

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

**Shiur #15: Chapter 9:**  
**The He-Goat**

Following the dream of the four beasts, Daniel describes another vision:

In the third year of the reign of King Belshatzar, a vision appeared to me – I, Daniel – after that which had appeared to me beforehand. And I saw in the vision, and when I looked I saw that I was in Shushan, the capital, which is in the province of Eilam; and I saw in the vision that I was at the river of Ulai. And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a ram stood before the river, and it had two horns; and the two horns were high, but one was higher than the other, and the higher one sprouted later. I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; and no beasts could stand before him, nor could anyone deliver out of his hand; and he did as he wished, and magnified himself. And as I was considering, behold, a he-goat came from the west over the face of the whole earth, but it did not touch the ground; and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. And he came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I saw standing before the river, and ran at him in the fury of his power. And I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him, and he smote the ram and broke both of his horns; and the ram was powerless to stand before him; so he cast him to the ground and trampled upon him; and no-one could save the ram from his hand. And the he-goat magnified himself exceedingly; and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and in its place there arose the appearance of four horns toward the four winds of heaven. And from one of them there came forth a little horn, which grew exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the beautiful land. And it grew great, up to the host of heaven; and it cast to the ground some of the host and of the stars, and trampled upon them. It magnified itself even to the prince of the host; and the continual burnt-offering was taken away from him, and the place of his Sanctuary was cast down. And the host was given over to it, together with the continual burnt-offering through transgression; and it cast truth down to the ground, and it acted, and prospered.

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the certain one who spoke: How long shall there be the vision concerning the continual burnt offering, and the transgression of desolation, which allow both the Sanctuary and the Host to be trampled underfoot? And he said to me: Until evening and morning, two thousand and three hundred have passed; then the Sanctuary will be victorious.

And it came to pass, when I – I, Daniel – had seen the vision, I sought to understand it, and behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. And I heard the voice of a man between the banks of Ulai, and it called and said: “Gavriel, make this man understand the vision.” So he came to where I stood, and when he came I was terrified, and fell upon my face; but he said to me: “Understand, son of man; for the vision concerns the time of the end.” Now as he was speaking with me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me, and set me upright. And he said: “Behold, I will make known to you what will be at the end of the fury; for it concerns the appointed time of the end: The ram which you saw with the two horns – they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough he-goat is the kingdom of Greece, and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. And the horn which was broken, to be replaced by four: four kingdoms shall rise up out of the nation, but not with his power. And at the end of their kingdom, when the sinners are finished, there shall arise a king of fierce countenance, who understands riddles. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; and he shall wreak remarkable destruction, and shall prosper and do; and he shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And with his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and shall easily destroy many. He shall also stand up against the Prince of princes, but he shall be broken without hand. And the vision of the evenings and mornings which has been told is true; but you must seal up the vision; for it is for the distant future.” And I Daniel fainted, and was sick for some days; then I arose and performed the duties for the king, and I was astonished at the vision but no-one understood it. (8:1-27)

The text provides a detailed explanation of the meaning of the vision. According to the angel (verses 20-25), the ram and the he-goat are a metaphor for the struggle between the Persian empire and the Greek empire during the conquests of Alexander the Great and the development of the kingdoms established by his heirs. The vision also speaks of the persecution of *Am Yisrael* in the period preceding the Hasmonean revolt.

Let us consider some of the details of this vision. Previously, the kingdoms had been compared to beasts – a lion, a bear and a leopard, which are aggressive animals of prey. This vision, in contrast, presents two seemingly tame animals – a ram and a he-goat. However, while seemingly docile when compared with wild beasts, the ram and he-goat are not truly peaceful. Even among the weak a hierarchy exists, and the relatively stronger rule over the weakest among them. An example of the power relations among them is provided by Yechezkel:

As for you, My flock – so says the Lord God: Behold, I judge between one lamb and another, the rams and the he-goats. Is it not sufficient for you that you have eaten up the good pasture, but you must also trample with your feet the rest of your pasture land? And not sufficient that you have drunk of the clear waters, but you must also foul that which remains with your feet?... Because you have thrust with your side and your shoulder, and have pushed the weak ones with your

horns until you scattered them away... and I shall judge between one lamb and another. (*Yechezkel* 34:17-22)

The ram in Daniel's vision represents the Persian kingdom, which possesses huge forces and quantities of weapons, but is weighed down by this very ponderousness. The he-goat is Alexander's kingdom of Macedonia-Greece. Its advantage lies not in its number of soldiers or weapons, but rather mainly in its speed and flexibility in adapting itself to any situation.<sup>[1]</sup> Following Alexander's death, his kingdom was split among his ministers (diadoches), to form four smaller kingdoms ruled by four kings – Philip, Antigonus, and Alexander's two main heirs, Ptolemy and Seleucus.

