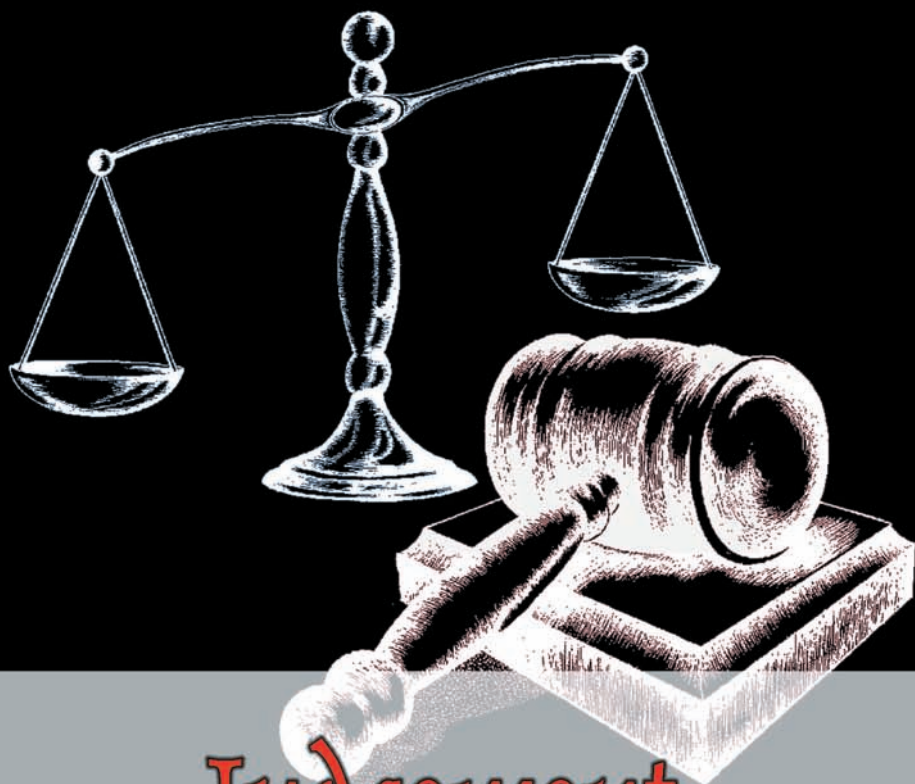




14

Shema Israel

Bible Correspondance Course



Judgement

What is Truth?

A strange question perhaps, yet one that expresses both our confusion and our skepticism regarding truth. Confusion, because with a multiplicity of religions and a diversity of beliefs around us we may genuinely wonder, “*Where is the truth?*” Skepticism, for it suggests that truth does not exist; in fact, there really is no objective truth.

The Hebrew Bible, the *Tanakh*, answers the question clearly. “*Hashem, God is the truth*” (Jeremiah 10:10; literal translation). For the Bible then, truth does exist; truth *is* association with God Himself. In fact, truth, *Emeth*, in the Hebrew language, is one of the 13 attributes of God. It falls seventh in the list in the exact center of the 13 attributes listed in Exodus 34:6; literal translation, a passage that is recited in the liturgies of Rosh Ha-Shanah Yom Kippur (Jewish New Year, Day of Attonement).

If truth is identified with God’s character, it does not come from us but is to be found outside of us – in God. This recognition implies that in order to find the truth we should not approach it with the preconceived idea that we know what the truth is. Instead, we should approach the truth with a question, “*What is it?*” This is the very same question, in fact, the ancient Israelites asked when confronted with the *manna*, the bread of God in the wilderness. “*What is it?*” they asked, and the question gave the name to this heavenly bread, for the Hebrew word *manna* means “*What is it?*” The meaning of the word *manna* suggests an important lesson regarding how we should approach Biblical truth. We should approach it with the question: “*What is it? What is truth?*” We should approach it with the same humble and honest mindset as the ancient Israelites approached the *manna* in the wilderness, asking “*What is it?*” Asking the question from this frame of reference no longer suggests confusion or skepticism. Instead, it implies sincere questioning from one who expects a true answer from above.

