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ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Yehezkel: The Book of Ezekiel
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IN LOVING MEMORY OF

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August 15, 1968 – July 29, 2012

לע"נ
יהודה פנחס בן הרב שרגא פייוועל
כ"ב אב תשכ"ח – י' אב תשע"ב
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Shiur #19: Prophecies to Tzor (Tyre) (26-28)

The nations of Tyre and Egypt differed from the other nations to whom Yehezkel prophesied: they were not always in conflict with Israel. On the contrary, they were occasionally allies. Perhaps this is why the prophet treats them at greater length than he does the other nations. In this way he addresses the uniqueness of Am Yisrael while also, indirectly, addressing the complicated relationship between Israel and these nations. A longer prophecy may also be devoted here specifically to the nations whose existence represents an indirect challenge to the eternity of Israel.

Tyre and Sidon

Yehezkel devotes no less than three chapters to his prophecy concerning Tyre (26 – 28:19), concluding with a brief prophecy addressed to Sidon (28:20-24). The scope of this prophecy suggests that Yehezkel takes a special interest in Tyre: his message is longer than the parallel prophecy made by any other prophet. Perhaps Tyre's extraordinary economic success during this period and its withstanding of the prolonged Babylonian siege represented a challenge to Yehezkel's prophecies.

The prophecy to Tyre starts with a reference to the date – the eleventh year of Yehoyakhin's exile, on the first of the month (which month is not mentioned). Many of Yehezkel's prophecies to the nations note their date (about half of all the dates mentioned in the Book are linked to prophecies to the nations), and most indicate that they are close to the time of the Destruction. Perhaps these prophecies have a proliferation of dates because they are ordered

thematically, in contrast all the other prophecies in the Book which appear in chronological order.

Tyre – historical background¹

Until the time of Alexander the Great, Tyre lay between Acre and Sidon on an island located at a distance of a few hundred meters from the coast. Then, a connecting embankment was created which was gradually built up over the years. So, throughout the biblical period, Tyre could only be accessed by boats.

The people of Tyre would seem to be a very ancient nation (*Yishayahu* 23:7) that is mentioned in Egyptian execration texts. If Philo of Byblos (a Greek Phoenician writer of the first and second centuries C.E.) is correct, it was the people of Tyre who invented boats, and their advanced commerce was widely admired in ancient times.

Tyre was an economic and cultural power throughout the duration of the Israelite kingdom. This was the source of various problems: starting from the time of Shlomo, who went after the gods of Sidon (*Melakhim* I 11:5); via Achav, who married Izevel, who was responsible for the introduction of idolatry throughout the Israelite kingdom (*Melakhim* I 16); up until the time of Nechemia, after the Return from Babylonia, when commercial cooperation between Israel and Tyre presented a challenge to Shabbat observance (*Nechemia* 13:16-22). All of this may explain why Yehezkel devotes such a long prophecy to Tyre. Other prophets who address themselves to Tyre include *Yishayahu* (23), *Yoel* (4:4-8) and *Amos* (1:9).

Despite these problems, there were periods when positive ties prevailed between Israel and Tyre. Examples include the building of David's house by emissaries from Tyre (*Shmuel* II 11-12) and Hiram's assistance in building the Temple (*Divrei Ha-yamim* II 2-7).² It seems that the Israel-Tyre connection was bound up over the years with the royal house and, especially, with the Temple. The topics of Yehezkel's prophecy to Tyre are not limited to events that took place during his own lifetime, but rather reflect the substantial and long-term relationship described above.

During the period of Yehezkel's prophecies, Tyre was a kingdom ruled by Etba'al III (591-573 B.C.E.) and shared an anti-Babylonian policy with the neighboring nations of the region. *Yirmiyahu* (27:3) provides a hint of its involvement in this policy, suggesting that Tyre, together with Tzidkiyahu, king of Yehuda, and other nations, formed an alliance against Babylonia. In view of this threat, Nevukhadnetzar journeyed to the region and laid siege to Tyre for thirteen

¹ The background presented here is borrowed partially from H.J. Katzenstein, *The History of Tyre: From the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E. until the fall of the Neo-Babylonian empire in 538 C.E.*, Beer Sheva, 1997.