Rashi views the chapter as focusing mainly on the Roman Empire and its decrees up until the Destruction of the Temple. Ibn Ezra adheres to the essence of the literal meaning of the vision, and speaks of the kingdom of the House of Seleucus and about Antiochus. Ralbag and Abravanel (*ma'ayan* 9, *tamar* 4) adopt this interpretation as well. With regard to this vision, we concur with the view of a great many of the commentators that the discussion here is mainly about the decrees of the Greek Empire, rather than the Roman Empire.

However, when it comes to the calculations of the redemption which arise from this vision, the commentators once again speak in terms of an end of days in the far distant future.

The text reads: "How long shall there be the vision concerning the continual burnt offering, and the transgression of desolation, which allow both the Sanctuary and the Host to be trampled underfoot? And he said to me: Until evening and morning, two thousand and three hundred, have passed; then the Sanctuary will be victorious" (8:13-14). What are the "two thousand and three hundred" which must pass until we arrive at the stage where "the Sanctuary will be victorious," which the commentators regarded as the end of days? What is the meaning of "evening and morning"?

Various dates for the time of redemption, based on these verses, have come and gone, and we are still waiting. Rashi notes the challenge to faith that may well arise from calculations for the redemption which turn out to be false, but despite this, he does not suggest that they should not be permitted. In his commentary on our chapter, he establishes the following principle:

I saw a calculation of this attributed to R. Sa'adia, [the date of which] has already passed... But we are certain that God's word will be upheld; it will never be annulled... The seer was commanded to seal up and conceal the matter... And we shall await the promise of our King, one appointed time after another, and concerning the appointed time that was previously derived, we now know that his calculations were wrong, and whoever comes after him will seek and calculate in a different manner. (Rashi 8:14)

In other words, there is nothing wrong with calculating the time of the redemption, so long as we do not place all our faith in that date as the time when God will redeem us.

R. Sa'adia calculated the appointed time for the redemption as 2300 years from the time of the Exodus. Then there would be a time when evening became morning – "And it shall be, at evening time, that there will be light" (*Zekharia* 14:7). According to the calculation of the *Seder Olam* – and supported by *Tanakh* – the Exodus took place in the year 2448 from the Creation. Another 2300 years later the date was 4748, the year 988 C.E., forty-six years after the death of Sa'adia. Rashi was born 52 years after this date.

Rashi's own calculations point to a later date, with three-fold support:

a. Rashi begins his calculation of the years from the beginning of the Egyptian exile, 210 years before the Exodus, in the year 2238 from the Creation. He then adds the 2300 years mentioned in *Sefer Daniel*, as well as the *gematria* (numerical value) of the words "*erev boker*" (evening and morning), arriving at the year 5112. Based on the final chapter of *Sefer Daniel* and a *midrash aggada*, he adds a further 45 years of "cutting off" of *Mashiach* after he appears, and ends up with the year 5157 after Creation as the time for redemption. This corresponds to the Gregorian year 1397 – 6 years after the terrible massacres that included the slaughter of Jews in many cities in Spain and the many conversions that followed.

b. Further on (12:11), the text reads, "From the time that the continual offering will be taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days." Rashi calculates these from the cessation of the continual offering at the end of the Second Temple Period; according to the *gemara*, this was 6 years prior to the Destruction. The Second Temple was destroyed, according to the calculation of *Seder Olam*, in the year 3828 from the Creation. Six years earlier was 3822. If we add 1290, we arrive once again at 5112, and with the addition of 45 years, as above, we once again arrive at 5157.

c. Commenting on *Daniel* 7:25, Rashi calculates the expression "a time and times and half a time" to mean the same 1335 years that are mentioned later, in 12:12. He derives this from the *gematria* of "*haster astir*" ("I shall surely hide [My face]"), which is 1336, as well as from a calculation of the "times:" The first "time" lasted 480 years, from the Exodus from Egypt until the First Temple was built (see *Melakhim I* 6:1); the second "time" lasted 410 years, from the completion of the Temple until its destruction. To this Rashi adds half of the sum of these two times, which is his understanding of the expression "half a time." The sum of the two "times" = 890 years, plus half of that (445) = 1335. Rashi counts these years from the cessation of the continual offering (6 years prior to the Destruction) and once again arrives at the year 5157 (3822+1335).