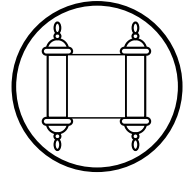
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Bible Study – Lesson # 14*

Judgment



notes

The Day of Judgment (Yom ha-Din)

The Day of judgment does not normally bring comforting thoughts. We are all afraid to come to the judge, especially if we feel guilty. And who doesn't!

And yet Biblical prophecy is clear on the matter. The Day of Judgment is a day of good news! In Biblical times the judge was identified by the people as the savior. He was the one who played the role of the defense attorney, one who would support and save. Significantly, in the Bible judges are called saviors. The book of Judges is full of stories telling us of the exploits of these judge-saviors. The judge was the one who was supposed to save the people from oppression or injustice.

Thus when Biblical prophecy speaks about a Day of judgment, it is designed to direct our expectations to the perspective of salvation; it is an event that is associated with hope. In the book of Daniel the judgment is “given” to the people. It is also noteworthy that judgment is associated with creation, for it is that event which brings repair, restoration and a new landscape of life, peace and happiness.

**Unless otherwise noted, all scripture verses are taken from the New International Reader's Version of the Bible, Copyright 1998, by the Zondervan Corporation.*

1. What was the main function of the judge in Biblical times?

Then the Lord gave them leaders. The leaders saved them from the power of those robbers (Judges 2:16). (cf. 3:9, 15; Isaiah 51:4-5)

2. Why shouldn't we be afraid of the Day of Judgment?

But then the Eternal God came. He decided in favor of his holy people. So the time came when the kingdom was given to them (Daniel 7:22).

- “When a king suppresses a rebellion, he kills the innocent with the guilty because he knows not the one from the other. God who knows men’s thoughts and the counsel of their hearts . . . knows the spirit of each individual, and will distinguish the guilty from the guiltless” (*Tarhuma, Buber, Korah*, par. 19).

3. On what special occasion did the ancient Israelites anticipate the great Day of the future judgment of God (*Yom ha-Din*)?

“Here is a law for you that will last for all time to come. On the tenth day of the seventh month you must not eat anything. You must not do any work. It does not matter whether

you are Israelites or outsiders. On that day your sin will be paid for. You will be made pure and clean. You will be clean from all of your sins in my sight. That day is a Sabbath for you. You must rest on it. You must not eat anything on that day. That is a law that will last for all time to come (Leviticus 16:29-30).

- “We must give this day all its holiness because it is a day of fear and awe. In this day thy reign is established and thy throne is made firm ... For thou art the judge, the pleader, and the witness, the one who opens and seals. And thou shalt remember every forgiven thing and thou shalt open the book of remembrance ...the great *shofar* will be sounded, and the small still voice will be heard, the angels will shudder from fear and say ‘This is the Day of Judgment’” (Book of Prayers, *Mahzor min rosh Hashana weyom hakippurim*, I. p. 31).

5. Who and what will be judged by God?

I said to myself, “God will judge godly and sinful people alike. He has a time for every act. He has a time for everything that is done” (Ecclesiastes 3:17). (cf. 12:14)

- “The just will be judged by their good inclination, the unjust by their evil inclination” (*Berakot* 61).

6. When should we expect the Day of Judgment to take place?

“As I watched, thrones were set in place. The Eternal God took his seat. His clothes were as white as snow. The hair on his head was white like wool. His throne was blazing with fire. And flames were all around its wheels...In my vision I saw One who looked like a son of man. He was coming with the clouds of heaven” (Daniel 7:9, 13). (cf. vs. 26-27; Daniel 8:17, 26)

- “*Yom ha-Din*, day on which mankind will be judged by God ... at the end of days” (R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], p. 750).

7. “How long” will the prophetic period last until the Day of Judgment begins?