² This assistance continued even though Hiram was dissatisfied with the compensation for his efforts; *Melakhim* I 9:10-14.

years (585-572 B.C.E.). Thus, while Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians, Tyre withstood the siege throughout the period of the Babylonian empire. The steadfastness of Tyre in contrast with the destruction of the Temple served to compound the psychological difficulty facing the inhabitants of Jerusalem: now, God's status in the eyes of the nations had fallen even more. Not only had the god of the Babylonians seemingly prevailed over the God of Israel, but there seemed to be a different god that watched over Tyre that was even stronger than the Babylonian power. In effect, Nevukhadnetzar's conquest of Jerusalem proved to the nations what they had wanted to demonstrate, namely, the weakness of the God of Israel. This religious challenge, and the desecration of God's Name among the nations, are apparently the reason for the length and vehemence of the prophecy to Tyre.

Chapter 26: The Sin and its Punishment

The prophecy to Tyre starts off with a description of the kingdom's joy over the destruction of the Temple, in a manner reminiscent of the prophecy to Ammon (Chapter 25):

"Because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken that was the gates of the peoples; she is turned to me, I shall be filled with her that is laid waste" (26:2).

In this prophecy, as in earlier ones, the prophet interweaves the allegory and its meaning. The substance of his prophetic message concerning the downfall of Tyre is connected to the "form", using images that are characteristic of and unique to Yehezkel. Yehezkel's style, as we have previously noted, entails explanations (or interpretations) of analogies and images that must be sought within the analogy itself, since the actual reality emerges within the allegoric description. Thus, the prophecy of the punishment awaiting Tyre comes in the form of a sea analogy, fitting for a nation that lives by the sea:

"... and I will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre, and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like a bare rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken it, says the Lord God, and it shall become a spoil to the nations. And her daughters who are in the field shall be slain by the sword, and they shall know that I am the Lord." (vv. 3-6)

The Babylonian conquest of Tyre – an outcome that never came about

Yehezkel attributes the downfall of Tyre to the king of Babylonia: "Behold, I will bring upon Tyre Nevukhadnetzar, king of Babylonia, a king of kings..." (v. 7). Nevukhadnetzar conquers Tyre using horsemen and chariots that surround the city, and an earthen rampart that is built up against its walls. When the walls

begin to collapse, the horsemen complete the work of destruction: the walls and houses are shattered, the city is plundered and is covered with water; finally, it becomes a heap of ruins. The result is described in real terms - "And I will cause the noise of your songs to cease, and the sound of your lyres shall be heard no more" (v. 13), but also from the Divine perspective: "And I will make you like a bare rock; you shall be a place to spread nets upon, you shall be built no more, for I the Lord have spoken it, says the Lord God" (v. 14). To this description the prophet adds the lamentation of the leaders of the local islands over the destruction of Tyre (vv. 15-18). From these lamentations we deduce the status of Tyre prior to its conquest: "... the renowned city that was strong in the sea; she and her inhabitants, who cause their terror to be on all those round about" (v. 17). The final end of Tyre, which likewise integrates allegory and reality, describes its descent to the depths of the sea forever:

"When I shall bring you down with them that descend into the pit, to the people of old time, and shall set you in the lowest parts of the earth (like places desolate of old), with them that go down to the pit, that you shall not be inhabited; and I shall set up My ornament in the land of living; I will make you a terror, and you shall be no more, that you be sought for, yet you shall never be found again, says the Lord God." (vv. 20-21)

Chapter 27: Description of the boat and its sinking

In chapter 27, Yehezkel describes, in detail, Tyre as a ship at sea, with sophisticated equipment (vv. 3-9), as well as military strength (vv. 10-11), which allows it to trade with many countries and ensures its key position in international commerce through involvement in many different manufacturing and commercial spheres (vv. 12-25).³ But the description of Tyre's greatness is abruptly cut short. In a sharp reversal, which is also part of the prophetic message, Yehezkel describes the sinking of the ship of Tyre (vv. 26-27) and the lamentation of the people of Tyre who dwell on this ship and on the islands around it (vv. 29-36). The detail with which the prophet describes the power of Tyre turns out to have created a false impression. Despite the long elaboration of the prophecy, there is in fact a lack of clarity in *Sefer Yehezkel* as to the state of Tyre during the years of the Destruction. The reason for this may be the desire to separate the written prophecy from its concrete historical or political context, and thereby convey a timeless message.

