

# THE BOOK OF DANIEL: PART II

## THE INFLUENCE OF DANIEL'S PROPHETIC MORAL LESSONS ON THE STRUCTURE AND THEMES OF THE PASSOVER HAGGADAH

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It is hypothesized that the literary structure and some themes of the Passover Haggadah were strongly influenced by the prophetic moral lessons of the Book of Daniel. This is based on these two texts' use of both Hebrew and Aramaic, with each text both beginning and ending in one or the other language. Likewise, both texts share common themes of redemption and resurrection, and both employ zoomorphic and angelology symbolism which contrasts the ineffable nature of God and Israel with the cyclical and transient nature of successive unjust civilizations.

PROPHETIC MORAL LESSONS INFLUENCING THE PASSOVER HAGGADAH:

### *Mene, Mene, Tekel Upharsin*

In the Book of Daniel, Belshazzar, unlike his father Nebuchadnezzar, does not acknowledge the true God. One day he has a feast and invites all his companions, consorts, and concubines to the palace where they drink from the Temple's holy vessels and simultaneously praise their pagan gods. *In the same hour, came forth fingers of a man's hand and wrote over against a candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the palm of the hand that wrote* (Dan. 5:5).

The frightened king promises to reward anyone who can read this mysterious writing and interpret it for him. Daniel comes to the rescue. He reads and explains the writing on the wall, in which the words are Aramaic but transliterated into Hebrew: *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* (5:25). Because it was written in Hebrew letters, it was indecipherable to Belshazzar and his people who could read only Babylonian cuneiform writing. Therefore, Daniel was needed to explain the strange writing:

*'This is the meaning: MENE MENE – God NUMBERED (twice for emphasis) your kingdom and brought it to an end. TEKEL – you are WEIGHED in the balance [judged] and found wanting. UPHARSIN – your kingdom is DIVIDED and given to the Medes and Persians'* (5: 25-28).

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The Hebrew-Aramaic words *mene mene, tekel*, and *upharsin* capture the moral essence of the entire Book of Daniel. Indeed, they summarize it. The words apply not only to Belshazzar, not only to each successive empire mentioned in Daniel – particularly to the Seleucid Greeks, who were then persecuting the Jews but had not yet been defeated at the time of its writing – but to all empires in space and time, in the past, present, and future. Every empire's days are numbered, are weighed (judged) and found wanting, and will be divided and destroyed. Only God's loyal adherents, Israel, escape the dictum of His judgmental writing. Thus "God's Judgment," the essence of this Book, is encapsulated and translated bilingually in the Hebrew "Daniel [God Judges]" and in the Aramaic "*tekel* [you have been weighed in the balance (judged)]" and you will be destroyed.

This theme is captured and reiterated in the Haggadah which recounts that during every successive generation there will be different nations that want to destroy us, but God [*Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*] saves us from them. The influence of this and other prophecies on the content of Chad Gadya is discussed below.

#### ZOOMORPHIC PROPHECIES

##### 1. THE FOUR BEAST PROPHECY

During Belshazzar's reign, Daniel himself has a dream which thematically recapitulates Nebuchadnezzar's earlier dream of successive empires rising and falling, but with different imagery. He sees four winds of the heavens break forth from the sea, and four beasts coming up from the sea. The number four is repeatedly employed, as it is in the Haggadah, and likely represents the four lettered Tetragrammaton name of God.

The first beast is a lion with eagle's wings which are plucked off. The second successive beast representing the Mede Empire is a voracious bear chomping on bloody ribs (not unlike the zoomorphic symbolism later used to describe the Soviet Empire). The third successive beast is a four-headed, four-winged leopard. The fourth successive beast is *dreadful and terrible*. It has ten horns and iron teeth, and is exceedingly strong. This beast represents Greece.

Then Daniel envisages a subdivision of this fourth terrible beast (a fifth empire): *I beheld the horns and behold, there came up among them a little*

*horn before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. Behold in this horn were eyes like a man and a mouth speaking great things (7:8).*

A mysterious celestial being (an archangel) interprets Daniel's dream for him:

*'One horn [King Antiochus IV] shall arise, and shall put down three other horns [the kings who divided up Alexander's Greek Empire] and shall speak words against the kaddishei elyonin, and shall think to change the seasons [the Jewish calendar] and the law [the Torah] . . . but the judgment shall sit . . . and his dominion taken away and destroyed . . . and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven will be given to the kaddishei elyonin, in an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them' (7:24-27).*

The term *kaddishei elyonin* [elevated holy ones] is almost a direct translation or, and in fact a code word for, the persecuted Hasidim. Hasidim were the staunch anti-assimilationist Jews under Seleucid-Greek rule to whom the Book of Daniel is addressed, as discussed in Part I of this article. The dream is telling the non-Hellenized Jews that despite the temporary setback in their epic theological battle against the Seleucid Greeks, with God's help, they will regain their kingdom and emerge victorious.