One of the holy angels said to me, “It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings” (Daniel 8:14). (cf. Daniel 7:9)

8. What are the elements of Daniel's prophecy that associate the "time of the end" with the Day of Atonement?

I watched the ram as he charged toward the west. He also charged toward the north and the south. No animal could stand up against him. Not one of them could save anyone from his power. He did as he pleased. And he became great...Then a goat suddenly came from the west...He raced across the whole earth without even touching the ground (Daniel 8: 4-5).

The community of Israel must give him two male goats and a ram. The goats are for a sin offering. The ram is for a burnt offering (Leviticus 16:5).

- On the connection between sacrifices and the Messiah: speaking of the sacrifices, "R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Josei: 'It is a *halakha* [a traditional law] regarding the Messiah'" (*Zebahim* 44b, *Sanhedrin* 51b).

9. To what other event is the Day of Judgment of Daniel 7 connected in the book of Daniel?

One of the holy angels said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and

mornings. Then the temple will be made holy again” (Daniel 8:14). (cf. Daniel 9:24; Exodus 29:36-37)

- Note the parallel between Daniel 7 & 8:
 - Daniel 7: animals, little horn, Day of Judgment, coming of the Messiah
 - Daniel 8: animals, little horn, cleansing of the temple (kippur), coming of the Messiah

10. What is the starting point of the 2300 evenings and mornings leading to the beginning of the heavenly Day of Judgment?

“Here is what I want you to know and understand. There will be seven ‘weeks.’ Then there will be 62 ‘weeks.’ The seven ‘weeks’ will begin when an order is given to rebuild Jerusalem and make it like new again. At the end of the 62 ‘weeks,’ the Anointed King will come. Jerusalem will have streets and a water system when it is rebuilt. But that will be done in times of trouble” (Daniel 9: 25).

The elders of the Jews continued to build the temple. They enjoyed great

success because of the preaching of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah... The people finished building the temple...Cyrus and Darius had given orders allowing them to do it...Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king's rule (Ezra 6:14; 7:8).

11. What is the date of the end of the 2300 evenings and mornings?

One of the holy angels said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the temple will be made holy again" (Daniel 8:14). (cf. Daniel 12:13)

- "Thus the *Admoz Hazaken* indicated that the Messiah should come in 5603 (1843-1844). Then the *Tsemah Tsedek* (third rabbi of Loubavitch) explained ... that it was only a spiritual redemption." (*Mashiah Now* No. 46, January 30, 1995).

12. What will be the role of the Messiah in the Day of Judgment?

And he was given authority, glory and a kingdom. People from every nation and language worshiped him. His authority will last forever. It will not

pass away. His kingdom will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:14). (cf. Daniel 8:14)

- “Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose ha-Gelili said: ‘God’s inclination in judgment is always in man’s favor. If 999 angels give a bad account of a man, and one only a favorable account, God inclines the balance to the meritorious side’” (*Y. Kiddushin* 61d).
- “The iniquities of Israel will then be atoned” (Rashi in *Miqzaoth Gdoloth* on Daniel 8:14).
- “When Israel turns toward the Lord, his advocate Michael will plead in his favor” (*Pesikra Rabbati* 44).
- “In the heavenly Jerusalem ... the temple and the altar are built, and Michael the great Prince stands and offers up thereupon an offering” (*Hogogah* 12b).

13. How and on what basis will the divine judgment proceed?

“As I watched, thrones were set in place. The Eternal God took his seat. His clothes were as white as snow.

The hair on his head was white like wool. His throne was blazing with fire. And flames were all around its wheels. A river of fire was flowing. It was coming out from in front of God. Thousands and thousands of angels served him. Millions of them stood in front of him. The court was seated. And the books were opened” (Daniel 7:9-10). (cf. Daniel 12:1; Malachi 3: 16, 18; Psalm 69:29; Isaiah 4:3)

- “Three books are opened in heaven on Rosh Ha-Shanah, one for the thoroughly wicked, one for the thoroughly righteous, and one for the intermediate. The thoroughly righteous are forthwith inscribed in the Book of Life, the thoroughly wicked in the Book of Death, while the fate of the intermediate is suspended until the Day of Atonement” (*Rosh Ha-Shanah* 16b).
- “The books which were opened are the books where there were written the sins they have done” (Rashi in *Migzaoth Gdoloth* on Daniel 7:10).

