

**SEFER DANIEL**  
**By Rav Yaakov Medan**

**Shiur #22: Sefer Daniel – 13b**  
**The Final Vision (continued)**

**3. The Revelation**

I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, his loins girded with fine gold of Ufaz. And his body was like beryl, and his face like the appearance of lightning, and his eyes like torches of fire, and arms and his feet the color of burnished brass, and the sound of his words was like the sound of a multitude. And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, and the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide. And I alone remained, and I saw this great vision, and I had no strength left in me, for my comeliness was altogether corrupted, and I had no strength. And I heard the sound of his words, and when I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face towards the ground. And behold, a hand touched me, and set me trembling upon my knees and the palms of my hands. And he said to me, "Daniel, greatly beloved man – take heed to the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." And when he spoke this thing to me I stood trembling. And he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and to humble yourself before God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words." (*Daniel* 10:5-12)[1]

The text does not elaborate on the identity of Daniel's companions here.[2] From the text we gather that the men who were with Daniel sensed the presence of the angel but could not see him, nor were they able to define what it was that they sensed. This was primarily a negative experience for them – a fear that led not to an elevation of spirit, but rather to flight. Their experience recalls the reaction of Bil'am's donkey upon being confronted with the angel.[3] The donkey does not tell Bil'am that an angel is blocking its path; it does not know this. It recoils and seeks to flee, not knowing why. It asks Bil'am two questions, but utters no answers. Similarly, Daniel's companions are left with an unpleasant experience of fear, with no revelation.

Their situation also recalls the experience of Elifaz, when he hears the vision of retribution in the story of Job:

"A word was secretly brought to me, and my ear received a whisper of it. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when sleep falls upon men, fear came upon me, and trembling, and it struck fear in my bones. And a spirit passed over my face, causing the hair of my flesh to stand on end. It stood still, but I could not

discern its appearance; a form was before my eyes; I heard a small voice."  
(*Iyov* 4:12-16)

However, despite the threatening feeling at the start, Elifaz does experience – along with the fear – something of the content of the revelation, and this makes his experience of it a positive one.

The Revelation at Sinai could likewise have remained a terrifying experience and nothing more, had God not revealed Himself with the light of Torah. In the verses leading up to the Revelation, we read of feelings of fear in response to the darkness and the heavy cloud. But *Am Yisrael* did not flee. The nation waited courageously and full of faith for the Revelation from within the light. *Chazal* teach that during the Revelation the nations of the world, and even animals, experienced a sort of inexplicable terror, like that felt by Daniel's companions.

Perhaps this explains the fear that seized Yaakov when he suddenly, in the middle of the night, took his wives, his children, and their entire camp over to the other side of the Yabbok, with no indication in the text as to why he did so. Why did he awaken in the middle of the night? Why did he lead his camp over to the other side of the Yabbok? An inexplicable fear hovered over the camp because of the presence of the angel. But only Yaakov meets the angel, face to face, for a struggle which concludes with the revelation of blessing.

We might suggest that Daniel embodied a higher level of holiness than his companions did, and therefore he was worthy of a revelation giving him strength and consolation. However, it may be that he was worthy of the revelation because he had genuinely mourned over the fate of the Temple and over the fate of the redemption of Israel, which was suddenly halted during the reign of Cyrus; perhaps it was this that earned him the words of comfort from the angel.

A final point with regard to the revelation:

And I heard the sound of his words, and when I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face towards the ground. (10:9)

The sleep here is not the result of weariness. It is the result of terror, closer to a faint than it is to sleep. It seems that the deep sleep that came upon Avraham, at the Covenant between the parts, is to be understood in the same way:

And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Avram, and behold – a dread, and a great darkness, overcame him. (*Bereishit* 15:12)

The dread of the visions of exile – specifically, according to the literal text, the Egyptian exile – is the reason for his deep sleep. During this sleep, God reveals Himself to Avraham and also tells him about the redemption that will come about after the harsh

decrees. The covenant that God forges with him is what strengthens him and puts him back on his feet.

