

Esther, Chapter Five

– מגילת אסתר, פרק ה –

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THE ETERNAL MESSAGE

Chapter 5 of Megillat Esther is a key bridge in the storyline between chapters 4 and 6. In chapter 4, we read of Esther's hesitancy to follow Mordechai's instructions to go uninvited to the king, due to the inherent life-threatening danger should the king not acknowledge her with his golden scepter. At Mordechai's behest, Esther prepares to carry out her mission. She understands the importance of *Achdut Yisrael* (the unity of the Jewish people) to her mission's success and asks Mordechai to convene all the Jews to fast together with her for three days before she approaches the king.

Chapter 5 then describes Esther coming before the king, who stretches out his scepter, understanding she would not take such a risk if it were not important. Esther invites King Achashverosh and Haman to feast with her. She then ducks Achashverosh's request to tell him what she wants but sets the stage for a second feast the following day, also with Haman. Haman, filled with joy at his apparent further rise in stature, second only to the king, then spots Mordechai, who doesn't bow to him in respect. Haman's joy turns to fury and he returns home to consult with his wife Zeresh and his advisors. Zeresh advises him to get the king's permission to immediately hang Mordechai on a 50-cubit-high gallows so he, Haman, can go to Queen Esther's feast with the king in the proper joyous state of mind.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with the Haman's downfall and execution and the Jews' subsequent salvation. Thus, the events in chapter 5 symbolize the beginning of *Am Yisrael's* escape from the evil decree. Taken on its own, one could not know that such a process had begun.

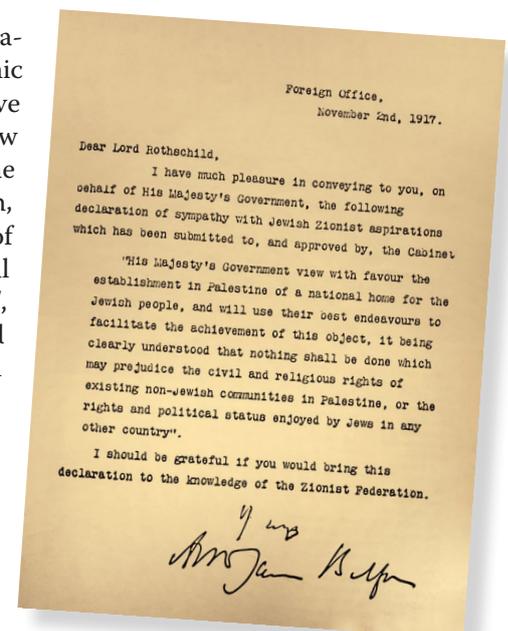
This is also true of the process of our national salvation and redemption in our own times.

Verse 5:8 reads: "If I have found favor in the eyes of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I shall prepare for them tomorrow, and I shall then do as the king asks (to reveal my request)." This event is the beginning of the end for Haman and the 'moving up a gear' in the salvation process. By itself, we cannot predict the outcome, but for perceptive people of faith, future developments can be clearly foreseen.

At the time of the Balfour Declaration (pictured) in 1917, some rabbinic leaders failed to see the redemptive process unfolding while others saw the future with clarity. Relating to the aforementioned verse in the Megillah, the renowned *Admor*, Rav Shmuel of Sochatchov, author of the seminal nine-volume work *Shem MiShmuel*, gathered his leading *chassidim* and quoted the commentary of the Ibn Ezra on this verse: "And tomorrow I shall do as the king asks" (in reference to Esther revealing her request). Rav Shmuel pointed out that on the first day, Esther held back because she did not yet see a sign from Above that it was time to reveal herself and her request, but on the second day, after King Achashverosh had ordered Haman to bestow the king's supreme honors upon Mordechai, Esther's heart was strengthened to go ahead. The Sochatchover Rebbe continued that the Balfour Declaration too was a sign from Heaven that we are in the period of *atchalta deGeula*, the "Beginning of the Redemption," and one should not make light of it. The Chafetz Chaim (as

quoted by his son in his book *HaChafetz Chaim*, printed in 1937) also perceived the Balfour Declaration to be "a heavenly sign regarding the forthcoming redemption of Israel."

Therefore, reading chapter 5 is a reminder to us all to faithfully recognize G-d's great miracles transpiring all around us as the Redemption gets ever closer.



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