14. What is the human counterpart that is contemporary on earth to the heavenly judgment?



notes

Blessed are those who wait for the 1,335 days and reach the end of them (Daniel 12:12).

I say another angel. He was flying high in the air. He came to tell everyone on earth the good news that will always be true. He told it to every nation, tribe, language and people. In a loud voice he said, "Have respect for God. Give him glory. The hour has come for God to judge. Worship him who made the heavens and the earth. Worship him who made the sea and the springs of water" (Revelation 14:6-7).

- “Blessed be Thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who opens the door to mercy and gives light to the eyes of those who expect forgiveness from the One who creates light and darkness, and creates everything” (*Yotser leyom Kippur*)
- “On the fourth of Tishri, the sacred New Year’s Day and the anniversary of creation, man’s doings were judged and his destiny was decided; and on the tenth of Tishri the decree of heaven was sealed” (*The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, p. 281; cf. *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 11a, 16a).
- Note the parallel between Daniel 7 and Revelation 13-14

- Daniel 7: animals (lion, bear, leopard), little horn, Day of Judgment, coming of the Son of man
- Revelation 13-14: animals (lion, bear, leopard), usurping power, Three angels Message (judgment and creation), coming of the Son of man

15. What does the expectation of the Day of Judgment imply for us in our daily existence?

“Daniel, go on your way until the end. Your body will rest in the grace. Then at the end of the days you will rise from the dead. And you will receive what God has appointed for you”
(Daniel 12:12).

Everything has now been heard. And here’s the final thing I want to say. Have respect for God and obey his commandments. That’s what everyone should do. God will judge everything people do. That includes everything they try to hide. He’ll judge everything, whether it’s good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

The Day of Judgment¹

For Daniel, the judgment is a unique and universal event taking place in the final moments of human history. The event of judgment appears in the last part of our text and coincides with the historical occurrence of the fourth beast and of the little horn. Judgment appears in the second part of the vision begun by the clause “*After that, in my vision I looked*” (Dan. 7:7) and by the “*As I watched*” that introduces the little horn (verse 9). The structure of the vision clearly situates the judgment before the end of human history.

Daniel regards it as the most important event of the prophecy. Significantly, the chiastic structure of chapter 7 puts the judgment right at the center. And since chapter 7 is at the middle of the book of Daniel, it follows that the judgment is at the center of the whole work of Daniel. Biblical tradition remembers the prophet in connection with divine judgment. The book of Ezekiel (Eze. 14:14-20), the only book in the Old Testament that refers to Daniel, associates the prophet with Job and Noah, the two central figures of the theme of judgment of God (verses 13; 17-22). Likewise, in the New Testament, the only passage referring to Daniel deals with the great day of judgment (Matt. 24:15-21, 38, 39). Finally, Daniel himself testifies to the importance of divine judgment in the very name he bears: “Daniel” means precisely “judgment of God.”

¹ Except from Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 111-118. Used by permission.

Judgment is the fulfillment of humanity's hopes and yearnings. But, in our minds it conveys the idea of crime and punishment and inspires fear and apprehension. The Bible, however, sees judgment from the viewpoint of the oppressed, the suffering victim, and thus places it in the context of salvation and victory over the oppressor and evil. Israelite culture already recognized that fact on a national level. The judges of Israel were war heroes who would crush the enemy. Scripture also referred to them as saviors, *moshiah* (Judges 3:9, 15; 6:36; 12:3). This two-level aspect of the judgment of God is especially clear in the psalms that describe the judging God as both savior and as avenger (Ps. 18:47, 48; 58:11; 94:1-6, 22, 23; 149:4, 7, 9; etc.). Such a depiction of God can shock our modern sensibilities. And yet, coaxing the lion into letting go of the lamb will not work. To save the lamb, one must overcome the lion. That is why the term *tsedaqa*, which means "justice," implying the punishment of the oppressor, also means "love," as it liberates the oppressed back to life.

