

**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**  
**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**  
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**Yehezkel: The Book of Ezekiel**

**By Dr. Tova Ganzel**

**Shiur #08b: The Departure of God's Glory from the Temple (chapters 9-11)**

Having completed this part of his description of the departure of God's glory from the Temple, borne by the *keruvim*, Yehezkel continues on the subject of the nation's actions in the present. This time, the overall situation is presented by focusing on the deeds and thoughts of twenty-five men at the entrance to the Temple, two of whom Yehezkel identifies by name:

“Then a spirit lifted me up, and brought me to the east gate of the Lord's House, which looks eastward; and behold, at the door of the gate – twenty-five men, among whom I saw Ya'azneya, son of Azzur, and Pelatyahu, son of Benayahu, princes of the people.” (11:1)

The fact that Yehezkel identifies two noblemen by name indicates the responsibility of the leadership for what is going on, and also provides some insight into Yehezkel's status before being exiled. Perhaps this familiarity with the nobility (as well as his being exiled with the skilled workers and artisans) suggests that Yehezkel belonged to the aristocracy. He may even have been a Jerusalemite Kohen, unlike Yirmiyahu, who, located in provincial Anatot (*Yirmiyahu* 1:1), seems to have lived in the peripheral border region.

Note that Yehezkel quotes the people, which gives us an idea of their perspective of the situation, and then we hear the Divine response to them:

“Then He said to me, Son of man, these are the men who devise mischief, and give evil counsel in this city; who say, It is not near, the building of houses; this city is the caldron, and we are the meat.” (11:2-3)

The building of the city, concede the people, “is not near,” which is an acknowledgment that difficult times are on their way. But the people nevertheless maintain that even if they “cook” in the fire of the troubles that await them, they will be saved from annihilation, just as meat in a cauldron is saved from burning. Thus the statement depicts these rebels as preparing themselves for the siege, certain however that they will prevail, since they are important to God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As Greenberg proposes; p. 275.

But their statement can be understood in a way that portrays the speakers as even more arrogant and certain of themselves. The assertion that the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not be building houses in the near future is not an expression of coming to terms with the imminent challenges, but rather a rejection of Yirmiyahu's advice to the exiles to build houses in exile (*Yirmiyahu* 29:5). If this is the case, their words express their confidence that the city will not be destroyed; nor will they be exiled; nor will they build (new) houses (in exile). Following this reading, the metaphor of the "cauldron" and the "meat" describes them as protected within this city surrounded by a wall, like meat is protected from the fire by the cauldron.

Either way, God's response is:

"You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with the slain." (v. 6)

God places the responsibility for the slain corpses (mentioned in 9:7) on the people of Jerusalem, even though they are killed by a Divinely-ordained campaign.

"Your slain, whom you have laid in the midst of it – they are the meat, and this city is the cauldron, but I will bring you out of the midst of it. You have feared the sword, and I will bring a sword upon you, says the Lord God. And I will bring you out of the midst of it, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and will execute judgments among you. You shall fall by the sword; I will judge you at the border of Israel, and you shall know that I am the Lord. [The city] shall not be your cauldron, neither shall you be the meat in its midst, but I will judge you at the border of Israel." (vv. 7-11)

So despite their brave words, we see that the inhabitants of Jerusalem are in fact afraid. God's response includes a confirmation of their fears, and emphasizes that despite their claim that they are like meat in a cauldron, they are destined to be brought out of Jerusalem – for even its wall will not protect them – and judged on the border of Israel.

The prophecy concludes with Yehezkel's own response to this:

"Then I fell down upon my face, and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah, Lord God! Will You then make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" (v. 13)

As part of his vision, Yehezkel sees Pelatyahu, son of Benaya – one of the two princes in the group – fall dead. He sees before his eyes that no one in the city will remain alive, and then he expresses his fright – perhaps also his protest – in a cry: Will there truly be no one at all left? This time the prophet receives only a partial response to his cry, and to his falling upon his face. We have

previously discussed God's response, concluding that the essence of the message is that God remains with the exiles as a "miniature Sanctuary," and that it is they who represent the remnant of Israel. This is yet another echo of the debate that the exiles in Babylonia maintained with the remnant in Jerusalem about their status – a debate that reaches its climax after word of the Destruction reaches Babylonia in chapter 33.