Other commentators have different ways of calculating 2300 years. R. Avraham bar Hiya the Nasi (author of *Yesod Olam*), as well as Ralbag and Ramban, started their calculations from the time of Shmuel, the time of David, and the building of the First Temple, respectively. If we add 2300 years, we arrive at the year 5170, 5194, or 5228 (all within the 15<sup>th</sup> century of the Gregorian calendar). Abravanel addresses these dates (*seema'ayan* 9, *tamar* 7), all of which passed without any sign of redemption. The year 5252 (1492 C.E.) witnessed the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain, which Abravanel regarded as the suffering and upheaval of the eve of the redemption. He begins his calculation of years from the splitting of the kingdom following the death of King Shlomo, 36 years after the Temple was built, and arrives – 2300 years later – at 5264, 12 years after the Expulsion from Spain. Once again, however, the redemption failed to materialize.<sup>[2]</sup>

After the greatest of the calculators, Abravanel, had been proved wrong, Malbim proposed a calculation based on the most straightforward interpretation: 2300 years from the revelation of this vision to Daniel, which took place in the year 3388 according to his calculation (3389 according to ours). 2300 years later was 5688 or 5689 (1928-9). But those years also saw riots and massacres instead of redemption! Malbim explains that the calculation of the redemption should be counted from 15 years prior to this final date, bringing us to the year 5673 or 5674 (1913-4).

Here we find an interesting coalescence between the calculations of Malbim (who died on Rosh Hashana 5640 [1880], some 34 years prior to the date he had arrived at for the redemption), and Rav Kook, who was alive in the year 5674 (1914) – the year of the outbreak of World War I (on Tish'a be-Av!). That same year, Rav Kook wrote concerning the war: "When there is a great war in the world, the power of *Mashiach* is aroused."<sup>[3]</sup> Rav Kook foresaw what was going to happen in the wake of this war: the "four kingdoms" – the Russian Empire, the Prussian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire would all collapse and fall apart. Out of this upheaval, the beginnings of the Jewish State were born through the Balfour Declaration and the San Remo Conference held in its wake, recognizing the right of the Jewish People to a national home in its land.

There are also some who calculated the 2300 years from the building of the Second Temple in the year 3408, arriving at the year 5708 (1948) – the year of the declaration of the State of Israel.<sup>[4]</sup>

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Until now, we have consistently maintained that Daniel's visions were not meant to refer to events thousands of years in the future. (It may, of course, be the case that even then, the redemption was not supposed to be so far off.) It should also be remembered that the vision concerns the he-goat – the Macedonian-Greek empire and its decrees. Moving the vision 2300 years forward from any point takes us well beyond the period of that kingdom.

It may be that Ibn Ezra noted this difficulty in his commentary on verse 25, and that this is what led him to suggest that 2300 was a number of days rather than years. 2300 days are 6 years, 3 months, and 14 days; Ibn Ezra suggests that this period

represents the duration of the harsh decrees of Antiochus Epiphanes. Thus, we remain within the boundaries of the rule of Greece, the he-goat that came from the west. Abravanel, however, cites this view in the name of non-Jewish sages and rejects it out of hand. He argues that we have no record of a period of 6 years as the duration of Antiochus's decrees, and therefore concludes that the number 2300 must represent years.

We shall adopt Ibn Ezra's approach as our inspiration in attempting to provide an additional explanation. The narrow path we propose will run alongside the broad road paved by Ibn Ezra and the broad road set down by all the great commentators we have mentioned.

Let us return to the vision itself:

It magnified itself even to the prince of the host; and **the continual burnt-offering** was taken away from him, and the place of his Sanctuary was cast down. And the host was given over to it, together with the **continual burnt-offering** through transgression; and it cast truth down to the ground, and it acted, and prospered.

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the certain one who spoke: How long shall there be the vision concerning the **continual burnt offering**, and the transgression of desolation, which allow both the Sanctuary and the Host to be trampled underfoot? And he said to me: Until evening and morning, two thousand and three hundred, have passed; then the Sanctuary will be victorious. (8:11-14)

The vision is talking about neither days nor years; it is talking about the continual burnt-offering (*olat ha-tamid*), the sacrifice offered twice daily in the Temple. This would explain the use of the expression "erev boker" (evening, morning), for the daily sacrifice is offered in the morning and at twilight. It is these sacrifices that ceased, and it is they that are destined to be renewed.