Chapter 7 of Daniel also explicates these two dimensions of divine judgment. The judgment is pronounced "*in favor of his holy people*" (verse 22) and against their enemies. In fact, the vision views judgment against a background of war and oppression: "*I saw that the horn was at war with God's people. It was winning the battle over them*" (verse 21).

In the explanation of the vision (verses 26, 27), the judgment takes on two aspects: a negative one against the little horn that

defeats and crushes him (verse 26), and a positive aspect for the saints who receive God's kingdom (verse 27). The scene of judgment is dominated by the images of **“throne,” the “Ancient of Days,”** and **“open books.”**

The “throne” is the first thing that Daniel notices. Right from the start the context defines the scene as a courtly one, testifying to the invisible presence of a king. But this throne is unlike other thrones. To describe it, Daniel uses the language of Ezekiel. In fact, it is the same throne! Both thrones give the impression of being aflame (Eze. 1: 27; Dan. 7:9, 10) and both are mounted on wheels (Eze. 1:21; Dan. 7:9). The prophet Ezekiel describes the throne as having the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord and then falls down in adoration (Eze. 1:28). Daniel is likewise awestruck, and uses the plural of emphasis “thrones.” The equivalent in English would be “super throne” (cf. Isa. 6:1). The rest of the passage clarifies the matter by having it seat no more than one person.

This vision of the throne clearly alludes to God's judgment. It evokes the seat of justice, and its fiery element is the Biblical symbol of wrath, destruction, and judgment (Deut. 4:24; Ps. 18:9-14; 21:10; 50:3; 97:3). In the ancient Middle East, as a whole and in Israel in particular, judgment was a royal function. The king would make legal decisions while seated on his throne. The image of the king who judges is especially vivid in the psalms sung during the Temple services. The key expression “the Lord reigns” is usually linked to the notion of judgment.

Psalm 97, among others (Psalms 93; 99), begins with the phrase “*The Lord rules,*” and continues with a description of God’s throne founded on “*righteousness and justice*” before which fire “*burns up his enemies all around him*” (verses 2, 3), and concludes with an explicit reference to God’s judgment and royalty: “*...Because of how you judge. Lord, you are the Most High God. You rule over the whole earth. You are honored much more than all gods*” (verses 8, 9).

This vision of the throne, as part of the scene of judgment, also reveals the divine kingdom. Monarchy is not our idea of perfection. The people do not elect God, and His government does not include different political parties. In fact, His presence dominates everything, and He has all control. Yet, such rulership was the greatest wish of the Biblical heroes (Ps. 139:7-9; 33:5; 119:64; 104:24; Isa. 6:3; Num. 14:21; Hab. 3:3; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10). All the enemies of God are wiped out. History is no longer adrift, no longer in the hands of fate or oppressors. The city of peace and of justice dreamed by the prophets did not have its origin in negotiations. Its walls ring with the shout of complete and radical victory over evil and death.

“**The Ancient of Days**” is a strange expression found nowhere else in the Bible, though similar expressions appear in Ugaritic (Canaanite) literature calling the great god El the “*king, father of years*” and judge.² The idea conveyed here is that of this

² See I AB 1.7; quoted in Lacocque, pp. 142, 143.

king-judge's eternity, a concept reinforced by the imagery of white hair. Surrounded by multitudes of servants who attend Him, the Ancient of Days represents God Himself (cf. Ps. 68:18; Heb. 12:22). Moreover, He is the one who ascends on the great throne to reign and to judge. In the Biblical mind-set His old age best qualifies Him as judge. Age is a sign of wisdom. With a smile, the Talmud alludes to this passage in Daniel when it mentions God's hair as being black when He goes to war like a young man and white when seated in court like an old man.³ The Ancient of Days was present at the beginning of time, as His name indicates. He knows every action when it is still unborn (Ps. 139:1-4). Only He knows the whole story and is in the best position to judge. His "*clothes were white as snow*" (Dan. 7: 9) represents His character. He is a judge who cannot be bribed, and His verdict will be totally objective. Having had no part in the sin He is about to condemn, His moral faculties of judgment are not dulled. Only He knows good from evil, a paradox already enunciated in Genesis. When the man and woman sinned, evil mingled with good to the point that it became humanly impossible to separate them. The more people dedicate themselves to evil, the less they see it as such. Only He who never has been subject to evil can truly condemn it.

