



Sefer Daniel and Predicting Mashiach's ETA

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Sefer Daniel presents numbers and terms indicating the expected arrival time of Mashiach. The phrase "Idan Ve'Idanin Uplag Idan" of Daniel 7:25 might refer to three and a half "idans" or eras. Daniel 8:14 refers to 2,300 without mentioning if they are days, weeks, months of years. Daniel 12:12 refers to the number 1,335. Many use these numbers as a basis to calculate the Ketz, Mashiach's estimated time of arrival.

One Approach to Calculating the Ketz

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 97b) condemns those who predict the date of Mashiach's arrival "*Tipach Atzman Shel Machshavei Keitzin SheHayu Omerim Keivan SheHigia Et HaKeitz VeLo Ba, Shuv Eino Ba. Ela Chakeh Lo, SheNe'Emar 'Im Yitmahme'ah Chakeh Lo,*" "May those who calculate the end be cursed, because when the end that is calculated comes but Mashi'ach doesn't come, they'll say he is never coming. Rather wait for him, as it says 'Even though it will delay, wait for him'". The Gemara (Megilla 3a) relates that a Bat Kol rang out forbidding the great Tanna Rabi Yonatan ben Uzziel from composing a Targum to Ketuvim lest he reveal the Ketz (Mashiach ETA, which Rashi explains appears in Sefer Daniel). Masechet Derech Eretz (Perek HaYotzei 13) even says that those who try to calculate the Ketz are denied a share in Olam Haba! The Rambam (Hilchot Melachim 12:2) codifies these rejections of Ketz calculations.

There are serious problems with predicting Mashiach's arrival date. If one errs, he has needlessly raised the hopes of our people, only to have them crushed when the great expectations are not realized. Moreover,

people will not endeavor to improve themselves in order to merit Mashi'ach's coming because they think it is inevitable. Once an authority interprets the Tanach as prophesying Mashiach's definite arrival at a certain one no longer needs to work to merit his coming.

The Ibn Ezra

Of the major classic commentators to Sefer Daniel, Ibn Ezra is one of the few who do not try to calculate the arrival date of the Mashi'ach. Ibn Ezra (to Daniel 8:25) notes that the numbers indicating Mashi'ach's arrival date are obscure to the point of being incomprehensible to human beings. Ibn Ezra notes that Daniel himself states (8:27) that he finds these dates incomprehensible. Moreover, he notes Daniel 12:8 states that these numbers are "inaccessible and sealed". Only when Mashi'ach arrives our wise men will be able to in retrospect decipher the meanings of these numbers¹.

Until the Ge'ulah, though, we are not able to and should not know the date of the Ge'ulah. Similarly, when the Torah in the Brit Bein HaBetarim sets forth the date of four hundred years for the redemption number, it was not understood until the time came. In retrospect, we understand the four hundred years as starting with the birth of Yitzchak Avinu. However, it was pointless for us until the redemption to calculate the date we will be saved.

When Yirmiyahu HaNavi sets forth the seventy years of redemption in retrospect we understand it as both as the seventy years of Babylonian rule (from 609 BCE to 539 BCE) and the seventy years from Nevuchadnetzar's destruction of the Beit Hamikdash (586 BCE) until its being rebuilt with the support of Daryavesh the Persian in 516 BCE. In the midst of the suffering it is impossible to calculate. Therefore the Gemara (Megillah 11b-12a) states that Belshatzar, Achashveirosh and even Daniel misunderstood the terminus of the seventy year sentence.

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¹ This brings to mind Shemot 33:23 where Hashem tells Moshe Rabbeinu that he can perceive Hashem only from the back but not from the front.

One may ask, why then does Sefer Daniel present numbers that are incomprehensible. TABC Talmidim including Boaz Kapitanker and Gavi Kigner explain that it is to show that the suffering will not last forever. It will end at some definite time, although we do not know and we should not know when it will be.

Another Approach to the Calculating the Ketz – Rav Saadia Gaon, Rashi, Abarbanel and Malbim

Despite all the objections to calculating the Ketz, we are shocked and (perhaps even somewhat disturbed) to discover most of the major commentaries to Sefer Daniel offering specific dates for the Ketz by interpreting certain Pesukim in Sefer Daniel. The predicted dates arrive and pass without Mashiach coming but the predictions continue unabated. Rav Saadia Gaon predicts 988 C.E., Rashi predicts 1399 C.E., Abrabanel predicts 1505 C.E., and then Malbim predicts 1928 C.E.

