

SEFER DANIEL
By Rav Yaakov Medan

Shiur #23: *Sefer Daniel* – 13c
The Final Vision (continued)

6. The "wise ones" and "those who act wickedly against the covenant"

Let us now return to the question that we have raised previously: What is the significance of this vision, in all its detail, concerning the Greek Empire? Based on the conclusions we have drawn from the preceding chapters, both Nevukhadnetzar's first dream and Daniel's visions lead up to this vision, and it is indeed the most detailed of all. It is also the vision that concludes the Book of Daniel, thereby appearing to represent the ultimate purpose of Daniel's mission. Let us examine the continuation of this vision:

Then he shall return to his land with great riches, with his heart set against the holy covenant, and he shall do [as he wishes] and shall return to his land. At the appointed time he shall return, and come through the south, but it shall not be at this latter time as it was previously. For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he will lose heart and will go back, and he shall resent the holy covenant, and shall do [his will]; and he shall return and shall show understanding to those who forsake the holy covenant. And arms shall stand up on his part, and they shall defile the Sanctuary, the fortress, and shall do away with the daily sacrifice, and shall set up the abomination that brings desolation. And he shall seduce with flattery those who act wickedly against the covenant, but the people who know their God shall be strong and prevail. And those who are wise among the people shall cause the many to understand, but they will fall by the sword and by the flame, by captivity and by spoil, for many days. And when they fall they shall be helped with a little help, but many shall join themselves to them with flattery. And some of those who are wise shall fall, to try them and to refine, and to cleanse them, until the time of the end, for it is yet for the appointed time. And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak wondrous things against the God of gods; and he shall prosper until the fury is over, for that which is determined shall be done. Nor shall he regard the gods of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor any god shall he regard; for he shall magnify himself above all. But in his place shall he honor the god of strongholds; and he shall honor a god whom his fathers did not know, with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and costly things. And he shall deal with the strongest fortresses with the help of a foreign god; he shall increase the glory of those whom he acknowledges; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for a price. And at the time of the end, the king of the south shall push at him; and the king of the north shall come against him like a storm, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with

many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow as he passes through. He shall enter also into the beautiful land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom and Moav, and the chief of the children of Ammon. He shall also stretch forth his hand upon the countries; and the land of Egypt shall not escape. But he shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall follow his steps. But rumors from the east and from the north shall frighten him; so he shall go forth with great fury to destroy and utterly to do away with many. And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the holy mountain of beauty; and he shall come to his end, and none shall help him.

And at that time, Michael, the chief angel who stands for the children of your people, shall arise, and there shall be a time of trouble, such as there has not been since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awaken, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who lead many to righteousness – like the stars, forever and ever. But you, Daniel - shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, there stood two others, one on this bank of the river and the other on the other bank. And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river: "How long until the end of the wonders?" And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he lifted up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him Who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and a half; and when the crushing of the power of the holy people is finished, all of this will be finished." And I heard, but I did not understand; and I said: "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?" And he said: "Go, Daniel; for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall purify themselves, and cleanse themselves and be refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. And from the time that the daily sacrifice is done away with, and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Happy is he who waits and reaches a thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. As for you – go, until the end comes; and you shall rest and stand up for your allotted portion at the end of days." (11:28-12:13)

The beginning of this section mentions the "holy covenant" three times. There is one reference to "those who forsake the holy covenant," and thereafter the text speaks of "those who act wickedly against the covenant." Likewise, there are three references to "those who are wise," the "wise among the people," and "the people who know their God." The vision speaks of those who awaken from sleeping in the dust to eternal life, and others who proceed to "shame and everlasting contempt," as well as the simply "wicked" and the "many who join themselves with flattery." The internal conflict

within *Am Yisrael*, between those who are wise and guard the covenant and those who forsake it and act wickedly against it, is central to the vision, and it relates to the decrees of the Greek tyrant against the covenant and the Sanctuary, which are mentioned here, as well as in the vision in chapter 8, which we discussed previously.

