

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Yechezkel: The Book of Ezekiel
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**Shiur #30: The Vision of the Future Temple:
More Concealment than Revelation (43:10 - 44:31)**

“You, son of man – describe the House to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities, and let them measure the plan. And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the form of the House, and its fashion, and its exits, and its entrances, and all its forms, and its ordinances, and all its shapes, and all its teachings, and write it in their sight, that they may keep its whole form, and all its ordinances, and do them. This is the Torah of the House: Upon the top of the mountain its whole limit round about shall be most holy; behold, this is the Torah of the House.” (43:10-12)

The prophet now comes back to the plan of the Temple after recalling, towards the beginning of Chapter 43 (vv. 7-9) the past sins of idolatry. He still interweaves the message that the people should “be ashamed of their iniquities”. The command to the prophet – that he must make known the plan for the Temple, that he must set it down in writing before them and present it in all its detail – serves to make it tangible and concrete. But surprisingly enough, there is also no explicit mention here of the location of the Temple; the location is conveyed with the rather vague expression, “Upon the top of the mountain” (which recalls 40:2, where Yechezkel speaks of “a very high mountain”).

So we find that the description of the Temple and the city, like the details of the future Temple itself, has some concrete and precise elements, but at the very same time, lacks some very central details. The reader is left with a sense of being “in the dark”. This feeling continues to follow us as, in the coming chapters, Yechezkel reconstructs the place of the nation and its status, the role of the prophets, the *leviim*, the *kohanim*, and the *nasi*, and the degree to which these are connected to the future Temple. This Temple will be different from its predecessor, *inter alia* in that it exists in the midst of a people that has been reorganized, with new laws: laws that are left somewhat vague and unclear in the text.

The place of the nation in the vision of the future Temple

In these chapters, as in other places prior to the vision of the future Temple, the nation's place in the Temple is limited; there is no general invitation for them to take an active part in either its establishment or the Divine service performed in it. The minimal involvement of the people in this vision of the future Temple is indicated by the small number of verses in which Yechezkel speaks of the people when dealing with the future Temple (Chapters 40-48) . As we have seen, Yechezkel is charged with informing the people of the plan for the Temple with all its details, so that the people keep to the plan and what it contains (40:4, and also here – 43:10). We have also seen that the people are mentioned with reference to their former sins having caused the defilement of God's holy Name (43:7-11), and the emphasis on the need to distance these sinners from the future Temple (44:5-9). The only verses in which the people's place in the Temple is mentioned are those which describe the people when the *kohanim* go out to them in the outer courtyard (44:19). Moreover, the prophet emphasizes that the place of the offering of sacrifices is in the inner courtyard, which is separated from the people (46:20). The closest place that the people are able to reach is "the gate of the inner court that faces east" (46:1), which is opened only on Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, and the people prostrate themselves outside of this gate, while it is open (46:3). In addition, the people are responsible for funding the communal sacrifices that are offered in the Temple – but once again, the actual sacrifice is carried out without the people present in the Temple (45:13-17)

Given the above, the impression arising from Yechezkel's prophecy is that the Temple is not a spiritual center for the entire nation. The Temple serves the *kohanim* and *leviim*, who perform their service within it as representatives of the people, while the only roles that are given to the people are the auxiliary functions and appearances: funding of the sacrifices, prostration, and a partial view of the Divine service. Another significant aspect showing the distancing of the people from the Temple is that they (the people being those who caused the Temple's defilement in the past) are now only to be found in the outer courtyard. This is in contrast to the picture arising from the plain text in *Sefer Vayikra*, which suggests that a lay Israelite may approach the sacrificial altar. This distancing seems to be aimed at protecting the Temple from elements that may lead to its defilement, thereby causing its destruction. In this way, Yechezkel's prophecy of an eternal dwelling, an eternal *nasi*, an eternal covenant and an eternal Temple can be fulfilled.

Purification ceremonies for the altar and the Temple – "This *parasha* will be explained in the future by Eliyahu" (43:13-27)

We have seen that Yechezkel's prophecies seek to counter the factors leading to the Destruction of the First Temple. His prophecies now emphasize the need to protect the Temple from impurity on a permanent basis, and

therefore prohibit the people from entering the Temple, and limit the people's involvement in its activities.¹ Admittedly, one might offer the opposite interpretation: from now on, God will rest His Presence even with no entry into the Temple:

“Nor shall I hide My face any more from them, for I have poured out My spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God” (39:29).

