

# Faith Matters: With anti-Semitism again rising, narrative of the Book of Esther 'shines forth as a beacon'

Festive holiday of Purim celebrates the escape of Persian Jews from annihilation, writes Moshe Meirovich

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On Tuesday, the festive holiday of Purim will be observed by worldwide Jewry.

At the heart of the Purim story, Haman, a dignitary in the court of the king of the Persian empire, spouts his vitriolic and toxic anti-Semitic declaration against the Persian Jewish community. His mission is genocide.

As Rabbi Hillel Millgram writes in his contemporary, work “Four Biblical Heroines and the Case for Female Authorship”: “The type of anti-Semitism encountered in the Book of Esther is the simple or primary form of the disease: a rejection of the Jew not because of what he does or believes, but simply for what he is — different; an alien ... The Jew, as Jew is ‘other’ and thus must be rejected, expelled or annihilated. This racial matrix becomes the foundation upon which all later, ‘secondary’ forms of anti-Semitism will be based. For the racial anti-Semite there is but one ‘solution.’

“There is no way a Jew can cease to be a Jew, and so long that a Jew exists, the ‘Jewish problem’ is of necessity a ‘final solution.’

“It is this that Haman proposes and attempts to implement. It is this that 19th-century anti-Semitism will revert, to find its purest form in Nazi ideology and practice. In this sense, Esther is the most relevant of books.”

Today, we witness the resurgence of anti-Semitism throughout the globe — including our beloved Canada — reflecting the infamous July 10, 1933, photograph of Joseph Goebbels, Nazi propaganda minister, on the front page of Time magazine.

In a nutshell: The Jews are to blame. As he articulated, “If you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it, and you will even come to believe it yourself ... a lie told once remains a lie, but a lie told a thousand times becomes the truth ... the essence of propaganda consists in winning people over to an idea so sincerely, so vitally, that in the end they succumb to it utterly and can never escape from it ...”

Thus, Purim reminds us of whatever shape anti-Semitism manifests itself, both in its overt forms and in its more subtle and insidious manifestations, we must confront it head-on. This scourge of anti-Semitism anchored in the Book of Esther continues to reverberate even in our time.

In the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: “The hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews.”

Consequently, the narrative of Esther shines forth as a beacon reminding us of the eternal mandate to be ever vigilant in the face of this pernicious evil.