



Shabbat Zakhor
Samuel 15:1-34
March 14, 2014 / 12 Adar II 5774

In this week's haftarah, the great Samuel, prophet, priest, and judge commands King Saul, the first king of Israel, in the name of God to wipe out all the Amalekites -- men, women, children, and even their farm animals.

Obviously, this passage raises a very serious question: how could God command us to perpetrate genocide against an entire group of people ?

What could have occurred that would lead a man of God to command us to wreak a mini-holocaust against other people? Believe it or not, we know the answer to that question. It began when the Israelites were leaving Egypt with Moses, and we were attacked for absolutely no reason by the Amalekites, a fierce war-like people living in the area of southern Canaan near the Sinai Wilderness. Even worse, they did not attack us where we could defend ourselves, but instead opted to attack the rear of the marching line where the most vulnerable people were -- the very old and the very young, the sick, the weak, and the exhausted.

Moses tells Joshua to organize a mini-army, and they defeat the Amalekites in short order. God now tells Moses that He will wage an eternal war against Amalek and ultimately blot out any memory of them. [see Exodus 17:8-16]

I believe that revelation is on-going. Every time we see a problem in our sacred texts, and are able to resolve it to our spiritual satisfaction, God reveals Himself anew.

Amalek represents the most savage, the most bestial, the most sadistic instincts of the human race which express themselves especially against innocents. The Amalekites are long gone, but their evil outlook and outrageous acts of evil still remain active -- even in our modern world. And extreme evil will continue to exist until the coming of the Messiah and the acceptance of God's kingdom universally.

Jewish tradition ascribes to Haman Amalekite lineage. He was ready to destroy an entire Jewish population because he had a grievance against one prominent Jew. Communism, Nazism, and Islamic terrorism represent the Amalekites of more recent times.

There are those who see only the positive motivations behind these evil movements, and ignore the evil acts that go hand in hand with these ideologies. But we as Jews know full well that

whatever good intentions exist behind evil movements, the evil fully cancels any positives that can be seen and ultimately does great harm to innocent people.

As Jews, we do not want to be ruthless or cruel. We don't delight in hurting innocent people. For that very reason, there can be no compromise with evil. It must be uprooted and completely destroyed. Any efforts to reach an accommodation with evil will not moderate wicked people or resolve unjust claims and demands. It only makes of us silent accomplices in acts of great injustice or even crimes against humanity.

We can only pray that the government of Israel and Jews throughout the world now and always will remember these facts of life.

The author of this week's commentary, Rabbi Gary G. Perras, is the spiritual leader of Temple Israel, Daytona Beach, FL. He is a native of Baltimore and a graduate of Johns Hopkins University and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Rabbi Perras is active in interfaith and community programs. He has served as president of the Jacksonville Ministerial Association, and as president of the Mandarin Clergy. He has participated in several TV programs in Jacksonville, and has lectured as an adjunct professor at the University of North Florida.