Daniel's dream continues:

*Behold, thrones were placed, and one which was ancient of days did sit, his raiment was white as snow, his hair like pure wool, his throne was fiery flames, and the wheels burning fire [God as similarly represented by Ezekiel's merkavah theophany], a fiery stream issued, the judgment was set, the books were opened . . . the beast was slain . . . the body destroyed . . . it was burned with fire . . . the rest of the beasts . . . their dominion was taken away . . . And behold there came with the cloud of heavens, one like unto a son of man [Israel] and he came to the ancient of days [God] and he was brought near before him, and was given dominion, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed (7:9-14).*

The description of the ancient one with white hair, wearing raiment of white [pure] linen and with hair pure as wool, is a reference to the pure wool's hair of a little lamb. This represents Jacob/Israel who is symbolized by

the *g'di izim* [male sheep] that Rebekah prepared and gave to Jacob to present to Isaac in Genesis, in order to obtain the blessing originally intended for Esau (Gen. 27:9).<sup>1</sup>

This visual symbol of Israel is also found in the Passover Haggadah's final song, *Had Gadya* [A Single Kid], which is chanted at the end of the Passover Seder. *Had Gadya* is written and sung in Aramaic. The only other Aramaic portion of the entire Hebrew Haggadah is the first paragraph of Maggid, "*Ha Lahma Anya*. . . [This is the bread of affliction we ate in Egypt . . . . Now we are slaves, next year we will be free men in Jerusalem]."

In this way the Haggadah's structure is analogous to the Book of Daniel incorporating both Hebrew and Aramaic in the text. The Haggadah is a linguistic mirror image of Daniel in that the story portion of the Haggadah begins and ends in Aramaic, with Hebrew in the center. Daniel, on the other hand, begins and ends in Hebrew, with Aramaic in between.

The beginning Aramaic paragraph of the Haggadah – *Ha lahma anya* – deals with going from slavery to freedom, from exile to the land of Israel. *Had Gadya*, the final Aramaic portion of the Haggadah, deals with attacks by and defeats of a succession of zoomorphic creatures and natural elements, representing the succession of empires. God finally destroys the last creature, the Angel of Death, and that leads to resurrection. Thus, the Haggadah's Aramaic bookends essentially mirror the major concepts of the Book of Daniel down to its angelic evocation and allusions to resurrection.

The song *Had Gadya*, like the Book of Daniel, is superficially childlike in its zoomorphism, belying its profound symbolism. It is about a single lamb (Israel) that is bought by a father (God) for two *zuzzim* (the two stone tablets) which subsequently is eaten by a cat which is then killed by a dog, and so on. Each successive animal or element in the song represents successive empires. Finally, the Angel of Death appears, and is destroyed by God. This brings the song, the Seder, and the sequence of natural history and mortality to a simultaneous end.

This song was very likely inspired by the Book of Daniel. It echoes the central redemptive themes of both the Haggadah and Daniel. Essentially, it is a musical story of Jewish survival in hostile lands throughout the millennia, recounting how in every generation, a new nation (a beast) arises to destroy the Jews, and God saves them from annihilation.

The earliest mention of *Had Gadya* is in *Sefer Roke'ah* (1160-1238).<sup>2</sup> Its first appearance as a Passover song is in a 1590 Prague Haggadah.<sup>3</sup> The author is unknown. This song was introduced into the Haggadah by Ashkenazi Jews who probably empathized with the stories told in the Book of Daniel which must have resonated with them during their time of medieval persecution.

## 2. THE RAM AND HE-GOAT PROPHECY

During Belshazzar's reign, Daniel has yet another dream reiterating his and Nebuchadnezzar's earlier dreams with homologous but different zoomorphic imagery. He first envisions a ram with two horns. One horn is higher than the other. The two horns represent Medes and Persians respectively. Daniel then sees the ram magnifying himself and doing according to his will. Then a he-goat comes, with a conspicuous horn between his eyes. This animal represents Greece.

Daniel watches the Greek he-goat running at the two-horned ram with fury and power, smiting the ram and breaking his two horns. He then watches as the he-goat magnifies himself. When he gains strength the great horn breaks, then four horns appear. Then Daniel sees a little horn coming forth *waxing great, even to the host of heaven, casting down and trampling upon some of them* [the Hasidim] (8:10).

Daniel then sees the little horn (Antiochus) taking away the continual burnt offering (abolishing Temple sacrifices to God). Daniel hears a holy voice bellow *'for how long will the burnt offering be trampled upon? Unto two thousand and three hundred evenings* (approximately six-and-a-half years, equivalent to the approximate time until the Maccabees will come to the rescue), *then shall the holy ones be justified'* (8:13-14).

Daniel now hears the voice of God crisply commanding, *'Gabriel, make this man understand this vision'* (8:16). Gabriel, an archangel, mysteriously appears and explains to Daniel that this vision belongs to the end of time; that is, when the Hasidim will be victorious.

