CHAPTER 8

The History of Exile and Redemption in the Book of Daniel

8.1 Subject and Structure of the Chapter

MM4a  Introduction (MM pp. 84–85)
MM4b  Visions of exile and redemption (MM pp. 85–93)
MM4b1 Relevant earlier prophecies (MM pp. 85–87)
MM4b2 Gradual revelation to Daniel in Dan. 8–10 (MM pp. 87–93)
MM4c  Dan. 11 and history (MM pp. 93–98)
MM4d  Evaluation of Edom and Ishmael (MM pp. 98–107)
MM4e  Road to redemption and the fate of the nations (MM pp. 107–110)

Chapter four of Megillat ha-Megalleh is structurally complex, and at first glance, not easily perceived as consisting of well-defined parts. The same verses and issues are discussed in many places in the text. Some structure is still discernible, and within the complexity consisting of detailed interpretations, it is possible to find a clearly proceeding discourse. The different parts of the discourse however overlap, and it is not worth while to try to give exact boundaries for the different parts.

On some introductory pages (MM4a), Bar Hiyya declares his approach to the Book of Daniel; he starts from the premises that it is in concordance with prophecies contained in the Torah and in the prophets, and that in reading it, one must be attentive to the gradual nature of the revelation of the future to Daniel.

Before moving to the actual text of Daniel, Bar Hiyya first discusses the prophecies from Jeremiah and Zechariah (MM4b1), which he holds to be relevant to the subject, and which are related to both the duration of the first exile and to the total time until the final redemption. This discussion includes messianic calculations, so that in this chapter the element of messianic calculations is present already in the first half of the chapter, and again towards the end of the chapter.

1 In this chapter, Bar Hiyya’s discourse seems to flow seamlessly from one topic to another, therefore I do not try to give exact boundaries here.
Bar Hiyya then approaches the text of Dan. 8 to 10 (mm4b2), putting special importance to the context in which Daniel received the visions, and especially to the proper, logical sequence in which the whole span of future history was revealed to him. Bar Hiyya has already in his chapter 3 insisted, that the verses in Gen. 49:8–12 must be read as a logical and temporal sequence, with the earlier events disclosed first. He now employs the same approach, in a larger scale, encompassing the whole series of visions given to Daniel.

In mm4b2 the emphasis is on the gradual revelation to Daniel. Daniel is initially waiting for the end of the first exile, and only gradually made to know that the whole of future will entail yet another, even longer exile.

This commentary is then concluded with a reading of Dan. 11–12 as a summary of the course of history from the first exile to the redemption (mm4c). The emphasis thus moves from the idea of a gradual revelation to a survey of world history as the framework for the fate of the Jewish people.

The survey of history then gives room to eschatological speculation based on Daniel’s mo‘adim combined with an evaluation of the Christian and Muslim empires in the light of their relations with the Jews (mm4d).

In the final pages of the chapter (mm4e), Bar Hiyya turns to interpreting allusions concerning the final period before the redemption, presenting some eschatological calculations, revisiting issues that he has already discussed and finally stating his views on the nature of the messianic age, especially on the fate of the non-Jewish nations.

The analysis that follows here is not intended to be a complete study of Bar Hiyya’s interpretation of the Book of Daniel in the fourth chapter of Megillat ha-Megalleh. The difficulties in medieval Jewish exegesis of the text of Daniel were huge. The text itself is cryptic and its polemical use by the Christians presented a further challenge. Robert Chazan has evaluated the commentaries of Saadia, Rashi and Nahmanides according to how their respective commentaries solve the difficulties and problems contained in the text on the one hand, and how they respond to the polemical threat on the other. In my analysis here, however, the main focus will be in how Bar Hiyya’s discourse continues and develops the themes and elements that he has introduced in the first three chapters. This approach appears justified, as we have already noted that Bar Hiyya is usually not conducting a systematic treatment of the materials he uses, but rather using the materials in support of his own discourse. Thus, I am mainly looking for what Bar Hiyya says here about time, history, the dichotomy of exile and

---