As mentioned previously, the Greek Empire was the first – both in Daniel's vision and in historical reality – to wage ongoing, all-out war against observance of the covenant, adherence to the Torah and its commandments. This was not a battle that was waged against the Jewish nation, as was Nevukhadnetzar's campaign against Jerusalem, nor did it seek to annihilate the Jewish people, like Haman's decrees, which were directed against "the people of Mordekhai." In this war, man is not viewed as a leaf blown about by the winds of forces greater than himself, which determine his fate. Rather, it places squarely in the hands of every individual the free choice to be a "soldier" of faith, of the covenant, of the Torah – to risk his life and even to give it up, for the sake of observance. On the other hand, for the sake of survival, comfort, or as an extraneous pretext to remove the yoke of Torah and the commandments from upon himself, he may accept upon himself the "law of the land" and reconcile himself to the decrees of the tyrannical king, even using them to benefit his personal status amongst Jewish society that is in the process of remolding itself.[1]

The risk and challenge that these decrees – in our instance, promulgated by the Greek Empire – posed to *Am Yisrael* had significant repercussions for the nation's religious life. Therefore, there was a need for a detailed, precise vision to last for many generations, foreseeing the test that *Am Yisrael* would face and providing the spiritual support needed to withstand it, as well as the hope of redemption, proclaiming to the entire world that there is a guiding force behind history, a Master of the world Who sees everything and Who is destined to reward those who fear Him and punish those who go against Him.

Daniel experienced his visions long before the rise of the kingdom of Greece. Daniel and his companions – Chanania, Mishael and Azarya – were men who preceded their time already in the first exile, establishing the principle of giving up one's life for sanctification of God's Name by observing and upholding the covenant of the Torah and its commandments to the point of "even if He takes your life." They risked their lives by secretly eating only seeds in Nevukhadnetzar's palace, not wishing to defile themselves with the royal food. The same behavior was demonstrated later on when, as ministers, they refused to worship Nevukhadnetzar's golden image. Daniel exhibited the same defiance of royal dictates when he prayed for the ruins of Jerusalem despite the decree by the ministers of Darius the Mede.

Eventually, during the rule of the kings of Greece, the law established by Daniel and his friends had already become a way of life for anyone who held dear the observance of God's covenant. To illustrate, the following is *Chaza's* description of the confrontation between the "righteous one of the priesthood," Yossi ben Yo'ezer, Nasi of the Sanhedrin during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, and Yakum of Tzereida (or

Yakim Ish Tzererot), his nephew (some identify him as Alcimus, the Hellenist *Kohen Gadol*):

Yakim Ish Tzerurot was the nephew of R. Yossi ben Yo'ezer Ish Tzereida. Once he was riding on his horse while [Yossi ben Yo'ezer] was being led to his execution [for the crime of teaching Torah]. He said to him [with scorn]: "Look at the horse that my [Roman] master has given me to ride, and look at the horse which your Master has given to you!" He answered him, "If this [your honorable station] is what God does for those who anger Him, how much greater must His reward be to those who carry out His will!" His nephew asked, "Is there anyone who has done His will more than you yourself?" [How, then, does He permit you to suffer such a punishment?] He answered, "If this is what God permits [to happen] to those who perform His will, how much more [punishment] awaits those who anger Him!" (*Bereishit Rabba* 65)

