

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

**Shiur #21: Sefer Daniel – 13a**  
**The Final Vision**

**1. Mourning**

The final vision (*Daniel* 10-12) is from the period of Cyrus, the king of Persia, who ascended the throne only a few months after Darius. (According to some traditions, Cyrus was Darius's son-in-law.) Cyrus appears in *Tanakh* mainly in two places. Yishayahu speaks of him in his prophecy:

He Who says of Cyrus, "He is My shepherd, and shall do all that I desire," and Who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be built," and of the Sanctuary, "Its foundation shall be laid." So says God to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held, to subdue nations before him, and to loosen the loins of kings, to open doors before him, and that the gates should not be shut: I shall go before you, and make the crooked places straight; I will shatter the doors of brass, and cut down the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, in order that you will know that I am the Lord who calls you by your name, the God of Israel. For the sake of My servant, Yaakov, and Yisrael, My chosen one, I have called you by your name; I have given you a title, though you have not known Me. (*Yishayahu* 44:28-45:4)

The Book of Ezra opens with the proclamation that Cyrus issues upon assuming the throne:

In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that the word of God by the mouth of Yirmiyahu might be fulfilled, God stirred the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, and he issued a proclamation throughout all of his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying: "So says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth have been given to me by the Lord God of heaven, and He has charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Yehuda. Whoever is among you of all of His people – may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Yehuda, and build the House of the Lord God of Israel; He is the God Who is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left, from any place where he dwelled, let the people of his place help him with silver and with gold and with goods and with beasts, along with a free-will offering for the House of God which is in Jerusalem." (*Ezra* 1:1-4)

Both sources indicate that Cyrus showed kindness towards the Jews and acted as God's emissary – albeit unknowingly – in bringing about the return to the Land and the rebuilding of the Temple. However, this picture does not sit well with two events implied by the chapters we are now addressing in *Sefer Daniel*. Let us consider the verses at the beginning of chapter 10:

In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, [God's] word was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Beltshatzar, and the word was true, and for a long period ahead. And he understood the word and had understanding of the vision. In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, until three whole weeks were fulfilled.<sup>[1]</sup>(10:1-3)

The redemption, the beginning of the return to Tzion, had commenced. The Temple had started to be rebuilt. Things seemed to be happening as the angel Gavriel had foretold to Daniel following his prayer (chapter 9). Why, then, is Daniel mourning? How can he maintain three weeks of mourning in the month of Nissan? Moreover, at the conclusion of his mourning, he experiences a vision on the 24<sup>th</sup> of the month – indicating that his period of mourning included the seven days of Pesach!<sup>[2]</sup>

Furthermore, when an angel comes to comfort Daniel in his mourning, he speaks the following words of consolation:

Then said he to me: “Fear not, Daniel; for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come because of your words.<sup>[3]</sup> But the guardian angel of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days – but behold, Michael, one of the chief angels, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to make you understand what will befall your people in the end of days, for the vision is for the days yet to come.” And when he had spoken these words to me, I set my face toward the ground, and became dumb. And behold, someone with the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth, and spoke and said to him that stood before me: “O my lord, because of the vision, my pains have come upon me, and I have no more strength. For how can this servant of my lord talk with this my lord? For as for me, there remains already no strength in me, nor is there breath left in me.” Then again one with the appearance of a man touched me, and strengthened me. And he said: “O greatly beloved man, do not fear. Peace be unto you, be strong and be resolute.” And when he had spoken to me, I was strengthened, and said: “Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.” Then he said, “Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight with the guardian angel of Persia, and when I depart, the guardian angel of Greece shall come.” (10:12-20)

The consolation that Daniel receives is the battle that Michael will wage against the guardian angel of the Kingdom of Persia. Later on in the vision, Daniel is informed of the downfall of the Persian Kingdom. This, again, would seem to undermine the view of Cyrus as a king who is favorably disposed towards the Jews.

Perhaps the key to our question lies in the following *gemara*:

R. Abahu said: Cyrus was a good king; therefore his [years] were counted, like the kings of Israel... Nevertheless, this leaves us with a difficulty. R. Yitzchak said: There is no difficulty: One place is speaking of [his situation] before he turned against [the Jews]; the other place is speaking about after he turned against them. (*Rosh ha-Shana* 3b)[4]

The "turning against" on Cyrus's part may be related to the description in *Ezra*, immediately after the building of the Temple began:

