

## **Bible and the Headlines: The Hangman**

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In the last election the term “Nazi” was used to the point of nausea. This week a real Nazi is making headlines. Or rather, the man who stopped a real Nazi is in the news.

On November 27th the Jerusalem Post proclaimed, “Shalom Nagar, Executioner of Nazi War Criminal Adolf Eichmann, Passes Away at 86.” The Post article gives only two sentences to Nagar. It reports, “Nagar hanged Eichmann . . . in 1962 . . . the only time that an Israeli court had given a death sentence.” Eichmann is the real focus of the article which states, “Eichmann was one of the key figures responsible for the Holocaust’s ‘Final Solution’ . . . a principal actor in . . . deporting Jews to death camps.” Snippets of the Nazi’s trial transcript help illustrate why Israel made an exception to their ban on capital punishment.

The BBC on November 28 carried, “Hangman of Nazi War Criminal Adolf Eichmann Dies.” The article notes an ironic task Nagar performed for Eichmann in the months before his execution: Nagar was Eichmann’s food taster to prevent someone poisoning the Nazi before his execution. As if to answer the question ‘How could a person be the executioner of someone he risked his life to protect?’, the article states, “Nagar . . . was chosen for the task [to be the hangman] and did not volunteer.”

The New York Times December 5th edition contained, “Shalom Nagar Dies; Reluctant Executioner of Adolf Eichmann.” The article explains that Nagar was one of 22 Sephardic Jewish men chosen to guard Eichmann. His supervisors believed Sephardic men were less likely to have relatives who died in or survived Nazi death camps. Nagar told the warden he did not want to be an executioner, “Then he [the warden] took me and several other guards and showed us footage of how the Nazis took innocent children and tore them to pieces.” This exposure allowed Nagar to pull the lever on the gallows when the time came.

The Bible contains many examples of state sanctioned attempts to exterminate the Jews. The example closest to Hitler’s Final Solution is in Esther when Haman conceived of a plan for “. . . the death and destruction of all Jews, young and old, little children and women, on the same day” (Est 3:13). Like Eichmann, Haman was hanged on the gallows (Est 7:10).

During the time of the judges, two Midianite kings carried out a small pogrom at Tabor (Jdg 8:18). Gideon captured these two kings, but unlike Eichmann’s Sephardic jailers, all the Tabor victims were relatives of Gideon (Jdg 8:19). Gideon initially chose a reluctant executioner: “Turning to Jether, his oldest son, he said, ‘Kill them!’ But Jether did not draw his sword, because he was only a boy and was afraid” (Jdg 8:20). Gideon executed the two kings himself (Jdg 8:21).

As October 7, 2023 taught Israel and the world, there are still evil people bent on the destruction of the Jews. The Israeli army has already visited justice on some of those who planned the attack. This week’s news of Nagar’s death is a good time to ask whether Israel would execute any of the October 7th attackers captured alive? Let me suggest what someone from Texas would tell the Israelis, “The government does not carry the sword for no reason. It is God’s servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does evil” (Rom 13:4).