Yossi ben Yo'ezer was not the only one during that period to die *al kiddush Hashem*. Many others followed his example. The Books of the *Chashmonaim* are filled with stories of such martyr deaths during this period, including stories of torture. Thus, *Makkabim* 1:1 describes the women who would circumcise their sons and who were consequently put to death along with their infants and the *mohalim*. We also read about many who preferred death to eating forbidden foods. *Makkabim* 1:2 tells about the pietists who died in caves, unwilling to desecrate Shabbat by waging war. In *Makkabim* 2:3 there is evidence of the readiness among many to give up their lives for the Temple treasures, which were about to be taken by Heliodorus, and a similar struggle against Lysimachus (ibid. 2:4). Further on (ibid. 6), we read of women who circumcised their sons, of those who were unwilling to eat of the Greek sacrifices to their gods, those unwilling to wage war on Shabbat, and about Elazar, the elderly scribe, who refused to touch prohibited food, despite the torture to which he was submitted. We also read (ibid. 7) the story of the woman and her seven sons, who were forced to eat the flesh of a pig and who died in unbearable suffering. The latter two episodes are mentioned again in *Makkabim* 4, in great detail, along with other stories (*Makkabim* 4:5-18). The essence of these narratives relates to self-sacrifice involving torture and death so as not to become defiled with forbidden foods – following in the footsteps of Chanania, Mishael and Azarya, in their time. Indeed, in *Makkabim* 4:13 and 16, these three are mentioned as the model for the seven sons who sanctified God's Name.

These laws were established for all future generations during the time of R. Yochanan in Tiberias (*Sanhedrin* 74a) as the laws of giving up one's life at a time of religious persecution – even for sins other than idolatry, killing, and sexual immorality.

We note further that on the basis of what we find in *Makkabim* 4:4 concerning the women who circumcised their sons, a new *halakha* was established in that generation. Unlike the previous two sources, where the women were sentenced to death by the Greek authorities, we find here that it was the women themselves who threw themselves together with their infants – after circumcising them – to their deaths.

This *halakha* is not mentioned explicitly in the laws of *kiddush Hashem*, although there is evidence of its observance in a later period:

There were four hundred boys and girls who had been taken captive to be forced into prostitution. They realized what awaited them, and said: If we drown ourselves in the sea, will be granted life in the World to Come? The eldest among them expounded: "God said: 'I shall bring back from Bashan, I shall bring them back from the depths of the sea' (*Tehillim* 68:23). 'I shall bring back from Bashan' – meaning, I shall bring them back from between a lion's teeth; 'from the depths of the sea' means 'those who drowned at sea.' When the girls heard this, they all jumped and fell into the sea. The boys applied the teaching to themselves: 'If these [girls], for whom sexual relations with men is natural, have acted thus [rather than submitting to prostitution], then we [boys], for whom such acts are not natural, should certainly do the same.' They, too, jumped into the sea. Concerning them the text states, 'For Your sake we are killed all the day; we are considered like sheep for the slaughter' (*Tehillim* 44:23)." (*Gittin* 57b)^[2]

The Gemara recounts this episode alongside the story of the woman with her seven sons.^[3]

During the Middle Ages, there were many debates over this law concerning a person who commits suicide for *kiddush Hashem*. Rabbeinu Tam writes:

"'And he shall not harm himself' – Rabbeinu Tam says that when they are afraid that they will be forced into forbidden idolatry, such as through torture that would be unbearable, he is commanded to harm himself [i.e., commit suicide] as in the story in *Gittin* concerning the children who were taken captive for prostitution, and who threw themselves into the sea. (*Tosafot, Avoda Zara* 18a)^[4]

The events at Massada should also be reviewed in light of this source, and the reality of suicide for *kiddush Hashem* during the Crusades is attested to in the lamentation for Tish'a be-Av, "*Al Beit Yisrael ve-al Am Hashem ki naflu ba-cherev*." Many historians^[5] have tended to regard the mass suicide at Massada as the source for this type of *kiddush Hashem*, but we maintain that the original source for it is in the story set forth in *Makkabim* 4, cited above.^[6]

This *halakha* is also related to the account of Chanania, Mishael, and Azarya in the Book of *Daniel*, in light of the assumption in the *midrash* cited above that these three men could have evaded Nevukhadnetzar's decree had they hidden, but they deliberately chose to perform their *Kiddush Hashem*.