The people's lack of inclusion in the sacrificial service and entry into the Temple is a function of their higher spiritual level, which has no need for the Temple. This process accords with Yechezkel's words in Chapter 36:

“I will also give you a new heart, and I will put within you a new spirit; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you...” (36:26-27).

The next prophecy is devoted to the ceremony of purification of the altar, and appended to it is a prophecy about purification and atonement of the Temple in Chapter 45. The commentators debate whether the descriptions of the offering of sacrifices in these chapters in Yechezkel refer to a one-time ceremony of inauguration of the Temple – like the inauguration of the *Mishkan* – or whether they are meant to be performed each year.² These verses are difficult to explain; this is also reflected in the statement of the Gemara (*Menachot* 45a) that Eliyahu will solve these difficulties in the future. Indeed, the plain language of the verses makes it difficult to determine this question one way or the other; but it seems that the verses devoted to the purification and atonement of the Temple (45:18-20) describe a one-time ceremony, representing a continuation of the purification of the altar in our chapter (43:18-27). This is the conclusion drawn in the Gemara:

“Thus says the Lord God: ‘In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a young bullock without blemish, and you shall offer it as a sin offering in the Sanctuary’. [Why does the text say] ‘a sin offering’? It is a burnt offering! R. Yochanan said, This *parasha* will be explained by Eliyahu in the future. Rav Ashi said: [It refers to] the special consecration offering that they offered at the time of Ezra, just as it was offered in the days of Moshe [at the inauguration of the *Mishkan*]. There is also a *beraita* to the same effect: Rabbi Yehuda said, ‘This parsha will be explained by Eliyahu in the future.’ R. Yossi said to him: ‘[It refers to] the consecration sacrifices that were offered in the days of Ezra, in the same way that they

¹ Another example of this is the location of the ceremonies in Yechezkel's prophecies in comparison with *Vayikra* 16: Yechezkel describes the ceremony taking place in the courtyard, while in Sefer Vayikra it takes place within the Sanctuary.

² I discuss this question in more detail in my article, “Haftarah of Tetzaveh, *Yechezkel* 43:6-27” in Eldad A. (ed.) *Maftirin be-Navi: Iyyunim be-Haftarot u-ve-Divrei ha-Neviim*, Jerusalem 5770, pp. 341-343.

were offered in the days of Moshe.’ He replied, ‘Set your mind at ease, for you have set my mind at ease.’” (*Menachot* 45a)³

In other words, just as Chapter 43 contained a description of the ceremony of inauguration of the altar, so too Chapter 45 contains a description of the ceremony of inauguration of the Temple. The purification of the altar and the atonement of the Temple in Yechezkel’s prophecy will be performed as one-time acts. We should therefore understand the atonement of the Temple “for everyone who sins out of error or ignorance” (45:20), as describing the purification of the Temple and the altar from impure contact which has adhered to it up until the inauguration, rather than from the impurity of the nation’s sins (which Yechezkel mentions also in vv. 7-9 preceding this prophecy). If these are indeed one-time events, and these chapters in *Yechezkel* are arranged in chronological order, then Yechezkel describes: first a ceremony of inauguration of the altar (Chapter 43); followed next by a description of the entry of God’s glory into the House and the tithes given to the *kohanim* (Chapter 4); and finally about the *nasi*’s role, and the inauguration of the Temple (Chapter 45).

Those who perform the service of the Sanctuary (44:1-14)⁴

“Then He brought me back the way of the outer gate of the Sanctuary which looks toward the east, and it was shut. Then the Lord said to me, This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut.” (44:1-2)

These verses show the process we have seen so far stepping up. The clearest expression perhaps of the isolation of the Temple from the people is the emphasis on the gate through which God entered: it now remains shut. In fact, even the *nasi*, who must be able to reach the Temple, will do so indirectly, without passing through the gate:

“As for the prince (*nasi*), he – being a prince – shall sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by the way of the same.” (v. 3)

Among the various details pertaining to the structure of the Temple, the prophet suddenly perceives God’s presence within it:

“Then he brought me the way of the north gate before the House, and I looked, and, behold the glory of the Lord filled the House of the Lord, and I fell upon my face. And the Lord said to me, Son of man, mark well, and

³ This also represents the Rambam’s ruling in his Laws of Sacrifices 2:14.