### **11:17-21 – Revival!**

Verses 17-21 address – for the first time in the *Sefer* – the future of the exiles following the harsh, painful prophecies to the remnant in Jerusalem. While one might expect a prophecy of consolation, some words of comfort and empathy, this is not to be. In Chapters 1-24, which cover the prophecies from the years preceding the Destruction, there are only three prophetic units devoted to the nation's future revival: in Chapter 11 (in the sixth year; see 8:1), Chapter 16 (undated), and in Chapter 20 (in the seventh year; 20:1).<sup>2</sup>

Now we come to the promise that the exiles are destined to return to their land:

“And I shall gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.” (11:17)

This prophecy is not dependent on the people changing their ways. To the contrary: in the future, God will gather them, assemble them and give them the land of Israel, and only after they arrive there (“and they shall come...”) do we find that “they shall take away all the detestable things of it, and all the abominations of it from there.” Are we to deduce from this verse that although the nation does not mend its ways prior to its return to the land, they will end up repenting afterwards? Apparently not. At the end of this prophetic unit it turns out that the people have kept up their evil ways:

“But as for them whose heart follows after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads” (v. 21).<sup>3</sup>

Admittedly, this is a problematic verse. It is not clear who the prophet is describing: the exiles in the present, or perhaps in the future? Or perhaps the inhabitants of Jerusalem?<sup>4</sup> But it seems that verse 21 is also talking about the

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<sup>2</sup> To these we might perhaps add vv. 22-24 in Chapter 17, which mention God's future renewal of the monarchy.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning the use of this expression, see 5:11.

<sup>4</sup> This difficulty has led some commentators to suggest that this verse has a new subject: while v. 18 describes the deeds of the exiles when they return in the future, verse 21 describes the sins of the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the present.

exiles who return in the future. This being so, we must assume that the prophet's aim is to emphasize that the sins of the people will still exist in their heart ("the heart of their detestable things," "the heart of their abominations") even when they return to the land, and this is why God will give them a new heart:

"And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you,<sup>5</sup> and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and do them" (11:19-20).

It is only in this way, and only at that time, that the "detestable things" and "abominations" will cease. Only then will the covenant between God and His people be fulfilled: "They shall be My people, and I shall be their God." This emphasizes that ultimately, the people returning to their land will not remove the detestable things and abominations from their hearts, as would be proper. This is also what is unique about this particular prophecy: it expresses God's attitude towards and treatment of His people as a result of the people's choice not to change their ways either before the Destruction or, as we now discover, even afterwards.

It would have been fitting for the exiles returning to their land to cease their idolatrous practices. But they do not; their actions are so much part of them, that it is as if they were inscribed in their hearts. So God Himself will have to give them a new heart. This heart of flesh will ensure that henceforth they will follow God's laws and observe His statutes, and even fulfil them. This prophecy thus complements the response that *Sefer Yehezkel* offers to the claim of the inhabitants of Jerusalem (verses 16 and 17 both begin with "Therefore..."), and emphasizes (contrary to the claim of the Jerusalemites) that the exiles will return to their land, even though they still adhere to their sinful ways.

Reviewing these verses shows that while superficially this appears to be a prophecy of consolation, in fact it actually offers little comfort: God will bring back His people to the land in the future, but without the people having repented. Therefore, the prophet concludes with harsh words: "I will recompense their way upon their own heads."

### **Parting: 11:22-25**

"Then the *keruvim* lifted their wings, and the wheels along with them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city Afterwards a spirit took me up, and brought me in a vision by the spirit of God into Kasdim, to the exiles. So the vision that I had seen went up from me." (11:22-24)

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<sup>5</sup> The version that follows the Aleppo Codex reads, "within you"; the Koren edition reads, "within them."

The chapter concludes with God's glory departing not only from the Temple, but also from the city of Jerusalem. The same spirit which had brought Yehezkel to see the Divine vision (8:3) now delivers him back to Babylonia, and Yehezkel and his vision are parted. The prophet returns to the exiles seated around him and shares with them what he has seen (11:25). But any hope of the people finally internalizing the message of his prophecy is shattered in the very next verses:

“Then word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not; they have ears to hear, but hear not; for they are a rebellious house.” (12:1-2)

Translated by Kaeren Fish