

Living in a Walled City

The opening Mishnah in *Tractate Megillah* teaches us that the Megillah is read on different days depending on one's location. Those who reside within a walled city from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun read the Megillah on the fifteenth day of Adar, while those who live in all other cities (except for Shushan) read the Megillah on the fourteenth day of Adar. The Ramban, *Megillah 2a*, is very puzzled by these unique laws. We never find that one particular mitzvah has two different time frames within which to fulfill the mitzvah. If the Torah itself never calls for such a distinction, why should a rabbinic holiday such as the festival of Purim allow for any deviance? Furthermore, the Talmud in *Tractate Yevamot 14a*, derives from the words "Lo Titgodedu" (Deuteronomy 14), that we should not allow the practice of noticeably different halachic customs, lest it give the appearance of there being two Torahs. Yet the Talmud is very clear that the Megillah is read on two very different occasions; why does this particular mitzvah require two time periods?

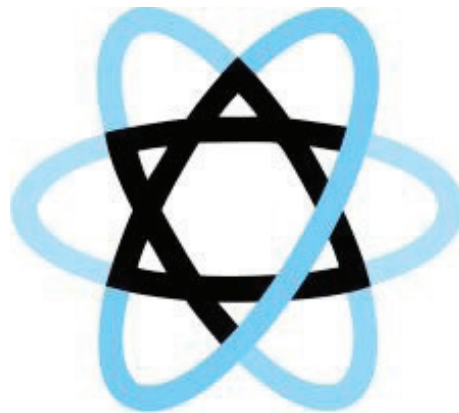
The Ramban suggests several approaches to understanding this unique halachah. In one explanation, he explains that the Jews of the walled cities did not fear impending violence because they felt safe and protected in their towns. Only the inhabitants of the unwalled cities felt the dangers of being exposed and open to foreign invasion. These people, who survived the potential



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onslaught on the thirteenth day of Adar, understood that they had just witnessed an incredible miracle and recognized the need to celebrate on the fourteenth. However, those in the walled cities, who were unafraid from the very onset of the original public announcement, were not convinced that they needed to celebrate until Mordechai and his court ordered the enactment of the festival for them as well. Because they were unafraid of any danger, their festival remains secondary to those in the unwalled cities, and therefore is not observed until the following day, the fifteenth day of Adar.



YAVNEH
ACADEMY

The Ran, *Megillah 1a*, questions the Ramban's assertion that the walled cities did not experience the same miracle as those in the unwalled cities. He rightfully claims that the wall would only have provided protection from any outside invaders, but what protection would a wall have provided against the dangers from within their own city? Certainly, there was a risk from inside their own cities from their very own neighbors and fellow residents. These Jews could very easily have been murdered by their neighbors within the walled cities. There was no less danger to the residents of the walled cities than to those of the unwalled cities. They too should be observing Purim on the fourteenth day — why should there be any distinction between walled and unwalled cities?

Perhaps the answer to the Ran's question lies in a sad statement of Jewish reality. The Jews within the walled cities certainly should have feared the dangers from within their walls as much as from outside their walls. Yet the reality is they did not. They felt safe and protected by their neighbors and gentile friends. They never envisioned that their very own friends, acquaintances, and colleagues would turn on them and murder

them. However, as history has proven repeatedly, this is pure fantasy, and the tragic fallacy of Anti-Semitism. Far too often we have sought shelter and sanctuary from our non-Jewish neighbors, and far too often they have failed to deliver. From the Inquisition to the Holocaust, the Crusaders to pogroms, the message of “*Al tivtichu b’ndivim*, do not trust in princes” (Psalms 146) rings awfully loud and terribly tragic. The Jews should not have trusted their neighbors and they should have realized the dangers from within the wall, but they did not. They thought they were safe and did not realize the magnitude of the miracle that G-D had performed for them.

The Chiddushei HaRim, R. Yitzchak Meir Alter (the first Gerrer Rebbe, cited in *Siach Sarfei Kodesh* pg. 219), suggests an alternative homiletic interpretation to understand the Ramban. The Rebbe explains that these two different locales don’t refer only to places, but actually to different types of people within the Jewish community. Those that live within the walled cities from the time of Yehoshua refer to those within the Jewish communities who feel secure in their faith and protected by their trust in G-D. These Jews understood that the impending disaster was a result of their willingness to bow down to Haman. The Jews of

the “walled cities” never considered bowing down to a mere mortal like Haman. In their eyes, sacrificing their life for G-D’s honor and dying a martyr’s death was not to be dreaded, but rather eagerly anticipated much like the famous tale of Rabbi Akiva’s martyrdom. They never feared sin before and never feared death now. It is only the people of the unwalled cities, those who lacked this impenetrable moral fence and felt no security in their religious beliefs, who felt fear. It is these Jews, who were tempted to placate Haman and acquiesce to his demands in the name of self-preservation, who feared the impending decrees of annihilation. For these Jews of the unwalled cities, their salvation on the thirteenth was cause for immediate celebration on the very next day. However, because the Jews of the walled cities weren’t fearful of sin, nor of dying a martyr’s death, they felt no need to declare a festival and therefore their festival remains secondary and delayed until the fifteenth.

According to this interpretation, it is understandable why a walled city is determined to be walled only if its wall dates back to the time period of Yehoshua bin Nun. At first glance this condition seems to be completely arbitrary; why should the time be determined by Yehoshua’s era over

any other period in history? Is there any connection between Yehoshua and walls? Is he somehow intrinsically related to the festival of Purim? The Rebbe explains that the verse (Shmot 33:11) describes Yehoshua as the young lad who never left the tent. He was the very epitome of “living within the walls.” He was a man who would not and could not have been tempted to worship a mortal. He did not have mortal fears of failure or death, because his life inside his tent was a purely spiritual existence.

Today we live in unwalled cities. While we do not face a constant physical threat, we certainly face a spiritual threat. This danger comes both from within our communities and from the culture and society on the outside. While there is no way to ensure that we and our families will remain safe and secure in these volatile times, we can look to Yehoshua for inspiration. His timeless message to us is to create our own tent and never leave it. A tent is unique in that it allows access to and interactions with the outside world, yet it still provides comfort and security. We can engage with the world around us, yet still remain rooted and protected within the secure and protective walls of our personal religious tents.



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