Let us now consider the Revelation at Sinai:

The Zohar teaches that the ancient pietists would remain awake all night [on Shavuot] engaged in Torah study, and this has become the custom among most Torah scholars. Perhaps this can be explained on the literal level of the text – because they slept the whole night, and the Holy One, blessed be He, had to wake them, as we learn in the *midrash* – therefore we must repair this. (*Magen Avraham, Orach Chayim* 494, introduction.)

It would seem that the *midrash* about Am Yisrael sleeping and the Holy One, blessed be He, having to wake them up, may be explained in a similar manner. This was not the sleep of apathy or weariness. It was a deep sleep induced by the terror of night with the mountain burning with fire, the darkness, and the heavy cloud. God emerged in the morning like a groom coming to greet His bride – whose heart, a moment before the “wedding,” is understandably filled with fear along with joy – in order to encourage them and awaken them to the goodness and light that come with the Torah.

#### **4. The End of the Persian kingdom**

Then he said: “Do you know why I have come to you? Now I shall return to fight with the guardian angel of Persia, and when I depart from him, behold, the guardian angel of Greece will come. But I shall tell you that which is inscribed in the writing of truth, and there is no one who holds strong with me against these, except for your guardian angel, Michael. And I – it was in the first year of Darius the Mede that I stood to be a supporter and a stronghold for him. And now I shall tell you the truth: behold, another three kings shall arise for Persia, and the fourth will be far richer than all the others, and when he grows strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece. (10:21-11:2)

The revelation starts by talking about the anticipated victory of Macedonia-Greece over Persia, such that it will inherit the position of the greatest of empires. According to the literal text, four more kings will rule over Persia, and the fourth will fall at the hands of the Greek empire. Together with Cyrus, then, who is already on the throne at the time of this vision and is not counted among the four, there will be five Persian kings until the victory of the Greek empire.

This number does not conform with the count of Persian kings according to the tradition of our Sages, nor does it match their number according to accepted historical research.

We have already noted that according to historical scholarship, there were ten kings of Persia.<sup>[4]</sup> Let us briefly review them. (We shall note their years according to the

Christian count, since there is no conformity over this period between the Hebrew year count and the historical approach under discussion):

Cyrus B.C.E.	538-530
Cambysis	530-522
Darius I (known in <i>Tanakh</i> as the "Persian Darius" or more generally as "Darius the Great")	522-486
Xerxes (widely, but not universally, identified with Achashverosh)	485-464
Artaxerxes I (the king whose butler was Nechemia and who gave approval to build the walls of Jerusalem. According to Josippon, he was the Achashverosh of the <i>Megilla</i> )	464-424
Darius II	423-404
Artaxerxes II (some claim that he was Achashverosh from the <i>Megilla</i> )	404-359
Artaxerxes III	358-337
Arses	337-335
Darius III (killed by Alexander the Great in battle) B.C.E.	335-332

The Sages enumerate only three Persian kings: Cyrus (Hebrew years 3390–3393); Achashverosh (3393-3407); and Darius (3407-3442).[5] In the Hebrew year 3442, Alexander the Great rose to power, and he reigned until 3448. Indeed, only these three Persian kings are mentioned in *Tanakh*. (Artaxerxes, mentioned frequently in the Books of Ezra and Nechemia, is not the name of an individual king according to the *gemara* in *Rosh Hashana*, but rather a royal appellation meaning “the glorious.” Therefore no "King Artaxerxes" is included in the list.) Darius I was indeed defeated towards the end of his life by the Greeks, at the battle of Marathon (according to historians, in the year 490 B.C.E.). However, it is generally accepted (especially in the writings of the Greek historian of the time, Herodotos) that this defeat did not seal the fate of the Persian Empire, until Darius III was defeated by Alexander at Gaugamela.

Below we shall attempt to reconcile the verses with these two different historical systems.