⁴ A detailed comparison of these sections with Bamidbar 15-18 and various places in Sefer Vayikra is to be found in Kasher’s commentary, pp. 844-847; the comparison and the questions that arise will not be addressed here.

behold with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I say to you concerning all the ordinances of the House of the Lord, and all its teachings, and mark well the entrance of the House, with all the exits of the Sanctuary. And you shall say to the rebellious ones, to the House of Israel: Thus says the Lord God: O House of Israel, enough now of all your disgusting deeds, in that you have brought into My Sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary, to pollute it, even My House, when you offer My bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken My covenant because of all your disgusting deeds, and you have not kept the charge of My holy things, but you have set keepers of My charge in My Sanctuary to please yourselves.” (44:4-8)

Like the start of Chapter 43, the prophecy once again emphasizes the need to convey the details of the plan to the people. But this time there is an additional prophetic message about distancing strangers. This Temple of Yechezkel is not a Temple that will be a magnet, an international center; rather, it will be a place in which – in light of the sins of the past – there is no place for strangers:

“Thus says the Lord God: No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into My Sanctuary, of any stranger that is among Bnei Yisrael” (v. 9).

Leviim and Kohanim

Going even further, even the faithfulness of the office-bearers who served in the Temple in the past must be re-examined. Yechezkel blames the *leviim* for having misled the people (vv. 10-11) and ministering for people visiting the Temple while engaged in serving idols:

“Because they ministered to them before their idols, and became a stumbling-block of iniquity to the House of Israel; therefore I have lifted up My hand against them, says the Lord God, and they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall not come near to Me, to perform the office of a Kohen to Me, nor to come near to any of My holy things, to the most holy things, but their shall bear their shame and their disgusting deeds which they have committed.” (vv. 12-13)

Despite their status and their role, the *leviim* did not take responsibility for the behavior of the people. So while they will serve in the Temple, they will not share in the authority bestowed on the *kohanim*:

“And I will make them keepers of the charge of the House, for all its service, and for all that shall be done in it” (v. 14).

In contrast, Yechezkel entrusts the *kohanim* with a range of tasks: the offering of sacrifices, instruction of the people, sitting in judgment, and guarding the Torah. Why does Yechezkel transfer all the leadership functions to the *kohanim*? Moreover, why does his description of the service of the *kohanim* not center not on the Temple, but rather on instructing the people? The reason for appears to be that there were also kohanim who misused their position. At a time of crisis, as well as the Temple service, the role of the kohanim is to teach the ways of Torah. Instead, what the kohanim actually did is described by Yechezkel as follows:

“Her priests have violated My Torah and have profaned My holy things; they have put no difference between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have hidden their eyes from My *shabbatot*, and I am profaned among them.” (22:26)

The *kohanim* who neglected their role and failed to instruct the people during their difficult time – even if they did not actually mislead them – will not be given a role in the future Temple. (These *kohanim* seem to be the descendants of Itamar.) Those *kohanim* who are descendants of Tzaddok, who demonstrated faithfulness to the house of David and followed God’s ways, even in times of crisis, will indeed merit to minister in the Temple:

“But the *kohanim*, the *leviim*, the sons of Tzaddok, who kept the charge of My Sanctuary when Bnei Yisrael went astray from Me – they shall come near to Me to minister to Me” (44:15).⁵

To the extent that the Temple service is performed by a smaller team of *kohanim*, the expectation is that it will be performed with greater skill and with more punctilious attention to the laws of ritual purity. In this way, the future Temple will be protected from the defilement that brought about the destruction of its predecessor in Yechezkel’s time. This is why Yechezkel emphasizes that the most important function of the *kohanim* in the future – as in the past and the present – is instructing the people to follow the ways of God; this is even more important than offering sacrifices. What caused the destruction of the Temple

⁵ At the same time, the choice of the descendants of Tzaddok has an historical basis. Radak mentions, in his commentary on 40:46, that Tzaddok – the first Kohen Gadol to serve in the Temple built by Shlomo – was a descendant of Pinchas, who was given a promise of eternal priesthood, while the curse upon Eli doomed the descendants of Itamar. For the actions of the *kohanim* from the house of Tzaddok, see *Shmuel* II 15:16; 19:12; 20:25; *Melachim* I 1:8; 4:2; *Divrei Ha-Yamim* I 15:11; 16:39; 18:16; 29:22. The preference shown to the house of Tzaddok is clearly apparent in *Shmuel* II 15:24-29, and was institutionalized at the time of Adoniya’s rebellion against David, when Evyatar joined Adoniya, while Tzaddok remained faithful to David. Immediately upon ascending the throne, Shlomo chose Tzaddok as *Kohen Gadol* and removed Evyatar from serving. During the period of Chizkiyahu, too, the *Kohen* was a descendant of the house of Tzaddok (*Divrei Ha-yamim* II 31:10), and later on Ezra’s lineage is traced to Tzaddok son of Achituv (*Ezra* 7:2).

