

It's very interesting that the Men's Club is helping with your service tonight, because one of the things that Men's Club is most known for is the Purim Carnival which is happening next week, because the Torah portion for this week is tied to the Purim story.

This week is called Shabbat Zachor, and it has got some juicy history to it. We don't really talk about this during the Passover story, and, well, it never made it into the "Ten Commandments" or "Prince of Egypt" movies. In fact, the movie this story reminds me most of was the new "Star Wars" movies, you know – the Phantom Menace. Humor me for a bit, Your Honor, I'll get there.

You all know the Passover story. If you don't were getting there in a few weeks. But, on the way out of Egypt, the Israelites were attacked by the people of Amalek. We were tired and beat up, and had been marching through the desert, and these Amalekite bad-guys attacked us from the rear. Real cowardly stuff. Never made it into the movies though.

But, the book of Exodus relates that Joshua fought against the Amalek under the inspiration of Moses, and he mowed them down with the sword. How cool is that, right? However, the people of Amalek were not destroyed totally and Moses was ordered to write in a document that we'd better remember what the Amaleks did to us.

In fact, they even included it in the big scroll – the Torah – so they wouldn't forget about it, and it says "Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt, how, undeterred by the fear of Gd, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, when the Lord your Gd grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your Gd is giving you in a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!"

How's that for a sticky note right in the middle of the Torah for when we get to Israel? Make houses, set up the temple, unpack the boxes, unload matzoh from the donkeys, and then blot out the Amalekians? It's like Gd's little "Welcome Home: To Do List" for Israel. In fact, the first King of Israel, Saul, was given the command to wipe out the Amalekites, man, woman, and child and animals – but he spared the king and a lot of their riches.

But you may say to me, Todd, what does this have to do with Purim? More importantly, what does this have to do with Star Wars? (You, in the front row, wake up – say it: how does this have anything to do with Purim?) I'm glad you asked.

Well, hashtag: plot twist. It turns out that our old point-headed buddy Haman (*Pause*) was a descendant of Amalekians and that's why Uncle Mordechai didn't want to bow down to him. Haman hated the Jews because we tried to wipe out his great-great-grandfather, and Morechai hates Haman because Haman's great-great-grandfather started the whole fight when we were busy escaping from Pharaoh, and we had enough on our plate at the time.

So, when we talk about Purim, we've got some classic, old, enemies. They each had their own mind set. A lot of stuff happened off-stage. When you look it at this way, it becomes like Star Wars the Phantom Menace. You know, the one with Jar Jar Binks?

Haman might be a genocidal maniac hell-bent on wiping out the Jews, but like Darth Vader you at least now know that he had his reasons.

The Rabbi wasn't messing around when he gave us this portion this week. We've got some pretty big themes here: We've got an Order in the Torah to "blot out the memory" of a people.

So, whenever, I'm in a bind, whenever I have troubles, and I need to figure out something, I say to myself, "what would the Rabbi do?"

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, boychiks and Shayna maidels, I am going to go somewhere that no Men's Club President has dared to go. I am going to go right to the Rabbi's turf, I am going to talk about the Civil War. (This is the part where you all go: ooooh)

To me, this whole problem started because of Gds orders: "you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!" Nobody stopped and said, now hey Gd? What do you mean about this whole blotting thing? What's that all about?

Its all about understanding your orders. Now, look out, here comes the Civil War:

Henry Heth (HEETH) was a Virginian who came from a family tradition of military service. His grandfather fought in the American Revolution and his father fought in the War of 1812. President John Tyler gave him an appointment to West Point. Unfortunately, Heth wasn't much of a student and graduated last in his class at West Point in 1847. Nice guy that Heth by all accounts, but not exactly the brightest candle on the menorah, if you know what I'm saying. Nonetheless, he was eventually given command of a Division in Gettysburg.

On June 30, 1863, Heth had apprized, his boss, General Lee that he believed his army could win a fight in Gettysburg. He said there did not be any enemy force in significant numbers in the area. Lee advised Heth, to "ascertain what force was at Gettysburg, and if he found infantry opposed to him, to report the fact immediately, without forcing an engagement." General Lee was telling Heth not to fight. But, Heth did not understand, did not ask for clarification, and began a fight with the Union Army. This started the largest battle of the Civil War – the Battle of Gettysburg. If Henry Heth didn't understand his Orders from General Lee, he probably should have asked.

So, when Gd told the Israelites to blot out the Ameleks, did Gd mean to slaughter every man, woman, child and animal? I don't think so. Like Henry Heth, we probably needed to clarify our orders. It doesn't sound like the forgiving Gd that I've heard about. I think that "blotting out their memory" meant for when the Jews finally got settled in Israel that we were to work harder and better and smarter than anyone around us and in this manner bad guys like the Amalek's will be forgotten by history. This is really the worst punishment Gd can give. Totally being wiped out and being turned into a footnote in history. I mean that's really bad. Been to a good Amalek restaurant lately?

Remember, the Amalek's attacked from the rear. We didn't see them coming. We weren't paying attention. So, when the Torah now tells us to "Remember the Amaleks" I think it is giving a very clear message, that as Jews, we need to work hard, work smart, and to always be vigilant as to what's going on around us, and may the Force be With You.

Shabbat Shalom