According to accepted historical research, the simplest explanation would seem to be that the three kings named in our text include Cyrus among them: they are Cyrus, Cambysis, and Darius I. The fourth, who will become greatly wealthy and will awaken the Greek empire, is Xerxes-Achashverosh, who decided to conquer Greece, and was defeated by the Greek armies in the battle of Thermopylae on land and the battle of Salamis at sea (480-479 B.C.E.). The Greek victory was so decisive that it may be considered as having set in motion the process of the gradual decline of the Persian Empire and the rise of the Greek states, until the ascent of Alexander, some 150 years later.

In terms of Chazal's approach, we might suggest that the kings are counted from Darius the Mede, who preceded Cyrus. The fourth and last king would be the Persian Darius, who was defeated by Alexander.

Rashi adds Cambysis to *Chazal's* list of kings, on the basis of his mention by Josippon,<sup>[6]</sup> such that there is no need to start counting from Darius the Mede.

## 5. The Greek Empire

"And a mighty king shall arise, and he shall rule with great dominion, and shall do according to his will. And when he arises, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided to the four winds of heaven, but not for his posterity nor according to the dominion with which he ruled, for his kingdom shall be plucked up for others besides those. And the king of the south shall grow strong, but one of his princes will be stronger than he, and will have great dominion; his shall be a great dominion. And at the end of years they shall join together, for the daughter of the king of the south will come to the king of the north to make an agreement, but she shall not retain the power of her arm, nor will he stand strong, so she shall be given up, and those who brought her, and those who gave birth to her, and he who strengthened her at that time. But one shall arise and stand from a branch of her roots; he shall come with an army, and shall enter the fortress of the king of the north, and shall deal against them, and shall prevail. And he shall bring into captivity to Egypt also their gods, with their princes, and with their precious vessels of silver and gold, and he shall desist for some years from attacking the king of the north. But he shall come into the kingdom of the king of the south, and shall return to his own land. But his sons shall be stirred up and shall gather a multitude of great forces, and one shall surely come, and overflow, and pass through; then he shall return and stir himself up, to his stronghold. And the king of the south shall be moved with anger, and shall come forth and fight with him, with the king of the north; and he shall set forth a great multitude, but the multitude shall be given into his hand. And the multitude shall be carried away, and his heart shall be lifted up, and he shall cast down tens of thousands, but he shall not prevail. For the king of the north shall against set forth a multitude, greater than before, and shall surely come after some years with a great army and with abundant supplies. And in those times many shall stand up against the king of the south, also the renegade among your people will exalt themselves to fulfill the vision, but they shall stumble. So the king of the north shall come and cast up a mound, and seize a well-fortified city, and the arms of the south shall not withstand it; and his chosen people – they too shall have no strength to withstand. But he who comes against him shall do according to his own will, and none shall stand before him. He shall stand in the land of beauty, and in his hand shall be destruction. And he shall set his face to enter with the strength of his whole kingdom, but he shall make peace with him, and he shall give him the daughter of women to destroy it, but she shall not stand, nor be his. After this he shall set his face to the isles, and shall take many, but a captain shall put an end to his insult, and furthermore shall cause his insult to return to him. Then he shall

set his face towards the strongholds of his own land, but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found. Then there shall arise in his stead one who shall send a collector of taxes to pass through the glory of the kingdom, but within a few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger nor in battle. And in his stead there shall arise a contemptible person, upon whom the honor of the kingdom had not be conferred, but he shall come in securely and shall obtain the kingdom by flattery. And the force of the flood shall be swept away before him, and shall be broken – even the prince of the covenant. And after the treaty made with him he shall work deceitfully, and he shall come up and become strong with a small people. He shall enter securely the fattest places of the province, and shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his father's fathers; he shall scatter prey among them, and spoil, and riches, for he shall devise schemes against the strongholds, but only for a time. And he shall story up his power and his courage against the king of the south with a great army, and the king of the south shall stir himself up to battle with with a very great and mighty army, but he shall not stand, for they shall devise schemes against him. For those who eat of his food shall destroy him, and overthrow his army, and many shall fall slain. And the hearts of both these kings shall be to do mischief, and they shall speak lies at the same table, but it shall not prosper, for the end is yet to come at the appointed time." (11:3-27)

Daniel describes here, in minute detail, the history of Greek rule in *Eretz Yisrael*. The details are surprisingly accurate, and Abravanel uses this as proof of the power of his prophecy. Whether or not we accept this, for every detail of the vision there is a real corresponding historical event. We shall examine some of the more important developments for our discussion.

