

**SEFER DANIEL**  
**By Rav Yaakov Medan**  
**Translated by Kaeren Fish**

***Shiur #27 : Chapter 15 – Conclusion***

Let us now summarize the topics that we covered in our study of *Sefer Daniel*.

In our exploration of chapter 1 of the *sefer*, we noted the decision by the young Daniel and his companions not to defile themselves with the food served in Nevukhadnetzar's royal court, even at risk to their lives. This decision was important in and of itself as a barrier to assimilation at the beginning of the period of exile, since food and other physical pleasures are often the doorway to the social mixing that eventually leads in that direction. Beyond this, however, their decision ultimately became a banner for those who were willing to give up their lives for observance of the commandments of God's covenant and against assimilation into the world of Hellenism, when they were commanded to desecrate the sanctity of food during the period of Antiochus's decrees. Daniel's decision also became, with time, a general rabbinical decree concerning bread, oil, and wine of gentiles. It is possible that the similarity between Daniel's struggle against the royal table and Yosef's battle against the wife of Potifar gave further reinforcement to the example he set for all future generations.

In examining chapter 2, we addressed the meaning of dreams in general, the extent to which dreams reflect a person's pre-existing inner world, and the extent to which a dream is a channel for a message from an upper world that lies outside of man. We discussed the differences between dreaming, a Divine spirit (*ruach ha-kodesh*), and prophecy. We also discussed the level of prophecy that characterized Daniel, in comparison with Yosef, who likewise interpreted dreams. The main focus of our discussion concerned the nature of God's discourse with Nevukhadnetzar via the dream, and why God found it necessary to reveal His plans to the Babylonian king. According to Yirmiyahu, Nevukhadnetzar is "God's servant." As king of the entire world, he needs to know the difference between a mortal kingdom, which is transient, and God's Kingdom, which is eternal and is destined to replace all the mortal kingdoms of this world.

We also discussed the four kingdoms depicted in the dream and the question of how far ahead the future was revealed to Nevukhadnetzar. In this context, we debated the question of whether Rome and Islam were included in Nevukhadnetzar's dream and Daniel's visions. We also addressed the meaning of Daniel's prayer in the wake of his interpretation of the dream, as well as the historical and national significance of his rise to greatness in the Babylonian royal palace.

In chapter 3, we examined Nevukhadnetzar's response to the message of the dream – his construction of the golden image in the valley of Dura. We compared this symbol of omnipotence with the example of Nimrod, and also drew a comparison between Avraham in the fiery furnace and the similar experience of Chanania, Mishael, and Azarya. We addressed at length the halakhic and moral significance of the behavior of these three men and the question of whether the golden image in fact represented idolatry, such that the situation actually required self-sacrifice rather than prostrating oneself before it. This, in turn, was compared with Mordekhai and his refusal to bow down to Haman. We explored the meaning of trust in God in light of the behavior of Chanania, Mishael, and Azarya – could they rely on a miracle and be certain that God would not allow a desecration of His Name?

Our study of chapter 4 dealt with the relationship between the wisdom and the courage entailed in Daniel's interpretation of the king's dreams in accordance with the Divine spirit imbued in him. We discussed the meaning of interpretation of a dream when its interpretation is already present within it. We also addressed the nature of Nevukhadnetzar's sin and the nature of the advice that Daniel offers him in order to spare himself punishment. In what way did Daniel act improperly? What was Nevukhadnetzar's punishment, and why did he suffer it despite Daniel's advice? And what does charity have to do with atoning for sin?

In keeping with the chronological order of events, we then skipped to chapter 7, which describes the four creatures that arise from the sea. Here we concentrated on the question of how far into the future Nevukhadnetzar saw in his dream and Daniel in his visions; our hypothesis is that perhaps the Greek kingdom and the diadochi represent the extent of what Daniel saw, with the ascent of the Hasmoneans who restored the Israelite monarchy and attempted to establish God's eternal Throne. According to this theory, Daniel foresaw neither Rome nor Islam – two major historical developments which presented a considerable exegetical problem to *Chaza* and the medieval commentators. This brought us back to Nevukhadnetzar's dream in chapter 2 and Daniel's visions in chapters 8 and 10-12.

Our discussion of chapter 8 centered mainly around the calculation of the "two thousand and three hundred" that is debated by the commentators, each in accordance with the perspective of his historical period. Once again, we raised the possibility that the vision is speaking of the defilement of the Temple and its vessels during the period of Antiochus and its rededication by Yehuda Maccabi and his brothers.

Returning to chapter 5, we discussed the differences between the attitude of the text towards Nevukhadnetzar and its attitude towards Belshatzar, the relationship between Divine decree and human choice in the downfall of Babylon, and the role of each in relation to sin. We also attempted to follow Daniel's thinking in interpreting the inscription and the background of previous visions which aided him.

Our discussion of chapters 6 and 9 concerned Daniel's prayer in the seventieth year to arouse Divine compassion for Jerusalem in its ruin. We also discussed the decree of Darius's ministers and their deliberate meddling, which reflected a profound hatred of Israel. Without intending to, these ministers presented a test for the exiled Jews and a challenge to their prayers – Daniel's prayer – to attain the necessary level of self-sacrifice to fulfill Yirmiyahu's vision, "You shall seek Me with all of your heart." We discussed the self-sacrifice of prayer in general, and of Daniel's prayer in particular, and its effect on the rest of what we are told in Daniel's visions. We also considered the issue of praying towards Jerusalem even after the Destruction and the significance of the calculation of the "seventy weeks" etc., which the angel revealed to Daniel. Here, too, we adopted a different interpretation to that proposed by *Chazal*, on the basis of the principles set forth above.

In the final vision, we covered a long list of topics. We began with the historical time frame of the vision and the question of who is worthy of experiencing such a vision and achieving a full understanding of it and who merely experiences an oppressive fear and flees, thus missing out on the encouragement that is also part of the message. We also discussed the discouragement that came shortly after the Return to Zion and at the end of the Persian rule. We touched mainly on the Jewish significance of the factional Greek Empire, the internal conflict that it caused amongst *Am Yisrael* and its effects, and the significance of the decrees against circumcision, the study of the Torah, and the observance of the commandments. We considered the meaning of the self-sacrifice entailed in the resistance to these decrees, the upholding of the covenant, and the connection between it and the kingdom of Israel, which arises specifically from these decrees. We also addressed the connection between the self-sacrifice in that generation and the self-sacrifice of Daniel and his companions, who lived hundreds of years prior to Antiochus. Finally, we explored death, which assumes new meaning at a

time of religious persecution, and the defense of the covenant with God specifically at that time. Death declares that God is blessed also in the worlds that lie beyond our own temporary, transient reality. Death – which is itself transient – awaits God's final, definitive response to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, and to all its allies in all the worlds, which seek out sin and the death that comes in its wake. Ultimately, we will merit the realization of the prophetic promise:

He will destroy death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from upon all faces, and shall remove the insult of His people from upon all the earth, for the Lord has spoken it. (*Yishayahu* 25:8)

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