Before we try to explain why the Mefarshim make these calculations, let us review the basics of the respective views. Rashi and Abarbanel focus on the phrase “*Idan Ve’Idanin Uflag Idan*” of Daniel 7:25 (which we refer to in the Zemer Baruch Hashem Yom Yom as “Kol Yemei Idani”). This phrase expresses the time we must wait until the final redemption. Rashi understands this phrase to mean one and half eras after the cessation of bringing the Korban Tamid in the second Beit HaMikdash which occurred in 64 C.E. (based on Daniel 12:8-13).

Rashi views an Idan/era as 890 years – the time from Yetzi’at Mitzrayim until the first Beit HaMikdash was destroyed. 1.5 eras are 1,335 years which when added to 64 C.E. is 1399 C.E. The number 1,335 also appears as a Ketz year in Daniel 12:12.

Abarbanel understands Idan as referring to 410 years, the numbers of years Bayit Rishon stood. “*Idan Ve’Idanin Uflag Idan*” refers to 3.5 “Idans” = 1435 years. The starting point is 70 C.E., the year of Churban Bayit Sheini. Result – the Ketz is 1505 C.E.

Calculations of Rav Saadia Gaon and the Malbim

Daniel Perek 8 Pesukim 23-25 speak of the rise of a brazen (Az-Panim) king. His reign of terror will end after a time period of 2300 according to Daniel 8:14 (the Pasuk does not specify if it is days or years). Rav Saadia Gaon interprets this as 2300 years from Yetziat Mitzrayim². Yetziat Mitzrayim occurred (according to the

Seder Olam) in the year 2448 from Creation. Mashiach’s arrival, accordingly, was scheduled for 4778 = 988 C.E.

Malbim counts the 2300 years from Daniel’s Nevuah in the year 3388. This comes to 5688 from Creation = 1928 C.E. “*UVeZman 5688 SheHu Ad Erev Boker Alpayim VeShalosh Mei’ot Shanim Mei’Oto Shanah SheDibeir Imo HaMalach, BeShnat Shalosh LeBeilshatzar VeNitzdak Kadosh BeYuchzar Tamid Al Mechono,*” “And in the year 5688, which is 2300 years from the year that the angel spoke with him, in Beilshatzar’s and the holiness ruled and the Tamid returned to its seder”.

Why these Mefarshim Make These Calculations

In exploring this issue in depth with my TABC Talmidim I asked for their suggested explanations as to why the Mefarshim make these calculations.

Elan Agus suggests that the Mefarshim are not trying to calculate the Ketz but simply trying to explain the Pesukim in Sefer Daniel.

Eitan Mermelstein observes that Rashi to Daniel 8:14 sets forth a critical point. Rashi writes that the Mefarshim are guessing since they do not fully understand the Pesukim. Sefer Daniel (8:26 and 12:9-10) states that these dates are actively hidden from understanding so we cannot achieve anything close to certainty in interpretation.

We suggest that the Mefarshim’s calculations are an expression of Tefilla to Hashem. They echo beautiful Pasuk (Tehillim 102:14): “*Atah Takum Terachem Tzion Ki Et LeChenena Ki Va Mo’ed*”, asking Hashem to redeem us since the Moed/Ketz/appointed time of Ge’ulah has arrived. By setting forth the various dates for Mashiach’s ETA, we strengthen our plea that the time for the ultimate redemption has arrived.

The best explanation seems to be that of Ezra Kopstick and Benzion Rotblat who suggest that these are times when there is potential for Mashi’ach to come. Indeed, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 94a) writes that Chizkiyahu HaMelech had the potential to be the Mashi’ach, but he failed to actualize his potential.

Rav Saadia Gaon, Rashi, Abrabanel, and Malbim may be interpreted as teaching that the dates they set forth are times ripe with potential³ for Mashi’ach’s

² The Ibn Ezra (Daniel 8:25) questions Rav Saadia Gaon. Ibn Ezra asks why the count begins with Yetzi’at Mitzrayim. Moreover, years are not mentioned in this context. It could possibly mean 2,300 days or weeks.