The *Sefer Chashmonaim* teaches that the Greeks seized the Temple and brought the sacrificial service to an end for a little over 3 years. They invaded the Temple on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Kislev in the year 145 (according to the calculation of years based on monetary notes, the calculation of the House of Seleucus). The Hasmoneans re-conquered the Temple on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev in the year 148, and purified it for 8 days, until the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> of Tevet.<sup>[5]</sup>

Let us suppose, based on pure speculation and without any proof, that 2 of the years of the struggle were leap years (like the years 6-8 or 17-19 of our 19-year cycle). An average leap year has 384 days. Two such years would total 768 days. To this we add one regular year, of about 354 days, bringing us to a total of 1122 days. Now we add 17-18 days, from the 15<sup>th</sup> of Kislev until the conclusion of the re-dedication of the Temple on the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> of Tevet. All in all, we have a period of 1139 days. Over this

period, 2278 sacrifices (twice daily) should have been offered – a number very close to 2300, and we know that the text often rounds numbers to the nearest 100 or 1000. These continual offerings, Daniel learns, would cease and then be renewed with the redemption and the reinstatement of an independent Israelite kingdom – as indeed happened with the beginning of the ascent of the Hasmoneans.

This leaves us with one major question: Why do Daniel's visions always focus on the conflict between the Hasmoneans and the Greek House of Seleucid? What was so special about the Hasmonean victory?

We shall address this question in the next chapters.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

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[1] Concerning the "river of Ulai" (8:2), see Rav Kook's explanation in *Orot ha-Kodesh I* (Jerusalem, 5729), p. 205.

[2] Abravanel experienced much suffering leading up to the date he had calculated for the redemption. He was forced to flee the court of the King of Portugal in the middle of the night, headed for Spain, and a short while later, he was expelled from Spain along with the entire Jewish population of the country. He moved to Italy, but was forced to move again to Corfu, and he never managed to settle anywhere. Four years after Abravanel's calculated date for the redemption had come and gone, he passed away at the age of 71. It may be that this terrible disappointment was part of the cause of his death.

[3] *Orot* (Jerusalem, 5753), p. 13.

[4] It is impossible to discuss calculations of the date for the redemption without making mention of the calculation proposed by the greatest opponent of such calculations – the Rambam, in his *Iggeret Teiman* (Letter to Yemen):

To come back to Balaam's prophecy, the verse "After the lapse of time, one will tell Jacob and Israel what God hath wrought," (Numbers 23:23), contains a veiled allusion to the date of the restoration of prophecy to Israel. The statement means that after the lapse of an interval equal to the time that passed from the Six Days of Creation to Balaam's day, seers will again tell Israel what God hath wrought. Now Balaam uttered his prediction in the thirty-eighth year after the Exodus which corresponds to the year 2486 after the Creation of the World, for the Exodus took place in the beginning of the year 2448. According to the interpretation of this chronology, prophecy would be restored to Israel in the year 4972 after the creation of the world. It is doubtless true that the reappearance of prophecy in Israel is one of the signs betokening the approach of the Messianic era (transl. Boaz Cohen, revised according to *Iggerot Ha-Rambam* vol. 1, ed. Y. Shilat [Jerusalem, 5747], p. 153).

The year 4972 (1212) of which the Rambam speaks was about seven years after his death. (According to our calculation, the date should be 4988, since it would seem that Bil'am uttered his words in the fortieth year from the Exodus, and not in the 38<sup>th</sup> year.) In the year 1212, R. Shimshon of Sens, along with 300 of the *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, moved from France and Germany to *Eretz Yisrael*, and their *aliya* caused a huge storm in the Jewish world. It may be that it was at this point that Rabbenu Chayim Katz, one of the greatest of the *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, wrote his opposing ruling concerning *aliya* to *Eretz Yisrael*:

It [the *mitzva* of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*] is not practiced at this time, owing to the dangers of the journey. And Rabbeinu Chaim taught that at present there is no *mitzvah* to live in *Eretz Yisrael*, since there are several *mitzvot* which are specific to the land, and several punishments, and we are not able to exercise the proper caution with them and to grasp them. (*Tosafot, Ketuvot* 110b, s.v. "*hu omer*").

The *aliya* of the 300 *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* brought about the great turning point in the desolate history of *Eretz Yisrael*, where the small Jewish population had steadily declined over the preceding 1000 years. The year

4972 (1212) marked the lowest ebb and the beginning of the *aliyot* to the land and the greatest increase in the numbers of its Jewish inhabitants until the development of the Zionist movement, the establishment of the State, and the huge ingathering of the exiles which followed. The year 4972 was thus the turning point in the redemption of the land and of the people.

Although prophecy was not restored in that year, something of Bil'am's prophecy was realized. It may be that the Rambam was Divinely inspired in his deciphering of the basis for calculating the time of the redemption, may it come speedily in our days. In any event, the Rambam is the only authority known to me who arrived at his calculation without relying on the verses in Daniel which are the subject of our discussion.

[\[5\]](#) See *Sefer Ha-Makkabim* I, chapter 1 and end of chapter 4.