"The books" open immediately after the Ancient of Days takes His seat. It is the ultimate procedure of judgment. The prophet adds nothing more. The Bible

³ Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 14a.

generally depicts God as writing in a context of judgment (see Dan. 5). The mention of books in the divine court also implies judgment. Their function is to record all past actions, and to serve as silent witnesses during the judgment (Ex. 13:9; 17:14). That is why the prophet Malachi speaks of a scroll of remembrance (Mal. 3:16-18). This perspective of remembrance again relates judgment to salvation. For example, God remembers Noah (Gen. 8:1), Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Ex. 32:13), Rachel (Gen. 30:22), Hannah (1 Sam. 1:19), and Israel (Ps. 115:12). In the psalms the victims of oppression cry out, “*Lord, remember*” (Ps. 25:6; 74:2; 89:50; 119:49; etc.).

But God’s remembrance can also bring about punishment. God remembers Amalek (1 Sam. 15:2); our iniquities (Ps. 79:8; Jer. 14:10), and Babylon (Rev. 16:19) and her iniquities (Rev. 18:5).

Likewise, “*...your people will be saved. Their names are written in the book of life*” (Dan. 12:1). Yet, it is also in the books that Daniel witnesses the execution of the little horn (Dan. 7:11, 12). The moment that the books open, however, does not coincide with the execution of the sentence. What Daniel sees in the books is only the verdict, whether guilty or not. The sentence comes later. Verses 11 and 12 announce the destiny of the little horn, more specifically of the fourth beast, carrier of the little horn. The destruction of the fourth beast is total, in contrast to the only partial destruction of the other three beasts, each one being the continuation of the former.

Thus, we should read the verses announcing the death of the fourth beast as anticipating a distant future while interpreting the verses describing the deaths of the other three beasts as a flashback to the past. Verses 10-12: *“And the books were opened. Then I continued to watch [in the open books]. . . . I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)”* NKJV

God intends the vision of judgment to be good news. In the twilight of human history the event of judgment is the last ray of hope. The judgment announces a new world, a new order, a city of peace and justice. The promise of the end of our misery, it predicts a new dawn.

III. A Son of Man

The last stage of the vision is the most fantastic and also the most disturbing. Riding upon the clouds, someone *“like a son of man”* (verse 13) rushes into view. His identity and his arrival on the scene greatly intrigue us.

1. His Identity

From the start the vision directly contrasts the son of man with that of the beasts, paralleling His *“semblance”* (*“like a son of man”*) to the *“semblance”* of the beasts (like a lion, like an eagle, etc.). Also, the humanity of this *“son of man”* (*“son of man”* is the Biblical idiom for someone of a human nature) sharply highlights the beastly attributes of the hybrids. The human is opposed

to the animal. It is a contrast already hinted at in the beginning of the chapter through an allusion to the experience of Nebuchadnezzar (verse 4) and in preceding verses about the little horn (verse 8). In the language of Daniel, this contrast renders the essential difference between two fundamental orders: that of the beasts, and that of the “son of man.” The animal symbolizes the political dimension of the earthly kingdoms; the human symbolizes the religious dimension of the kingdom of heaven, something already attested to by several passages (Dan. 2:45; 3:25; 4:34; 5:5, etc.).

In the context of the book of Daniel the “son of man” shares his essence with that of the kingdom of God. A Babylonian inscription using the word *Barnash* (son of man) to designate a high dignitary of the kingdom, rather like the Spanish *Hidalgo*, helps us to understand this passage more clearly.