³ TABC Talmid Yakov Abraham’s cogently asks how great the potential is. Is it highly likely Mashi’ach will arrive at these dates or merely a greater chance than usual? This is impossible to know, but intuitively when a Nevu’ah is issued it seems it has great potential to be actualized unless a drastic and quick change is made as occurred in Nineveh in the wake of Yonah’s prophecy that Nineveh will fall in forty days. However, the likelihood of a great

arrival. If we are deemed worthy we will be redeemed. The great Mepharshim are informing us that it is incumbent upon ourselves to improve ourselves to the point at which we merit the Messianic age at these potential arrival times.

Similarly, Sanhedrin 98a tells of Rabi Yehoshua ben Levi asking Mashi'ach when he will arrive. Mashi'ach answers "today". After he did not arrive, Eliyahu HaNavi explains to Rabi Yehoshua ben Levi that Mashi'ach meant to say (HaYom Im B'Kolo Yishma'u) today, if we hear Hashem's voice.

Conclusion

As we have frequently quoted, Tosafot (Yevamot 50a d"h Teida) teaches that Nevu'ah expresses potential but does not set the future in stone. The future can be changed by Teshuva, Tefillah and Tzedaka. Nevu'ah is hardly an abdication of responsibility. Quite the opposite is true. Nevu'ah is a summons to acting responsibly.

Postscript

Da'at Mikra and Rav Yaakov see Malbim's interpretation of Mashi'ach's arrival in 1928 as supporting the idea of the modern rejuvenation of Eretz Yisrael and the establishment of Medinat Yisrael as Reishit Tzemichat Ge'ulateinu, the beginning of the flowering of the dawn of our deliverance.

Moreover, some, including Rav Yitzchak Herzog, insist that there will not be a third Churban. For a full discussion of the basis of this opinion, and why some Religious Zionist authorities such as Rav Aharon Lichtenstein do not subscribe to this approach, see <https://www.koltorah.org/halachah/does-the-torah-guarantee-the-survival-of-medinat-yisrael-part-one-by-rabbi-chaim-jachter>.

However one views this topic, this interpretation of the Torah should not lead to an abdication of responsibility. As Tosafot makes absolutely clear, even an explicit Nevu'ah may not be fulfilled if we squander the opportunity.

50 to 10: Avraham's Request for Hashem's Mercy on Sedom

By Shimon Ross ('22)

In this week's Parashah, Parashat VaYeira, we read about the famous story of Sedom. The people of Sedom are

commentary's interpretation of a communication from Hashem, may be significantly less than an actual Nevu'ah.

notoriously wicked, and therefore Hashem decides that He will destroy Sedom and its four neighboring cities, Amora, Adma, Tzvoyim, and Bela, which is also called Zoar. (Although, as Rashi BeReishit 19:25 s. v. ויהפך את צדיקים וגו' notes, Bela ended up being saved from potential destruction.) When Hashem tells Avraham Avinu about His plan to destroy the cities, Avraham begins to Daven and begs Hashem to have mercy on the wicked cities and their inhabitants. In this תפילה, he first asks Hashem to save the city on the condition that he can find 50 צדיקים in the city. When Hashem agrees, Avraham Avinu asks if Hashem will do the same if he can only find 45 צדיקים. Hashem consents to this as well. The same back and forth continues, in which Avraham lowers the required number of צדיקים down from 40, to 30, to 20, until Hashem agrees not to destroy the cities on the condition that Avraham can find 10 צדיקים there.

This story leads to many important questions, although we will focus on only one. The question is about the numbers: why does Avraham choose the numbers that he does as a means of persuading Hashem to retract His word and have mercy on the cities? The number 45 especially seems to stand out as, without it, Avraham would just be counting down by 10 at a time. What is the basis behind these numbers and why does Avraham think they will help him convince Hashem to not destroy the cities?