Daniel's multiple recurrent prophetic dreams, all of which express identical messages which strongly allude to the certainty of their fulfillment (like the dreams of Pharaoh which Joseph interpreted), all of which use highly similar visual zoomorphic metaphor variants, mostly written in Aramaic, all likely

had a powerful effect on the thoughts and imagination of the authors of *Had Gadya*, influencing their stylistic choice of zoomorphic allegory composition, as well as their choice of Aramaic as the language. Its placement at the very end of the Haggadah creates a structure of Aramaic bookends for the Haggadah, thereby consciously or subconsciously mimicking the literary patterns and structure of Daniel.

#### PROPHECIES OF DELIVERY AND RESURRECTION

During the reign of Cyrus, Daniel has a vision at the banks of the Tigris River which prophesies the ultimate deliverance of Israel and resurrection; themes which resonate throughout the Haggadah in general, and *Had Gadya* in particular.

Upon lifting his eyes, Daniel sees a man clothed in linen whose loins are girded with gold. *His face has the appearance of lightening, his eyes have torches of fire, his arms and legs are like brass, and the voices of his words are like the voice of a multitude* (10:6).

Daniel becomes frightened and weak, suddenly a mysterious hand touches him. The voice proclaims:

*'Stand upright for I am sent unto you.' . . . 'The Prince of Persia withstood me for twenty-one days. Michael one of the first princes came to help me . . . I came to make you understand what will befall your people at the end of days . . . do you know why I have come to speak to you? I will now return to fight with the King of Persia, and when I will go out, the King of Greece will come . . . There is only one person who strongly goes out with me, and that is Michael, your prince'* (10:11-21).

The voice speaking is God's. Michael, Israel's prince, is apparently an archangel. The influence of this archangel theme is reflected in *Had Gadya* by the appearance of the ultimate Archangel of Death [*Malakh ha-Mavet*].

The voice in Daniel's dream then goes into great detail, quite accurately describing the battles which will occur between the Kings of the South and the North (Ptolemaic and Seleucid), which have already occurred in historical but not parable time. He then describes Antiochus' actions, but does not name him.

*Ships of Kittim shall come against him . . . he (Antiochus IV) shall have indignation against the Holy Covenant, and they (Seleucid Greeks) shall profane the holy Temple, and shall take away the continual burnt offerings, and they shall set up the detestable abomination. But then the people that know their God (Hasidim) shall show strength and prevail, and they that are wise among the people shall cause the many to understand (Hasidim will win over the other Jews) (11:30-33). And at that that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince that stands for your nation and there shall be a time of great trouble, and at that time the people shall be delivered . . . and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting abhorrence (12:1-3).*

These themes of resurrection and deliverance are emphasized at the end of *Had Gadya*, when the Angel of Death is destroyed by *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* [God], thus harboring in resurrection, the ultimate liberation and deliverance essential to the Haggadah story.

This vision, like the previous cyclical zoomorphic prophecies, emphasizes that Antiochus shall ultimately be defeated. Thus, Daniel instructs: Do not fall prey to he who shall soon sail off the cliff of history. Resist to the death. No matter, you will awake to everlasting life for your efforts.

Likewise, the Haggadah suggests that despite the fact that in every successive generation nations stand against us and seek to destroy us, they, like Antiochus, and all past and future of his ilk, will disappear. All generations who read the Haggadah are instructed to be steadfast, just like the Hasidim in Antiochus' age, and trust the prophecies foretold in the Book of Daniel.

Daniel replies to the inner voice of his dreams: *I heard but I do not understand . . . Lord what will happen in the end? And He said 'Go Daniel . . . the words are hidden and sealed until the end of time. The wicked shall be wicked, and none of the wicked will understand (that is, the Hellenist Jews will not betray you), but the wise ones (that is, the Hasidim to whom the Book is addressed) will understand . . . There will be a thousand and two hundred and ninety days (a little over three years) from the time that the continual burnt offering is taken away. Happy is he who waits' (12:8-12).*

The Haggadah, like Daniel, teaches patience and perseverance with the certain cyclical emergence of cruel yet transient civilizations which are part and parcel of the natural history of mankind.

#### CONCLUSION

The Book of Daniel's colorful and powerful prophecies did indeed come to be. The Hasidim harkened to Daniel's instructions. They held on until the Maccabees came to their rescue. Ultimately, in the end of days, Antiochus was defeated, and the Temple cleansed and rededicated. Judaism survived the Seleucid Greeks intact, not to mention all the other successive rising and falling evil empires to this very day, and neither a whimper nor a whisper was ever heard from Zeus. *Had Gadya*, *Had Gadya*.

#### NOTES

1. [www.nahumhalevi.com](http://www.nahumhalevi.com) "Labor Day: Jacob and Esau: description."
2. J.D. Rayner, *An Understanding of Judaism* (Providence, R.I.: Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997) pp. 114-115.
- 3 *The New Jewish Encyclopedia*, D. Bridger, ed., "Had Gadya" (New York: Behrman House, 1962) p. 180.

*This analysis was inspired by the meditative creation of the oil painting "The Book of Daniel: Back to the Future" ([www.nahumhalevi.com](http://www.nahumhalevi.com)).*



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