["But the blood of your lives"] – This includes one who strangles himself... Could this refer to [a case like that of] Chanania, Mishael, and Azarya? [No, and] it is for this reason that the text says "but" (*akh*). (*Bereishit Rabba* 34:13)^[7]

Chanania, Mishael and Azarya did not enter the fiery furnace of their own free will, and the only "accusation" against them is that they did not run away or hide. This is in contrast to the other instances which we have cited, where the individuals involved put an end to their own lives before the enemy even reached them. Indeed, on the one hand, during the Crusades, people were unable to save themselves without violating some prohibition, whereas Chanania, Mishael, and Azarya could have saved themselves. On the other hand, however, these three performed no actual action to end their lives, whereas during the Crusades, the communities of Worms and Mainz actually committed suicide.

It is also possible that Greek culture, rich both materially and intellectually – "western culture" – to which *Am Yisrael* was exposed here for the first time in its history, was God's reason for warning against its dangers as early as the time of Chanania, Mishael, and Azarya, long before it burst into our lives so rudely during the reign of the House of Seleucus. The ability to stand up to this culture, with the great self-sacrifice that this involved, was one of the reasons for the promise given to Daniel in his vision that Jewish sovereignty and the dwelling of the Divine Presence would come (during the days of the Chashmona'im) with victory in the struggle against this culture.

Another unique difficulty which the Greek Empire presented to the spiritual existence of *Am Yisrael* involved, to a considerable degree, Alexander's policy during his conquests. Alexander paid his soldiers with portions of land in the countries which he conquered. Thus, within a short time, *Eretz Yisrael* was filled with a foreign people unknown to us; in fact, the area became a mixture of people, with Greek culture serving as their sole, weak common denominator. Identity was no longer national but rather cultural. Having such a large number of foreigners coming to assimilate with the inhabitants of the land could potentially break the local spirit – in our case, the spirit of Torah and faith. This culture led to many mixed marriages between the Greek soldiers and local Jewish girls.

Circumcision and the holiness of Jewish seed stood in opposition to this trend and attempted to halt it. It is no wonder that decrees against circumcision were at the center of the struggle, as discussed above. Perhaps this is what Daniel refers to in his vision, when he speaks of those who forsake the covenant, and those who act wickedly against the covenant, and about the enemy that shows fury towards the holy covenant. A tremendous spiritual effort, inspired by the example of Daniel and his companions, was necessary in order to defeat this phenomenon and to restore the Divine Presence to the holy land. The path set down by Daniel and his friends for the generation of the Chashmona'im is engraved "with an iron pen and a diamond point" in our book, the Book of *Daniel*.

7. "**Charut**" (engraved) and "**cherut**"

The struggle of the "keepers of the covenant" against "those who act wickedly against it" is, according to our interpretation of the vision, the final struggle before the appearance of Jewish sovereignty upon God's appointed throne – in our case, the

kingdom of the Chashmona'im – which, had we been worthy, would have established its throne forever (the king being succeeded by a descendant of David). The connection between the self-sacrificing struggle of the keepers of the covenant and the establishment of Jewish sovereignty upon the throne of God's Kingdom might be expressed in the following *midrash*:

"And the writing was Divine writing, engraved (*charut*) upon the tablets:" Do not read *charut* (engraved), but rather *cherut* (freedom), for no person is free except him who engages in Torah study. (*Avot* 6:2)

Indeed, many of the struggles for Jewish independence started out as struggles for observance of the Torah. The struggle for Israel's exodus from slavery in Egypt to freedom began as a struggle for the basic right to serve their God and to offer Him sacrifices after a three-day journey. It was only when Pharaoh refused this elementary religious demand, ruling that slaves lack even the right to believe in their God and to worship Him, that the struggle erupted in full force, leading to a push for full freedom from Egyptian slavery. The struggle for liberation from the yoke of Yavin, king of Chatzor, and Sisra, the commander of his army, seems likewise to have been conducted mainly by those "engaged in Torah study:"

My heart goes out to the governors of Israel, who offered themselves willingly among the people; bless God. (*Shoftim* 5:9)

Leaders came down from Makhir, and from Zevulun – those who handle the marshal's staff. (*ibid.* 14)

The same was true of the period of the Chashmona'im. The rebellion was initiated by Matityahu as a struggle for the right of God's servants to fulfill their obligation towards their God. It continued under the leadership of his son, Yehuda, as a struggle for national liberation from the yoke of the Syrian-Greeks. Almost certainly, the struggle of R. Akiva and his students, led by Ben Koziba, followed a similar development.

