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OU ISRAEL FACULTY

Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

בס"ד

Faithfulness in the Face of Adversity

Although we conclude our study of Megillat Esther and continue with Sefer Daniel, the latter actually preceded the former in chronological sequence. Daniel was exiled along with the Judean elite under King Yehoyakim, prior to the destruction of the First Temple, while the story of Esther takes place at the dawn of the Second Temple Era, some seventy years after the destruction. Could Daniel have lived to witness the miracle of Purim?

Hazal certainly think so. According to the gemara, we find hints of Daniel's presence in two different incidents in the Megillah. In the first chapter of Megillat Esther, when Achashverosh assembles his seven advisors to determine Vashti's fate, the seventh among them is Memuchan, who advised that Vashti be eliminated and a decree issued throughout the empire that wives must obey their husbands. The Targum Sheini interpolates that Memuchan was Daniel, to whom it had been revealed by Heaven that Vashti was to be put to death. The Targum goes on to explain that Daniel had been given an aristocratic Persian woman as a wife (whom he had presumably converted), and she refused to converse with him in Hebrew. We will see throughout Sefer Daniel how firmly committed he remained under all circumstances

to maintaining his identity. His wife's refusal to make Hebrew the language spoken in his home was undoubtedly a constant source of grief to him, and Daniel seized the opportunity to rectify the situation while fulfilling the prophecy that had been revealed to him.

The gemara (Megillah 15a) places Daniel in a later episode. When in response to Haman's evil decree Mordechai appeared at the palace gate dressed in sackcloth and ashes, Esther sent her servant Hatach (התך) to Mordechai demanding to know what had prompted his behavior. Rav identifies Hatach as Daniel, who had been cut down (חתכוהו) by Achashverosh from the position of greatness he had held under previous emperors. Shmuel concurs with Rav's identification, but offers a conflicting reason: Daniel was called Hatach because all matters of the kingdom were decided (נחתין) by him. This approach is echoed in the Targum to the Megillah, in which the verse is translated as: "And Esther summoned Daniel, called Hatach for all royal decrees were articulated by him, and sent him to Mordechai."

After Hatach faithfully relayed the initial messages back and forth between Esther and Mordechai, the language of the text changes abruptly, and Hatach seems to disappear. "And *they* told Mordechai" of Esther's reluctance to appear before the king without having been summoned. The Targum interpolates that Haman noticed Hatach/Daniel coming and going before Esther; he became enraged by his easy access to the queen and slew him. The angels Michael and Gavriel were then summoned and completed the mission. The gemara offers

a different explanation, suggesting that Daniel refused to relay Esther's hesitation to Mordechai so as not to be the bearer of bad tidings.

The medieval Spanish commentator Avraham Ibn Ezra posits that this identification is implausible. In his opinion, Daniel would have been at least fifteen years old when exiled to Bavel, since he is described as having knowledge of all disciplines. By Ibn Ezra's calculation, Daniel would have been around 120 years old at the time of the Purim story, making his presence a highly unlikely scenario. Rather, Ibn Ezra suggests that Hazal intended to draw a comparison between Hatach and Daniel, implying that Hatach was as faithful as Daniel, who was incomparably righteous in his generation.

Hazal offer one more suggestion as to Daniel's concealed identity in a later generation. In the first chapter of Sefer Ezra, King Cyrus entrusted the plundered treasures of the First Temple to Sheshbazzar (ששכבצר), a prince of Yehudah who was returning to Eretz Yisrael to rebuild the Temple. Rashi, citing a midrashic teaching, explains that Sheshbazzar was in fact Daniel, called by this name to indicate that he had survived six challenges (שש צרות). This would place Daniel in Eretz Yisrael during the period between Sefer Daniel and Megillat Esther, and would require that we assume he later returned to Persia to be of service to the Jewish community in exile when the building of the Temple was blocked by Achashverosh, as Ralbag suggests is true of Mordechai, who is also listed among the returnees to Israel. It should be noted that as observed by Ibn Ezra, Daniel would have been of advanced age in this era and it is significant that the midrash identifies him as still serving in a leadership capacity, respected both by the secular political powers and the Jewish community.

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characteristic of Daniel is his absolute loyalty to the Jewish faith, determined to act as Hashem expects of him without regard for personal consequences. It is perhaps most striking that in the role of Hatach, he navigates between Mordechai and Esther and their conflicting approaches as to how to handle Haman's decree, with Mordechai advocating for absolute reliance on Hashem's power to intercede miraculously and Esther preferring patience and diplomacy. Having braved the lion's den rather than cease praying to Hashem, his refusal to relay Esther's hesitation may have stemmed from his own feeling that such an approach was inadmissible. Ultimately, Daniel, Esther and Mordechai all serve as outstanding exemplars of commitment to Torah and to the Jewish nation in the face of the challenges of exile. ■

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program

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