Chapter 28:1-19 – King and Temple – Tyre vs. Jerusalem

Chapter 28 includes two prophecies to the king of Tyre. At the center of the first prophecy stands the godly pride of the prince of Tyre and God's

³ An overall view of Tyre's extensive commercial ties is presented on a map that appears in the *Da'at Mikra* edition of Yechezkel (Moskowitz, chapter 3, n. 5, p. 207). The map shows the countries with which Tyre maintained commercial ties, as well as the merchandise that each of these countries produced.

response to it (vv. 1-10), while at the center of the second prophecy is the pride of the king who is compared to a *keruv*⁴ banished from the Garden of Eden. The images that Yehezkel uses in this prophecy are surprising (“You were the far covering *keruv*, and I have set you so; you were upon the holy mountain of God” – v. 14). Tyre – which, from the earliest history of the Israelite monarchy maintained commercial ties with it – has grown arrogant to the point where it has presumed itself above the Lord God of Israel.⁵

First we learn of the presumptuousness of the king of Tyre:

“Because your heart is lifted up, and you have said, I am a god; I sit in the seat of God, in the heart of the seas, yet you are a man, and not God, though you have set your heart as the heart of God” (v. 2).

This description vividly illustrates the ongoing battle waged by the Jewish prophets against the pagan world-view. The pagan view sees the king as a god – or, at the very least, as the god’s exclusive representative – and is easily discerned in the description of his great wealth. The Divine view, in contrast, regards the king as a messenger or agent of God and therefore subject to His laws and commandments, like everyone else – which is reflected, *inter alia*, in the prohibition on accumulating excessive wealth, or too many wives, or horses.

The final part of the lamentation over the fall of the king of Tyre in Chapter 28 describes the fall of he who dwells in “Eden the garden of God” (v. 13). In this section Yehezkel mentions the temples of Tyre:

“By the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your traffic, you have defiled your sanctuaries; therefore I have brought forth a fire from the midst of you, it has devoured you, and I have turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold you” (v. 18).

This is a unique, one-time occurrence; nowhere else in *Sefer Yehezkel* is any mention made of foreign sanctuaries.⁶ Even this source offers little information about Tyre’s sanctuaries. Even the literal meaning of the term “your sanctuaries” is not clear. The term appears here in the plural, and perhaps Yehezkel is indeed speaking of a number of sanctuaries that existed in Tyre, not

⁴ A *keruv*, is a cherub: a type of angel. ⁴

⁵ The translations and midrashim grapple with this world of imagery and its relationship with that of the Torah. See R. Kasher, *Yechezkel* 25-48, *Mikra le-Yisrael*, Tel Aviv-Jerusalem 5764, Appendix G: The Fourth Prophecy to Tyre as Reflected in the Ancient Translations and Commentary” (Heb.), pp. 558-561, and see also A. Goldberg, *Ha-Itzuv ha-Omanuti shel ha-Kina al Melekh Tzor*, *Tarbitz* 58, 2, 5749, pp. 277-281, who suggests that the lamentation should be understood through its structural completeness.