When the adversaries of Yehuda and Binyamin heard that the children of the captivity were building a Sanctuary for the Lord God of Israel, they drew near to Zerubavel, and to the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esar Chadon, king of Assyria, who brought us up to here." But Zerubavel and Yeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel, said to them, "You have nothing to do with us in building a house for our God; rather, we ourselves together will build for the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, has commanded us." Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Yehuda, and harried them in their building, and hired advisors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus, king of Persia, until the reign of Darius king of Persia. And in the reign of Achashverosh, at the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Yehuda and Jerusalem. (*Ezra*4:1-6)

The text then records the accusations submitted to the kings of Persia, as well as their result:

So the work of the House of God which is Jerusalem, ceased; and it was suspended until the second year of Darius, king of Persia. (4:24)

The commentators are divided as to the identity of the king who suspended the building of the Temple. The *midrashim*, too, offer differing opinions in this regard. One possibility was that the decision was taken by Vashti and Achashverosh,[5] based on the verse cited above: "And in the reign of Achashverosh, at the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Yehuda and Jerusalem" (4:6). This is the approach taken by Ibn Ezra.[6] To this view, Cyrus remains a righteous king, and the accusations did not influence his policy towards the Jews and the Temple in any way.[7]

We shall follow the approach of Rashi (in his commentary on *Daniel* 10:1, as well as on *Ezra* 4:5 and 7:23) and the above *gemara* in *Rosh ha-Shana*, both of which maintain that it was Cyrus himself who cancelled the license which he had given the Jews to build the Temple, retracting the magnanimous proclamation issued at the start of his reign. This development is reminiscent of the Exodus from Egypt, which began with Pharaoh's full agreement (even though this was extracted by virtue of the plague on the first-born):

He called to Moshe and to Aharon by night, and he said, "Arise, go forth from among my people – both you and *Bnei Yisrael* – and go and serve the Lord as you have spoken. Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have spoken, and be gone, and bless me also." (*Shemot* 12:31-32)

After sending them away, Pharaoh regretted his move and pursued them with a view to leading them back to Egypt. Perhaps one of God's aims in conducting matters in this way was to instill amongst *Bnei Yisrael* the knowledge that their deliverance had not come about by virtue of a mortal, foreign, pagan king, but rather was owing to God in His war against Pharaoh at the sea. A similar aim may have brought about Cyrus's retraction of his good will, and the promise by Michael, head of the heavenly angels, to wage war against the Persian army.<sup>[8]</sup>

In any event, according to this view, Cyrus changed his mind about supporting the building of the Temple, in the wake of pressure applied by the adversaries of Yehuda and Binyamin, who had been excluded from participation in the project by the heads of the returnees – Zerubavel, son of Shealtiel, and Yehoshua son of Yehotzadak. The construction was halted for eight years, after the first row of stones had already been laid. It was renewed at the instruction of the prophets Chaggai and Zekharia, in the second year of Darius, without any royal permit. King Darius retroactively approved the continuation of the building and lent his support.<sup>[9]</sup>

## 2. The Timing

The revelation comes on the 24<sup>th</sup> of the month of Nissan:

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was at the side of the great river, the Tigris... (10:4)

At the start of the Second Temple Period, the 24<sup>th</sup> of the month was consistently the date of key events in the realm of Divine revelation. Some other examples:

Then Chaggai, the messenger of God, spoke God's message to the people, saying: I am with you, says God. And God stirred the spirit of Zerubavel, son of Shaltiel, governor of Yehuda, and the spirit of Yehoshua, son of Yehotzadak, the Kohen Gadol, and the spirit of all the remanent of the people, and they came and performed work in the House of the Lord of Hosts, their God. On the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius. (*Chaggai* 1:13-15)

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, God's word came to Chaggai, the prophet, saying... (ibid. 2:10)

Consider, I pray you, from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of God's Sanctuary was laid, consider it... (ibid. 2:18)

God's word came to Chaggai a second time, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying... (ibid. 2:20)

On the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Shevat, in the second year of Darius, God's word came to Zekharia, son of Berakhia son of Ido, the prophet, saying... (*Zekharia* 1:7).

And on the twenty-fourth day of this month, *Bnei Yisrael* were assembled with fasting and with sackcloth and with earth upon them. (*Nechemia* 9:1)

During this period, we find almost no other date in the month mentioned. Perhaps the significance of the 24<sup>th</sup> lies in the fact that it starts the last week of the month, thus pointing to Rosh Chodesh.<sup>[10]</sup> Rosh Chodesh, in the biblical period, was a day of prayer and Torah study; the days leading up to it were devoted to personal accounting. What remains of this custom today is the Yom Kippur Katan observed on the eve of the new month, and perhaps also the prayer recited for the new month on the preceding Shabbat. It is possible that in ancient times, the entire week preceding Rosh Chodesh was orientated to atonement and renewal. At the beginning of the week, the prophet would chastise the people, and on this day, in Nechemia's time, the people gathered with fasting and sackcloth with a view to mending their ways.