To answer this question, we begin by looking at Rashi who breaks down all the numbers and gives their reasons. According to him, when Avraham Avinu asks that Hashem save Sedom if 50 צדיקים are found, he is asking for 10 צדיקים to be found from each of the five cities. Rashi continues with this theme in his explanation of the rest of the numbers. When Avraham asks for the salvation of the cities if 45 צדיקים are found, Rashi says that this number is based on if nine צדיקים were to be found from each of the cities, then Hashem would join together with each group of nine, and there would be 10 צדיקים found from each city. The basis of the number 45 therefore, is very closely related to the basis of the number 50. Then when Avraham asks for the number to go down to 40, Rashi seems to state his general rule that is behind all of the numbers: **every 10 צדיקים found will lead to one saved city**. Apparently, Avraham believed that all the cities could be saved only if he found 50 צדיקים in the city, and since 45 is the equivalent of 50, the same

holds true there as well. In his comment on the words “אולי ימצאון שם ארבעים,” “Perhaps forty will be found there?” (ibid. 18:29), Rashi states that 40 צדיקים would be able to save four cities. He follows by saying that in Avraham’s requests that follow, finding 30 צדיקים would be able to save three cities, finding 20 צדיקים would be able to save two cities, and finding 10 צדיקים would be able to save one city- all reflective of Rashi’s rule that he is applying to this Pasuk. However, in the generation of the flood, there were only eight, which was insufficient to save the entire world. Therefore, Avraham does not go below ten.

Ramban, however, questions Rashi’s approach. He questions two points. 1) Based on Rashi’s idea that it is appropriate and proper for 10 צדיקים to save one city, why does Avraham repeatedly state “אל נא יחר לה,” “Let my Lord not be annoyed” (ibid. 30) and “הנה נא הואלתי,” “Behold, now, I have begun” (ibid. 27) which both sound as if he thinks it is inappropriate to make these requests, but is nonetheless asking Hashem to heed them. If the requests are appropriate, then he shouldn’t think there is a problem with presenting them! Furthermore, Rashi notes that when Avraham reached 10, he did not lower the request down to nine and just say that Hashem would combine with them to be a group of 10. However, we noted earlier that when Avraham requested that 45 people would be enough to save the cities, Rashi believes that this would constitute nine צדיקים being found in each city and Hashem would be the tenth “צדיק” of each city. So how can Rashi say that in the case of 45, Hashem would combine with a group of nine to form a group of ten, but this would not be true in the case of nine people? Ramban explains that Rashi seems to believe that many righteous people are able to affect a greater salvation than fewer people, as the חכמים say “אינו דומה מועטין העושין את התורה” “that one can’t compare a smaller group of people who observe the Torah to a larger group of people who do the same (see Rabbeinu Bachya to VaYikra 26:8 s.v. URdefu MiKem Chamisha Mei’ah). However, Ramban disagrees. He says that even a small number of צדיקים can have a major effect and so even when Avraham is asking for Hashem to save Sedom on account of 10 צדיקים, he believes that these 10 צדיקים can save all five cities and not just one, as Rashi believes. Based on this, we suggest that had there been 10 צדיקים who lived during the דור המבול, the entire world potentially could have been saved. We learn from

Ramban the value of the few in Judaism and that even a small group of צדיקים who are engaged in Mitzvot can have a major impact on the world.

A Tale of Two Episodes

By Gavi Kigner (22')

The burning question arises from two of the most famous episodes in Tanach. Avraham is completely unaware of everything. In his mind, he is ecstatic upon having welcomed three men into his home. Then, Hashem speaks to himself for the last time in the Torah: “*VeHashem Amar HaMechaseh Ani MeiAvraham Asher Ani Oseh*,” “And Hashem said will I hide from Avraham what I am doing?” (VaYeira 18:17). Eventually, even after Hashem’s exchange with Avraham, Sedom is destroyed. Fast forward to Akedat Yitzchak. There is a weird contrast between the two episodes: it appears that Avraham Davens on behalf of Sedom, but does not Daven on behalf of his son, his favorite son, the one he loves, Yitzchak. Why? Perhaps, the question is faulty and is based on a misconception.