Daniel establishes, in his vision, that without a determined struggle, with self-sacrifice to the point of death for observance of the Torah and its commandments and the guarding of the covenant, there will be no Jewish sovereignty, nor will God's sovereignty be established.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

[1] All of this is based on our assumption that the vision is speaking of the Greek Empire, as indeed the literal level of the text seems to suggest. However, we might also explain it in accordance with the view of the commentators who propose that the future visions refer to the Roman Empire. We note here the Rambam's comment on Daniel's final vision: "The [advent of the] Christian Yeshua, who imagined that he was to be the messiah and who was put to death by the *beit din*, was already foretold by Daniel, as it is written: 'The renegades of your people shall exalt themselves to fulfill the vision, but they shall fail'

(*Daniel* 11:14)" (Laws of Kings and Wars 11:4, uncensored version [S. Frenkel edition]). Apparently, then, Rambam understood the vision as pertaining to the Roman Empire.

[2] This source served as inspiration for R. Chanokh bar Moshe, one of the four captives, to permit his wife to jump off the ship into the sea when the head of the pirates on the ship demanded her. See R. Avraham Ibn Daoud, *Sefer Ha-Kabbala* (G.D. Cohen edition, Philadelphia, 5727), p. 46. See also the notes below.

[3] According to the story in the Gemara, these boys were commanded to bow down to an idol. According to the Books of the *Makkabim*, they were commanded to eat forbidden foods. The example of Chanania, Mishael, and Azarya is cited in both versions.

[4] See also *Tosafot*, *Gittin* 57, "kaftzu," and in more detail in *Tosafot Rabbenu Elchanan, Avoda Zara* 19b.

[5] See Y. Baer, "*Mavo li-Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Tzarfat*" (Haberman edition, Jerusalem, 5731), p. 2. See also Grossman (next note), who referred us to his book.

[6] Here, too, a distinction must be made between going to one's death in order that a certain prohibition will not be violated and going to one's death after the commandment in question – circumcision – has been performed, with the knowledge that the person who has sanctified God's Name will not be saved from death. The instance of the women described above is more similar to the case of Meir Feinstein, a fighter in the Etzel, and Moshe Barazani, a fighter in the Lehi, who blew themselves up before being taken to the gallows – may Hashem avenge their blood, and may their merit stand for all of Israel. See also below concerning the fate of the mother in the story of the women and her seven sons.

This subject is addressed extensively by many historians. A. Grossman compiles a comprehensive bibliography in his interesting article, "*Shorshav shel Kiddush Hashem be-Ashkenaz ha-Keduma*," in Y. Gafni and A. Ravitzky (eds.), *Kedushat ha-Chayim ve-Cheruf ha-Nefesh* (Jerusalem, 5753), pp. 99-130. The bibliography appears on p. 100, n. 3. The first source that he cites from the Middle Ages is a letter from the Cairo Geniza, apparently sent to Chisdai Ibn Shaprut in the mid-10th century, and describes three sages from Italy who committed suicide when they were ordered to worship idolatry (see *ibid.* pp. 109-110).

[7] See above, p. 86 and onwards. See also M.M. Kasher, *Torah Sheleimah* 2, p. 467, *ot* 31, and *Shir ha-Shirim Rabba* 7. See also H. Soloveitchik, "Religious Law and Change: The Medieval Ashkenazic Example," *AJS Review* XII (1987), pp. 205-21. He argues that all of these actions were not in accordance with Halakha, and that anyone who follows this example is considered as one who spills blood and is deserving of burial outside of a Jewish cemetery, heaven forefend. This debate also appears in A. Grossman (cited above); he quotes some important points from Soloveitchik's arguments. Our view, as stated above, is that the source for the entire subject is the tradition carried down from the *Sefer Ha-Makkabim* and its parallels.