

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Yehezkel: The Book of Ezekiel
By Dr. Tova Ganzel

This week's shiurim are dedicated in loving memory
of Yehuda Nattan Yudkowsky z"l whose yahrzeit is 17 Cheshvan

In Honor of Ovadia Sutton for his love of Sefer Yehezkel

Shiur #22: The Shepherds of Israel, in the Past and in the Future
(Chapter 34)

In Chapter 34, Yehezkel records a harsh prophecy directed against the kings of Israel, the nation's leaders, whom he compares to shepherds who do not tend to their flocks. His words to them leave no room for doubt:

“Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand, and I will put an end to their feeding the sheep; nor shall the shepherds feed themselves any more, for I will deliver My flock from their mouth, that they may not be food for them” (34:10).

In the future, the leadership will be taken from these shepherds who failed in the past to properly lead the nation. God Himself will gather up the flock, rehabilitate it and hand it over to a different shepherd who will fulfill his role faithfully:

“And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, namely – My servant, David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd” (34:23).

The new shepherd will be (a descendant of) David. The prophecy that the present model of leadership will come to an end will be fulfilled completely. It will not be a mere “technical” replacement of personnel, but rather a fundamental change in the essence of the role:

“And I the Lord will be their God, and My servant, David, will be a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.” (34:24)

In Chapter 37, too, the prophecy speaks of the future leader:

“And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king over them all, and they shall no more be two nations, nor shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.” (37:22)

In addressing the form of leadership that existed in the past, Yehezkel notes that while Israel and Yehuda had previously existed as two separate kingdoms, from now onwards there will be “one king over them all.” This leadership will be in the hands of David, known to the nation as the king who unified the kingdom in the past, and he will fill the same role in the future, too:

“And David, My servant, will be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall follow My judgments and observe My statutes and perform them” (37:24).

Yehezkel connects the prophecy concerning the future leadership with the message of Chapter 34: King David will rule over the nation in the future. However, the leadership role has changed, and therefore in speaking of David’s future status he is not referred to as “king”:

“And they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Yaakov, My servant, in which your fathers dwelled; and they shall dwell there – they and their children and their children’s children forever, and My servant, David, shall be their prince forever” (37:25).

In the future, David will be a “prince” (*nasi*) rather than “king” over Israel. During this period, when the leadership will be in the hands of the “*nasi*,” it will be possible to build the future Temple:

“... and I will set My Temple in their midst for evermore... Then the nations shall know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My Temple shall be in the midst of them for evermore.” (ibid. 26-28)

David’s new title would seem to be a necessary change. In Yehezkel’s prophecies, the term “king” represents the leader during a period in which many sins are attributed to the nation, suggesting that the leadership of the king is a failure. The king, as he appears in *Sefer Yehezkel*, is always portrayed in a negative light. Only in Chapters 34 (v. 24) and 37 (v. 25) is there any positive attention to the king, and here the prophet is speaking of the historical kingship of David in which the kingdom was unified, and of his future reign. Nevertheless, although the prophet speaks here of David, he takes care to refer to him as “*nasi*.” Since the institution of kingship has failed, an alternative form of leadership must replace it. One of the roles of the king of Israel is to bring about

a situation that will facilitate the Divine Presence coming to rest amongst the nation. The kings of Israel, as depicted in *Sefer Yehezkel*, brought about the opposite situation: defilement and the distancing of the Divine Presence. Now it is too late; there is no repair for the corrupt kingship, and therefore it is replaced by the station of “*nasi*.”

Translated by Kaeren Fish