

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



This learning is dedicated in memory of our dear parents:
Yoseph & Felice Chajmovic

The prophet Yechezkel began to prophesize in Babylonia in the fifth year of the exile of Yehoyachin (593 BCE). It appears that Yechezkel was one of the exiles from the “exile of the craftsmen and the smiths” who were sent to Babylonia with Yehoyachin, and he counts his years of prophesy according to the years of the kingdom of Yehoyachin. Yechezkel is a prophet in the exile and his prophecies turn, for the most part, to the exiles. The prophecies of Yechezkel can be divided into two periods – the prophecies of doom which he prophesied until the destruction, which are included in the first half of the book (Perakim 1-24), and the prophecies which he prophesied after the destruction, which are mostly prophecies of consolation (Perakim 33-48). Between these two sections there are prophecies for the gentile nations (Perakim 25-32). The prophecies of Yechezkel cover twenty-two fateful years in Jewish history, years in which the nation deals with crises and transformations: the division of the nation to two centers, Babylonia and Israel, and the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem.

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מִתַּן מִן
מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רענגערט
The Sodie Rennerl Women's Institute for Torah Studies
המרכז ללימודי תנ"ך





Perek 1

1 Sefer Yechezkel opens, as do the other books of Prophets, with an introduction in which we find some details connected to the prophet and his prophecies (pesukim 1-4). In this introduction we have a two-fold problem:

a) In pasuk 1 Yechezkel notes, in first person, the date and place in which he becomes a prophet – in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, in the exile by the river Kevar. However, pesukim 2-3 are written in third person, and seem to repeat what is stated in pasuk 1. Pasuk 4 returns to first person: “*and I saw visions of God*” (1) – “*and I saw, and behold*” (4). Use **Rashi** to understand this duplication:

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year: The prophet presented his words obscurely and did not tell his name, who he was; nor did he explain from what date he was counting. Therefore, the holy spirit interrupted his words in the following two verses to teach [us] who the prophet was and to teach [us] from what date he was counting... and furthermore, from the beginning he had stated his prophecy in the first person: “*and I was in the midst of the exile*” ; “*and I saw visions of God.*” And so at the end: “*And I saw, and behold, a storm wind, etc.*” Now these [next] two verses interrupted his words, as though someone else was speaking about him: “*The word of the Lord was [revealed] to Yechezkel... and the hand of the Lord came upon him there.*”

b) In addition to the duplication of the introductions, there is a disparity between the date in pasuk 1 and the date in pasuk 2. See the commentaries of the Targum Yonatan, Radak and Rashi, and think about what the meaning of the words “*Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year*” is.

Targum Yonatan: In the thirtieth year to the time when Chilkiyahu the High Priest found the Sefer Torah in the Courtyard of the Temple.

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Radak: And the Blessed One showed Yechezkel this vision which hints at the Holy Spirit leaving the Temple in the thirtieth year after the finding of the Sefer Torah. This was the Sefer Torah which caused the king to tear his clothes upon hearing the evil and the exile which would come upon Israel because they violated the words of the Sefer Torah. The evil had already begun in the time of Yoshiyahu, and therefore God showed Yechezkel the sign of the Holy Spirit leaving the Temple, so that he would understand that just as the beginning came true, so too the rest of the words would come true.

Rashi: Thus, we may deduce that the thirty years he counted, he counted from the beginning of the jubilee [cycle]: the last jubilee commenced at the beginning of the eighteenth year of Yoshiyah[’s reign]; that is, the year that Chilkiyah found the scroll (II Kings 22).

2 The first prophecy in the book is dedicated to a description of the vision of the divine chariot which Yechezkel sees as an introduction to his being inaugurated as a prophet. Visions of this type appear in a few other places in this book and in other prophetic books, but this is the most detailed of them all.

a) Yishayahu also describes in his inaugural address a vision of God sitting on His throne with his servants around him (Perek 6). Compare the two descriptions and note the differences between the description of the Glory of God in Yishayahu and in our perek. See the words of the **Gemara in Massechet Chagiga 13b:**

Rava said: All that Yechezkel saw Yishaya saw. What does Yechezkel resemble? A villager who saw the king. And what does Yishaya resemble? A townsman who saw the king.

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b) Pay attention to the characterization of the throne and the servants in the two descriptions, and to the placement of the throne. What can we deduce from this about the attitude of God to his Temple in our book, as compared to the situation in the period of Yishayahu the prophet.