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

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[1] Daniel's mourning in our chapter is discussed in the *gemara*, *Yoma* 76b onwards.

[2] In an earlier chapter, we compared Daniel, Chanania, Azarya and Michael to Mordekhai. Perhaps they are similar in this respect, too. The *midrash* recounts concerning Esther: "She said to [Mordekhai]: 'Go, gather all the Jews who are in Shushan, and fast for me, and do not eat and do not drink for three days.' These three days were the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. He sent back to her: 'But these [dates] include the first day of Pesach!' She replied to him: 'Elder of Israel: What is the point of Pesach?' Thereupon Mordekhai acquiesced and agreed with her" (*Esther Rabba* 8). Thus, Mordekhai and Esther also fasted on Pesach during a time of danger for *Am Yisrael*.

The Ibn Ezra found it difficult to accept the idea of a fast on Pesach, proposing instead that the "first month" mentioned here refers to the Persian months counting Cyrus's reign. This interpretation seems far-fetched.

Rashi proposes that the three weeks are not 21 days, but rather 21 years, in a manner that recalls his interpretation of "*shavu'im*" ("weeks") in the calculation of the time for redemption, in chapter 9. There, we cited the possibility that the text hints to periods of days rather than years. According to Rashi's approach, Daniel had commenced his mourning during the first year of Darius's reign, and continued until the Temple was rebuilt – a total, according to our previous calculation, of 18 years. Rashi debates whether the three remaining years should be added prior to Darius the Mede or after the rebuilding of the Temple had begun. Were it not for his own presentation of the question, we might have explained, in accordance

with his approach, that the 21 years stretched from the third year of Cyrus until the sixth year of Darius, when the rebuilding of the Temple was completed. Until that time Daniel feared that they would not achieve their aim, and he fasted and prayed for the success of this endeavor. In total, this was a period of 21 years.

[3] Daniel's prayer had been heard from the time he decided to afflict himself, and not from his fasting in the end; see *Ta'anit* 8b. This may be the basis for the teaching in the *gemara* (*Yoma* 81b) that eating on the eve of Yom Kippur is considered as meritorious and fasting on Yom Kippur itself, since the eating is evidence of the decision to afflict oneself even though the affliction has not yet begun.

[4] It is difficult to bring conclusive proof from the *gemara* here, owing to the lack of clarity in the *gemara* concerning the distinction between Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes. We address this in our article, "Introduction to the Article by H. Hefetz on the Kings of Persia and Media," *Megadim* 14 (5751), pp. 47-77; we shall not elaborate here.

[5] As raised in several places in *Esther Rabba*; see, for example, 1:5. See also *Kohelet Rabba* 10.

[6] See his commentary on verses 6, 24. Haman's decrees were issued only in the twelfth years of Achashverosh's reign, not right at the start.

[7] According to the calculation of the *Seder Olam*, Cyrus reigned for three years. The accepted historical view is that he ruled over the Persian Empire for eight years (538-530 B.C.E.). C. Chefetz ("The Kings of Persia and Media in the Second Temple Period and Earlier – a Revised Study," *Megadim* 14 [5751], pp. 78-147) argues that the Cyrus who issued the proclamation was Cyrus II, the son of Darius II – whom he identifies as Darius the Mede. Cyrus II ruled over only part of the empire and sought to conquer it in its entirety. His reign began, according to the accepted historical calculation, in the year 404 B.C.E., and he was killed in 401 B.C.E., such that he reigned a total of three years. The scope of the present discussion does not allow for further discussion of this view.

[8] Perhaps a parallel can be drawn with what happened some three years after the Balfour Declaration, following the riots that took place in *Eretz Yisrael* in the year 5680. The British in effect retracted their support for the establishment of an independent national home for the Jews. Eighteen years later, this about-face was formulated unequivocally in the publication of the White Paper.

[9] The *gemara* (*Bava Batra* 4a) records that Herod adopted a similar strategy to his renovation of the Temple, on the advice of the sages of his generation (*Bava ben Butra*). First he began building, and only afterwards, when the construction was done, did he seek the approval of Rome. Perhaps the reason for Divine Providence maintaining the building in each case was the same: to minimize the patronage of a pagan foreign power over the building of God's Temple.

[10] This hypothesis was proposed by my rabbi and teacher, R. Yoel bin-Nun.