

# Who and Where is Amalek Today?

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March 8, 2011



The Midrash relates: Cursed are the wicked. They occupy their time with ideas about how to destroy the Jews, with each one vying for the honor of having the best idea. Esav ridiculed Cain for killing Abel during Adam's lifetime. If Cain wanted the whole world for himself, he should have realized that Adam was still alive and could have more children. Esav was not going to make that mistake. He would wait until Yitzchok's death and then kill Yaakov. Later, it was Pharaoh's turn to laugh at Esav. Didn't Esav know that Yaakov could have children before Yitzchok died? Nothing would be gained by killing Yaakov if he had offspring that would survive him. Pharaoh thought himself smarter than Esav. He would kill every Jewish male at birth. Centuries later it was Pharaoh's turn to be thought a fool, by Haman. Didn't

Pharaoh understand that even if one Jewish male remained he could father the nation anew? Haman's plan was to kill them all!

The Midrash concludes by teaching that in the future, Gog and Magog will deride Haman. Didn't Haman know that the Jews have a Father in Heaven Who will never let them be destroyed as long as they do His bidding? So they will first do battle with God by keeping the Jews from observing the Torah and mitzvot. This will enable them to destroy the Jews. But God's response to this is clear: "I have many messengers whom I can send into battle. But the war against Gog and Magog I shall wage Myself. Their destruction shall be complete" (Esther Rabbah 7:23.)

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Today, though Amalek definitely and unfortunately exists, we cannot say with certainty who, or where, all of them are. However, there is a noteworthy exception. When Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany visited Jerusalem during his journey to the Holy Land almost all the religious leaders of Jerusalem came to the city gates to greet him. Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (d.1932), the spiritual leader of Ashkenazic Jewry in Israel at that time, did not go. When asked about his refusal he answered that although the Kaiser himself was deserving of the honor bestowed upon him, "I have a tradition that Germany is Amalek."

#### The Amalek Within

Our Sages teach that God says to the Jews, "If you do not remember Amalek, you will be sent back to the bondage of Egypt" (Pesikta Rabati 12). This is exhibited frequently on a personal level. The modus operandi that Amalek has always used in attacking the Jews can be described in a word: Devious. He gets the international community embroiled in some sort of political or military conflict for example, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait or he gets Jews to engage in some worthy cause "civil rights" all with one goal in mind: The annihilation of

the Jews. Amalek has the same numerical value (240) as "safek", doubt (B'nei Yissaschar, Purim). The Amalek that is omnipresent today are the questions and doubts that we have regarding our faith. This includes the uncertainties, confusion and troubles we face when we lack proper direction and advice. When we strengthen ourselves in true faith in God, we overpower the Amalek within.

Reb Noson writes that Amalek corresponds to burning lust, the strife between husband and wife, between a person and his community and the hatred directed against the true tzaddikim (Likutey Halakhot, Minchah 7:20).

An additional aspect of Amalek that is prevalent today: False leaders.

"The Torah writes, [Amalek] smote the hindmost among you" (Deuteronomy 25:18). Our Sages teach: "[Amalek] separates the tails and throws them high (Tanchuma, Ki Taytze 10). Reb Noson writes: "Amalek found a clever way to destroy the Jewish nation. 'He takes the tails,' people of little or no stature and 'throws them high' makes them into Jewish leaders (Likutey Halakhot, Shabbat, 5:9). Thus, the Jewish people have been fooled into thinking that their leaders are men of stature when in reality many of them are ordinary people who lack the ability to guide. A nation without proper leaders is easily misled, and so many unsuspecting and misguided Jews end up living a life devoid of real Jewish meaning.

Yet another face of Amalek that plagues us today is forgetfulness (ibid., Aveidah u'Metzia 1:3). We forget God's goodness, the countless times He's helped us in many ways, large and small (ibid., Nachlot 4:12). This leads to our forgetting about God, the Torah and mitzvot, and even the Mashiach, who will bring

the Ultimate Redemption. Perhaps, since Amalek represents forgetfulness, we're instructed to remember what he did. Even though we don't know which individuals today are

Amalekites, the mitzvah to remember the evil, ruthless and cruel behavior they personify, remains. This mitzvah is fulfilled when we recite the passage in Deuteronomy 25, verses 17-19. This is done communally on the Sabbath preceding Purim. Some have a custom of saying these verses daily (see Sha'ar HaKavannot, Inyan Yotzer Or, p.119)

Ultimately, Amalek will be destroyed. He will be set upon by thieves who will leave him penniless (Tana d'Bei Eliyahu Raba 24) Then God Himself will battle Amalek, exposing him for the sinner that he is before removing him from the face of the earth (Tana d'Bei Eliyahu Zuta 19). May this take place quickly, in our lifetime, Amen.