The "mighty king" (verse 3) is Alexander. The empire will be given to his successors (verse 4), and these are the king of the south (Ptolemy and his dynasty, who ruled in Egypt, emerging from there on their conquests), and the king of the north (Seleucus I and his dynasty, who ruled over Syria and the lands of the Tigris and the Euphrates). These – the kings of the north – would conquer *Eretz Yisrael* at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E. from the hands of the Ptolemies<sup>[7]</sup> (verse 5). The alliance of the king of the north and the king of the south through marriage ties (Berenice, daughter of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, married Antiochus II in 252 B.C.E. following the Second Syrian War – 259-253 B.C.E.) did not last, and all were put to death (in 246 B.C.E., as plotted by Laodice, Antiochus II's first wife and the mother of Seleucus II; she objected to her children being deprived of their royal inheritance. All this is hinted to in verse 6). The successor – Ptolemy III, son of Berenice from the "south," Egypt – took revenge on Seleucus II, son of Laodice from the north, and prevailed against him (verses 7-8). The children of Seleucus II – Seleucus III and, later, Antiochus III – fought back against the king of the south (Ptolemy IV Philopator), until the battle of Raphia (Rafiach, Gaza) (217 B.C.E.), where the king of the south prevailed, but ultimately Antiochus III would defeat Ptolemy V Epiphanes (at the battle of Gaza, 201 B.C.E. – verses 10-15) and conquered *Eretz Yisrael* (198 B.C.E.). This Antiochus sought to extend his rule over Egypt, by having his daughter Cleopatra marry Ptolemy V (193 B.C.E.), but his plan

failed (verse 17). He set his sights on Turkey and Greece, and conquered them (196-191 B.C.E. – verse 18), but was dealt a blow by the Roman Scipio in the year 190 B.C.E., at Magnesia; he set off for Elam and was killed there (187 B.C.E., verses 18-19). He was succeeded by his son, Seleucus IV (187-175 B.C.E), who sent his minister Haliodorus to plunder the Temple in Jerusalem; his minister assassinated him shortly afterwards (verse 20). Thereafter, Seleucus's brother, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (170-168 B.C.E.), arose with his terrible decrees against the Jews (verse 21). His deputy, Andronicus, murdered the *Kohen Gadol*, Chonio III (Onias) (verse 22). Antiochus IV then went on to conquer Egypt from the hands of Ptolemy VI, through cunning (170 B.C.E.) (verses 23-27).

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How are we to understand the presentation of all these details in Daniel's vision? For what reason was he shown all these conspiracies and wars? Perhaps Daniel – whose vision is mainly about the Greek Empire, as we have noted previously – is describing here the feet of the statue that Nevukhadnetzar saw in his first dream, feet that are part-clay and part-iron. As we noted there, clay and iron cannot mix. The conventional understanding of this image is that it refers to the Roman Empire, but we raised the possibility that this was meant to symbolize the split Greek Empire – the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. It appears, in light of many details of Jewish history in the Land of Israel in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E., which is the period under discussion, that the allegiances, marriages, poisonings, scheming, betrayals and wars among the two branches of Alexander's successors often led to attempts on their part to involve the Jews in these intrigues and encourage their collaboration. The Jews themselves were consequently divided into factions (such as the Oniads and Tobiads), and this rift became the source of internal struggles among them and schemes to attain power. Thus, the unity of the Jewish nation and the rule of Torah disintegrated, finally leading to the great confrontation between the "keepers of the covenant" and "those who act wickedly against the covenant," as mentioned later on in Daniel's vision. Perhaps Daniel perceives (rightly!) the connection between the external schism and the internal rift, which is the essence of his vision and of his spiritual struggle, as we shall see.