Moreover, His coming upon the clouds clearly identifies Him with God, whose return Scripture describes in similar terms (Isa. 19:1; Ps.18:10-13). The Jewish tradition is unanimous (Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Saadia Gaon, etc.) in recognizing such a personage as being the Messiah-King. The New Testament and later the Christian tradition have assimilated the concept “son of man” with Jesus Christ. It is from this passage that the early Christians derived their greeting of hope, *Maranatha*, “the Lord is coming.” The Aramaic verb *atha* (come) appears in our passage to describe the arrival of this “son of man” (Dan. 7:13).

2. *His Coming*

Daniel sees him “coming down” (verse 13, literal translation) from heaven. Hope arrives from elsewhere, a truth repeatedly emphasized throughout the Bible. Men and women cannot save themselves. They need God, who is external to them.

Our hope has not been vain. The prophet has spotted the “son of man” in the distant heavens. This link between heaven and earth, the one dreamed of by the patriarch Jacob as he slept on his stone (Gen. 28:11, 12), announced by the prophets, and longed for by the Psalms, the hope of Israel and of the Christians, is finally fulfilled. The whole structure of chapter 7 rests on this assumption. Three times the text alternates from prose to poetry, as the vision switches back and forth between heaven and earth.

verses 2-8 on the earth in prose

verses 9, 10 in the heavens in poetry

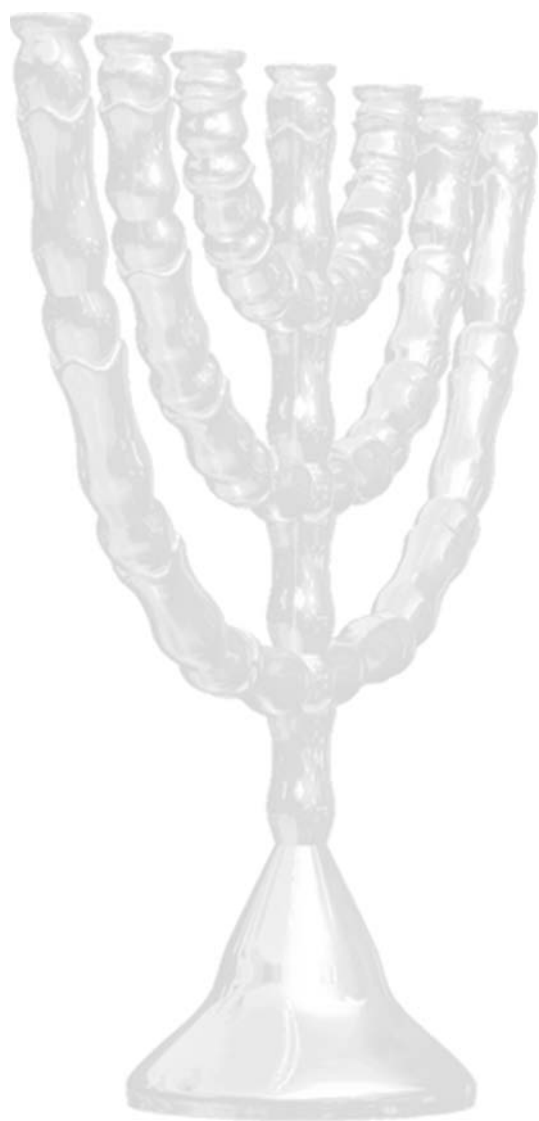
verses 11, 12 on the earth in prose

verses 13, 14 in the heavens in poetry

verses 15-22 on the earth in prose

verses 23-27 in the heavens in poetry

The sky and the earth seem to answer each other for the first time, as the sky is no longer empty. It finally has a voice—the voice of victory, of reconciliation. This is the heart of the book of Daniel. Chapter 7 is the chapter of hope, of renewed relationship with God.





אֲזַיִרְנֶנּוּ עֲצֵי הַיַּעַר
מִלְפָּנֵי יְהוָה

כִּי בָא לְשִׁפּוֹט אֶת-הָאָרֶץ
הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי טוֹב

כִּי לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

דוק

דברי הימים א, טז, לג

*“Then shall the trees of the wood sing for joy before the LORD,
for He comes to judge the earth.*

*○ give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures for ever!”*

1 Chronicles 16:33, 34, NRSV