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Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

בס"ד

Masa'ot and Meaning

As we study the Masa'ot of Yeshayahu concerning the ultimate destruction of a series of world powers, we are guided by the same two questions that direct our study of Nach in general: What was the message of the Navi to his generation, and what was his message for the future that warranted the inclusion of these prophecies in Tanach? To further complicate the issue, many of the nations addressed by Yeshayahu in his Masa'ot did not exist in Yeshayahu's own times, and/or no longer exist today. How could their destinies occupy a role so significant that they merit no fewer than ten chapters of our holy Scriptures?

Many of the commentators ask to whom these prophecies of Yeshayahu were directed. There is no indication that Yeshayahu left Yerushalayim and its environs to deliver these messages to the nations of whom he spoke. It is reasonable to assume that word of Yeshayahu's prophecies of doom and destruction did reach the relevant empires even in those days before the advent of social media, but that does not seem to be his primary concern.¹ Thus we have to assume

that the Navi's message was intended for his Jewish audience, then and now.

Speaking several generations before the destruction of Yerushalayim and the Mikdash and the exile of the Jewish people, Yeshayahu directs our attention to the universal. We do not, nor are we intended to, live in a vacuum. Every nation has a role to play on the international stage, with Israel at its center. While the light of Torah is meant to radiate outward from Yerushalayim to the nations of the world, as Yeshayahu taught earlier, the nations of the world are summoned to serve as messengers of Hashem and instruments of His providence over Israel. The Navi demands that we see ourselves not only within the confines of our own communities, insulated from the reality surrounding us, but that we engage with that reality and learn from it.

Furthermore, the Navi projects a long view of the historical process. Even if our present situation is one of war and existential threats, such an outlook enables us to confront the challenges of the present with Emunah and Bitachon. Rav Soloveitchik, zt"l, taught that a Jew lives with a sense of time-awareness. "To exist as a Jew means to be at the juncture of past and future, of that which is no longer real and that which is not yet real. Our mission is to live in both dimensions."² The key to living such a life is the study of Tanach,

1. There are several examples in Tanach that demonstrate that nations outside of Israel were aware of prophecies delivered only within Yerushalayim; for example, when Nevuzaradan released Yirmiyahu from prison

at the time of the Churban he expressed awareness of Yirmiyahu's prophecies concerning the city.

2. Festival of Freedom, p. 177

An apocryphal story is told of Napoleon passing by a synagogue on the night of Tisha B'Av and observing the Jews inside sitting on the floor in darkness, crying bitter tears. When he asked what tragedy had befallen the community that caused them to cry so bitterly, he was told that they were mourning the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years earlier. Napoleon purportedly responded admiringly, "Any nation that still mourns the destruction of its homeland after 2,000 years will surely see its rebuilding."

In Orot HaTehiyah, Rav Kook zt"l taught: "Our path in the national life and its orientation vis-a-vis the general human relation is very long... We are great, and great are our mistakes and therefore great are our troubles, but great also are our consolations."³

Living with a sense of eternity, with an awareness of our connection to both the past and the future, enables us to experience the present with a greater sense of purpose. May we merit to soon see the fulfillment of Yesha-yahu's prophecies, and until then be inspired by them to live a meaningful life. ■

3. Orot, Orot HaTechiya 5

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

In the **OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi series**, which just began it's fourth cycle, women scholars deliver a daily shiur on the books of Prophets (Neviim) and Writings (Ketuvim) at the pace of a chapter a day. Shiurim are geared toward learners of all levels who would like to participate in the two-year Nach Yomi study cycle. Visit the **OU Women's Initiative** to register for additional content.

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