As with everything, the most important place to look is the text. Avraham opens by simply asking a question “*VaYomar HaAf Tispeh Tzadik Im Rasha*,” “and he said will you destroy the Tzadik with the Rasha” (VaYeira 18:23). Avraham proceeds to pick numbers and asks Hashem if he would destroy that many Tzadikim with Rashaim. At the end, Hashem just leaves after telling Avraham that he would not destroy ten Tzadikim with Rashaim, which is weird in its own right. Nonetheless, does this really appear to be some kind of Tefillah or argument? Avraham requested information, not for Sedom not to be destroyed. One would have expected Avraham to just ask Hashem not to destroy Sedom if Avraham really wanted that. Seemingly, Avraham just wants to learn more about Hashem. So, Avraham probes Hashem to learn how far He is willing to go when destroying something.

Fast forward to Akedat Yitzchak. The only thing Yitzchak says in the whole episode is simple and Avraham’s reply is telling: “*VaYomer Yitzchak El Avraham Aviv VaYomer Avi VaYomer Heneini Beni VaYomer Heneah HaEsh VeHaEtzim VeAyeh HaSeh LeOlah VaYomer Avraham Elokim Yireh Lo HaSeh LeOlah Beni VaYelechu Shneihem Yachdav*,” “and Yitzchak said to Avraham his

father and he said my father and he said I am here my son and he said here is the fire and the wood and where is the sheep for the korban and Avraham said Elokim will present the sheep for the Korban and the two of them walked together as one" (VaYeira 22:7-8). Avraham does not tell Yitzchak what his real role is and seems to implicitly say that there will be a Korban that is not Yitzchak. Avraham was told otherwise, but this seems to be Avraham's Tefilla for his son. While the two episodes are still enigmatic in their own right, it is difficult to really say that Avraham cared for Sedom more than his own son.

The Power of Ten

By Eitan Book ('23)

After the Melachim visit Abraham, giving him Brachot and the news that he will have a child, it is told to him that the city of Sedom, where his nephew Lot lives, is going to be destroyed. The Pasuk before Hashem tells Avraham states: "*VeHashem Amar HaMechaseh Ani MeAvraham Asher Ani Oseh*," "Now Hashem had said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?'" (Genesis 18:17). Does Hashem really need to let Avraham Avinu know this? Hashem runs the universe! Avraham doesn't know everything that happens! But Hashem answers by saying that Avraham is going to become a great nation because I (Hashem) singled him out and he's going to spread to his children the importance of following in the way of Hashem by doing what is right. Why is this point relevant? How does this insight shed light on why Hashem tells Avraham Avinu that He is going to destroy Sedom?

This question is raised by Rashi (18:18) in his commentary on this Pasuk. He explains that since Avraham is so important Hashem could not possibly keep secrets from him. The Rashbam comments on this saying that Avraham Avinu is so great that he is going to inherit this land and these people, so Hashem feels that He must tell him when something of his is being destroyed. These explanations make sense because the Pasuk presents Avraham Avinu's greatness. However, there is a deeper lesson we can learn from this pasuk.

The Radak says that the reason Avraham and his children are mentioned here is because, when Avraham is blessed with a child, he is not merely going to tell him to follow Hashem but, he will tell them the punishments and

reward for doing so. Therefore, as the ultimate example to give his kids, Hashem destroys Sedom and Amora, punishing them for their wrongdoings. The Ohr HaChaim says that Avraham's job is to be a Bracha to the world. When Avraham Avinu advocates for Sedom, what is he feeling? Possibly bold because he is confronting Hashem and advocating on their behalf: "Maybe there are fifty Tzadikim," no. "Perhaps there are forty," no. He keeps going and going, finally reaching ten, but there are not even ten. Imagine working so hard on something for so long only for it to fall apart. Avraham Avinu feels frustrated, disappointed, let down, as if Sedom's failure was his fault. What was the point of Hashem rejecting his plea? Avraham now has a lesson for his future generations: one of the most powerful moments of his life was when he begged Hashem to save this city, but there were not even ten Tzadikim. We see that the ten could have changed Sedom's fate from destruction to salvation, but there were insufficient good people. Hence Avraham Avinu will pass on to his future generations the importance of a Minyan - ten people make a huge difference!

This lesson is why Hashem needed to tell Avraham about Sedom's destruction, and let him argue to save it: for him to realize that even if you are few, you can make a huge difference in the world. This idea expresses the essence of Am Yisrael. We are those descendants of Avraham and it is our job to be those few that change the world. We don't need to be a huge number to make a big difference. With Hashem's help, we can continue to be those few who demonstrate His ways to the rest of the world.

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