Assembly in Corinth, Rav Sha'ul is teaching the Kehilah how to battle against the spirits of rebellion, of arrogance and how to take them captive and force them to

be obedient to Adonai Yeshua and His commands. These spirits often reside in those who would be authoritative but lack the legitimacy. Thus we must always be wary of those who falsely claim to be authoritative but lack the legitimacy of authority.

How do we recognize them? Once again, Rav Sha'ul provides us with a clear example of illegitimate authority, in the figure of Kefa. In Galatians 2, Sha'ul shares his encounter with the disciple Kefa: *Furthermore, when Kefa came to Antioch, I opposed him publicly, because he was clearly in the wrong. For prior to the arrival of certain people from [the community headed by] Ya'akov, he had been eating with the Gentile believers; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he was afraid of the faction who favored circumcising Gentile believers.* (Galatians 2:11,12) How does Kefa's behaviour indicate illegitimate authority? Sha'ul claims by giving into the intimidating tactics of the Judaizers, Kefa was betraying his commitment to both Adonai Yeshua and to his family of believers. Kefa was an authority figure, assuming he was the Apostle Kefa or assuming he was a teaching disciple. As such, by betraying Adonai Yeshua's ethical standards, he moved away from his position of legitimate authority to one of illegitimate authority. He needed to be brought to task by Rav Sha'ul.

Dr. Paul Elliot, of Teaching the Word Ministries, has paraphrased Rav Sha'ul's reprimand of Kefa with the following: *you are submitting to an illegitimate authority, and in doing so, you are playing the hypocrite. Worse yet, in submitting to this illegitimate authority you are denying the truth of the Gospel. So brother Peter, I must confront you - not on my own authority, but on the authority of Scripture.* And so must we all. When we observe one of our brothers or sisters in

Messiah displaying an allegiance to an illegitimate authority, we have the duty and the obligation to rebuke her or him, in love, and to provide guidance and assistance in moving out from the influence of that illegitimacy. If we shirk this responsibility then, by omission, we are condoning the illegitimate authority and we are equally responsible for the consequences. Does that seem harsh?

Ya'akov, in James 14 says to us, *So then, anyone who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it is committing a sin.* (James 4:17) As well, in Isaiah 59 we are told, *Rather, it is your own crimes that separate you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he doesn't hear.* (Isaiah 59:2) Beloved, are we willing to suffer the wrath of our Holy Abba because of fear of rejection, embarrassment or any other self-centred concern we may have which prevents us from acting, from stepping out in trust and helping a loved and respected brother or sister also step away from the consequences of following false teachers and false messiahs? Are we willing to betray our love for Him and our commitment to His Word by ignoring our responsibilities to our brothers and sisters in Messiah?

I urge all of us to look at these questions seriously, for our futures as well as the future of those within our mishpachah are at stake. Ask Adonai Elohim Tzivaot for the courage and the integrity to stand up to false messiahs, teachers and authorities and stand up for Adonai Yeshua and His teachings.