was not a lack of sacrifices, but rather a lack of basic understanding among the people about what the service of God entails, what it means to have an exclusive commitment to Him and His Torah. This role of the *kohanim* is amplified and emphasized by Yechezkel over and above the ritual roles involved in the Temple service. Later in the chapter, after listing the instructions concerning the clothing to be worn by the *kohanim* (vv. 17-19), the prohibition against shaving their hair (v. 20) and against their drinking wine (v. 21) and the limitations on whom they are permitted to marry (v. 22), the prophet states once again:

“And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the common, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. And in a controversy they shall stand in judgment, and they shall judge it according to My judgments, and they shall keep My teachings and My statutes in all My appointed times, and they shall sanctify My *shabbatot*.” (44:23-24)

R. Eliezer of Beaugency writes, in his commentary on Yechezkel 40:45:

“And I will make them keepers of the charge of the House, for all its service, and for all that shall be done in it’ – but they will not perform the sacrificial service, but rather will perform the service of the *leviim*, ‘to be singers’... these are the *kohanim* who are not of the seed of Tzaddok ha-Kohen (see *Yechezkel* 48:11). In the future they will be disqualified from the sacrificial service, but will be singers and gatekeepers like the *leviim*, because they ‘have violated My Torah’ (see *Yechezkel* 22:26), and they became like priests for idolatry. They led Bnei Yisrael astray, and distanced themselves from the Holy One, blessed be He; therefore, they, too, will be distanced.”

King and prophet

In addition to the changes that we have seen, Yechezkel’s prophecy reveals a fundamental change with regard to the leadership of the nation: in this Temple, there will be no role for the kings of Israel. Instead of a king, in the future there will be a *nasi*, whose functions will be to mediate between God and His people by means of his seat of power, which is in the Temple precinct; offering of sacrifices, and more (Chapter 46). The place of the prophets is likewise left empty, because in the past some of them caused the people to become defiled:

“And if a prophet is deceived when he has spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet and I will stretch out My hand upon him and will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel...that the house of Israel may no more go astray from Me, neither be defiled any more by all their transgressions...” (14:9-11).

So for these prophets too, there is no room in Yechezkel's vision of the future Temple:

“And My hand shall be against the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies; they shall not be in the counsel of My people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel, and you shall know that I am the Lord God” (13:9).

Thus, Yechezkel foretells that the prophets will have no portion and no role in the future leadership. This would seem to explain why the terms “prophets”, “prophecy” and “vision” appear in *Sefer Yechezkel* only up to Chapter 39, and not in Chapters 40-48.⁶ Yechezkel's avoidance of any use of the root ‘*n-b-a*’ (prophecy) in these chapters seems to reinforce the sense that prophecy in its present form will have no place in the future.

Perhaps one can detect an echo of a substitute for the connection between God and His people that is effected through prophecy in the First Temple Period, in the closing prophecy before the chapters devoted to the vision of the future Temple: “Nor will I hide My face any more from them, for I have poured out My spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God.” (39:29) This “pouring of the spirit” upon the entire nation, according to the prophet Yoel, ultimately transforms the entire nation into prophets:

“And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions...” (*Yoel* 3:1).

We have seen in Yechezkel's prophecy that the changes in this Temple include not only the outer structure of the edifice, but also fundamental difference in who enters it. This change relates both to the measure of access afforded the people, but also the division of roles among the various leaders of the nation, and the degree to which they are connected to the Temple.

Now the connection between Yechezkel's prophecy of rebuke and the vision of the future Temple becomes clearer: the actions of the people and their leaders in the years prior to the Destruction are what lead to the (limited) extent of their involvement in and access to the future Temple as described by the prophet. Once again, despite the level of detail in the description of the roles of the various officials, we cannot translate these descriptions into practice because some critical details are missing: does the lack of mention of any *Kohen Gadol* in Yechezkel's prophecy indicate that this office no longer exists? If so, how are we to understand this? Will this future Temple have an area that is designated the “most holy place” (41:4), to which no-one, ever, enters? Here, too, we remain in

⁶ Notably, even the word “prophecy” which appears frequently in Chapters 1-39 to emphasize Yechezkel's divine mission to Israel or to other nations, appears nowhere in the last nine chapters.

the dark. Perhaps this ambiguity is meant to further reinforce our hypothesis that the absence of some critical details is intentional? That is, it is meant to rule out any possibility of the people attempting, out of longing for the Temple, to initiate its establishment, along the lines of this prophetic vision, before the proper time arrives.

Translated by Kaeren Fish