⁶ In the whole of Tanakh there is only one, single other mention of a sanctuary that is not the Temple (or *Mishkan*); and this sanctuary is not even desecrated. It belongs to Moav: “And it shall come to pass, when it is seen that Moav is weary on the high place, that he shall come to his sanctuary to pray, but he shall not prevail” (*Yishayahu* 16:12). The glory of this sanctuary is reminiscent of that of Shlomo’s Temple.

just one. Another possibility is that there is in fact one such sanctuary, and the plural is used to refer collectively to all of its contents.⁷

Either way, the explicit reference to desecration of the sanctuary of Tyre is unusual, and finds no parallel in Yehezkel's prophecies to the other nations. Since it is difficult to imagine that Yehezkel views the sanctuary of Tyre – a place of idolatry – as a holy site that has been defiled, perhaps his description is meant to convey something of the way in which this sanctuary is perceived by the nations. Indeed, Yehezkel emphasizes the personal dimension of the people of Tyre: “By the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your traffic, you have defiled your sanctuaries” – it is the iniquities of the king of Tyre that have caused the defilement of his sanctuary. Therefore, no comparison should be drawn between the sanctity and defilement attributed to the Temple in Jerusalem, and the parallel expressions referring to the sanctuary of Tyre. The reason for which the sanctuary in Tyre is defiled (commerce) is likewise different from the causes of the destruction in Jerusalem (primarily, idolatry). This may also explain why the punishment for defilement of the sanctuary of Tyre is included within the description of the fate awaiting Tyre as a whole:

“All they that know you among the people shall be appalled at you; you have become a terror, and you shall exist no more, forever” (v. 19)

Chapter 28: 20-24 – Sidon

Sidon was an ancient Canaanite port city on the coast to the north of Tyre. It is a major city in Tanakh – both because it is one of the earliest cities in Kena'an and because of the history that it shares with Israel. As early as the days of Yehoshua, Sidon already marked the northern border of the territory conquered by Israel upon entering the land (*Yehoshua* 11:8; 19:28), and in fact it was never inhabited by Israelites. It is therefore possible that this prophecy contains an echo of the historical accounting that concludes with God's destruction of Sidon. If this is the case then it comes as no surprise that in Yehezkel's brief prophecy to Sidon he emphasizes that the purpose of God's word is to cause the people of Sidon to recognize Him:

“Behold, I am against you, O Sidon, and I will be glorified in the midst of you, and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her. For I will send into her pestilence, and blood into her streets, and the wounded shall fall in heaps

⁷ Support for the possibility that the prophet is speaking of a single sanctuary is to be found in 21:7 – “Son of man, set your face towards Jerusalem and preach towards the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel”. Here the prophet is speaking of the Temple in Jerusalem, yet he uses the plural. Similarly, *Vayikra* 21:23 – “... that he not profane My holy places”; and *Yirmiyahu* 51:51 – “... for strangers have come into the sanctuaries of God's House”. In contrast, Moskowitz (chapter 3, n. 5, pp. 222) interprets Yechezkel's expression “defiled your sanctuaries” in a non-literal way, such that “your sanctuaries” means “your sanctity”. Thus, the verse is not referring to a specific temple or to actual sanctuaries, but rather to sanctity in the general sense.

in the midst of her by the sword upon her on every said, and they shall know that I am the Lord. And there shall be no more a pricking bier to the house of Israel, nor a thorn to give pain, among all those who are round about that disdain them, and they shall know that I am the Lord.” (vv. 22-24).

In addition to the purpose of the prophecy, Yehezkel also notes the anticipated result: a sanctification of God’s Name before the eyes of the nations, after God punishes Sidon.

Chapter 28:25-26 – the judgment of the nations prior to the ingathering of Israel

Yehezkel’s prophecy to Tyre and to Sidon ends with the ingathering of Israel in its land. This does not appear to be an after-thought to the prophecy, but rather an essential component, a conclusion that completes the prophecies of destruction to the nations. Sanctification of God’s Name in the eyes of the nation begins with their downfall, but it will not be open and clear until God gathers up His nation. Therefore, although the end of the prophecy refers to Israel, it should not be viewed as a prophecy of consolation addressed to Israel, but rather the rounding off of the prophecies of destruction addressed to the nations:

“When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the nations, then they shall dwell in their land that I have given to My servant Yaakov. And they shall dwell safely there, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards, and they shall dwell in security, when I have executed judgments upon all those that disdain them round about them, and they shall know that I am the Lord their God.” (29:25-26)

For this reason, this prophecy does not include elements of consolation and redemption beyond the image of God’s people dwelling in their land safely and prosperously.

Translated by Kaeren Fish