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

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[1] Daniel's prayer has been heard from the time that he decided to fast, and not from the act of fasting; see *Ta'anit* 8b. This may be the source for the teaching (*Yoma* 81b) that eating on Erev Yom Kippur is considered as praiseworthy as the fast itself, since the eating represents the decision to fast, even though the person has not yet begun afflicting himself.

[2] *Chazal* maintain that they were Chaggai, Zekharia, and Malakhi (*Megilla* 3a; *Sanhedrin* 93b). R. Sa'adia Gaon and Rashi concur, as does Abravanel (*ma'ayan* 11, *tamar* 2). It seems most probable that such a description of Chaggai, Zekharia, and Malakhi could apply only in their youth, before they became prophets. Indeed, this prophecy is uttered in the third year of Cyrus, while the prophecies of Chaggai and of Zekharia began only in the second year of Darius – some fifteen years later. Malakhi is an even later

prophet. Although the Gemara makes no mention of it, this theory in no way contradicts *Chazal's* teaching; on the contrary – it explains it. Only on the basis of this hypothesis that we permit ourselves to write as we do below.

[3] See Ramban (*Bamidbar* 22:23): "God's angels are not discerned by means of the sense of sight, for they are not bodies that may be perceived by their appearance. When they appeared to prophets or to people with Divine spirit, such as Daniel, they could be perceived through the intelligent soul, when these people achieved the level of prophecy or the level beneath it. But for the angels to be discerned by an animal's vision is impossible. We might therefore interpret the words, '*va-tire ha-aton*' to mean that the donkey sensed something which intimidated it, [holding it back] from passing through."

[4] Our interpretation of the ten horns of the fourth creature that Daniel saw in his vision in chapter 7 was based on that enumeration. The horn that arises from their midst, we explained, represented the kingdom of Alexander the Great.

[5] From the above-mentioned chronological discrepancy we deduce that the year 3390 was the year of the Return to Zion. From then until the ascent of the diadoches, Ptolemy and Seleucus, Alexander's successors in 3448, there was a period of 58 years. According to the accepted historical account, the year of the Return to Zion was 538 B.C.E., and the year of the ascent of Alexander's successors – 312 B.C.E., a total of 226 years. During this period the two chronological systems do not tally; there is a discrepancy of 168 years between them.

[6] Rashi relies on Josippon elsewhere as well, regarding him as an historical authority even in some instances where it would appear that *Chazal* did not accept his accounts. It is not clear who composed the Book of Josippon, and scholars are also divided as to when it was written (the 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, or 10<sup>th</sup> century). It is clear that the book is based mainly on Josephus, with the addition of rabbinical traditions as well as some popular legends of Christian origin. The Rashba and Ritva (*Rosh Hashana* 3a), in the wake of the Ba'al Ha-Ma'or, add Artaxerxes as a separate king, and even more than one king by this name. Ibn Ezra elaborates at length here, in his own name as well as in the name of R. Moshe ha-Kohen. Abravanel (*ma'ayan* 11, *tamar* 3) includes in his list all the known kings of Persia and argues that *Chazal* did not deny their existence, even though they make no mention of them. Nevertheless, Abravanel remains within *Chazal's* time framework and does not deviate from it. Azaria de Rossi, in his work *Ma'or Enayim*, deviates from *Chazal's* time framework for this period. All this is discussed in detail in our article, "Introduction to the Article by Ch. Chefetz on the Kings of Persia and Media," *Megadim* 14 (5751). Chefetz posits that the three kings after Cyrus are those known today as Artaxerxes II (Achashverosh), Arses, and Darius III.

[7] Antiochus III conquered it from Ptolemy V Epiphanes in battle in the year 201 B.C.E.