Perek 2-3:15

After seeing the vision of the chariot, culminating in the vision of the Glory of God, God turns to Yechezkel and inaugurates him to be a prophet and charges him with a prophetic mission. The inaugural prophecy is comprised of three parts: 2:1-7: charging him with the mission; 2:8 – 3:3: the act of eating the scroll which symbolizes the placing of the word of God in the mouth of the prophet; 3:4-9: a review of the command of the prophetic mission with an elaboration to include the expected reaction of the people.

- 3 The prophecy opens with the term: *'son of man'*. This is not a common term in Tanach, but it appears ninety-three times in Sefer Yechezkel. What does it mean? Use the words of the commentators below to understand. Pay attention to the differences between them:

Rashi: I hold, however, that He called him *"son of man"* only so that he should not become haughty from having become familiar with the Celestial Chariot and with workings of the heavenly beings.

Radak: And it seems to me that because he saw the face of man on the chariot, it is telling him that he is good, and that he is a son of man and not a son of a lion or a son of an ox or a son of an eagle.

- 4 As opposed to other prophets, who were sent to prophesy in order to cause the nation to repent, the sad fate of Yechezkel's prophecy is explicit already in his inaugural prophecy. Pay attention to the characterization



of the nation in the first and third section and to the repeated phrase 'a rebellious house'. In light of this, what is the purpose of Yechezkel's prophecy to the nation? See pasuk 5.

- 5 The inaugural prophecy ends with the call of the angels of God, who make "the sound of a great uproar": "Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place." (3:12). The calls of the Seraphim are heard as well in the inaugural prophecy of Yishayahu: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." (Yishayahu 6:3)

a) Compare the two calls and see what praise is emphasized in each of them, and where God is found. How does this fit with the different roles which the two prophets play?

- b) In summary, look at Micha 1:3-4 and see the words of **M. Buber**:

The language "from His place" of Micha (and Yishayahu)...is talking about the Temple Mount, while he (Yechezkel) is in exile, and here, in exile, unlike Yishayahu at his inaugural prophecy before whom appears the Heavenly Temple, he sees a vision which comes in a storm. The place of the vision is the place he is found in at the time of the vision, the river Kevar...Not only in Zion, but also here, there is prophecy. And so, even here there is from time to time a place for God, and from Him, from time to time, he will be blessed. Today from here, tomorrow from Zion as before. That is the prophecy of the exile. (Free translation of Darko shel Mikra, p. 336)



Appendix

The Work of the Chariot

Perek 1 in Yechezkel is called by the Rabbis Maaseh Merkava (the Work of the Chariot) and is thought to be one of the most difficult and cryptic Perakim in Tanach, which is dealt with only by those who deal in the secrets of the Torah. The phrase Maaseh Merkava is found in the Mishna in the beginning of the second perek of **Massechet Chagiga**:

The (subject of) forbidden relations may not be expounded in the presence of three, nor the work of creation in the presence of two, nor (the work of) the chariot in the presence of one, unless he is a sage and understands of his own knowledge.

From this interest in learning the secrets of the Torah, we have a genre of books called “Sifrut haHeichalot vahaMerkava” (“Books of the Palaces and the Chariot”), which includes the works Heichalot Rabbati, Heichalot Zutrati, Maaseh Merkava and others. Although the Talmud and the Rabbinical literature do not deal with these topics, we do see several stories about Tannaim (rabbis from the Mishnaic period) who dealt with the “work of the chariot”:

Our Rabbis taught: Once R. Yochanan b. Zakkai was riding on an ass when going on a journey, and R. Eleazar b. ‘Arak was driving the ass from behind. [R. Eleazar] said to him: Master, teach me a chapter of the ‘Work of the Chariot’. He answered: Have I not taught you thus: ‘Nor the work of the chariot in the presence of one, unless he is a Sage and understands of his own knowledge?’ [R. Eleazar] then said to him: Master, permit me to say before you something which you have taught me. He answered, Say on! Forthwith R. Yochanan b. Zakkai dismounted from the ass, and wrapped himself up, and sat upon a stone beneath an olive tree. Said [R. Eleazar] to him: Master, why did you dismount from the ass? He answered: Is it proper that while you are expounding the ‘Work of the Chariot’, and the Divine Presence is

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with us, and the ministering angels accompany us, I should ride on the ass! Forthwith, R. Eleazar b. 'Arak began his exposition of the 'work of the Chariot', and fire came down from heaven and encompassed all the trees in the field; thereupon they all began to utter [divine] song. What was the song they uttered? — Praise the Lord from the earth, ye sea-monsters, and all deeps ... fruitful trees and all cedars ... Hallelujah. An angel then answered from the fire and said: 'This is the very 'Work of the Chariot'. [Thereupon] R. Yochanan b. Zakkai rose and kissed him on his head and said: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, Who has given a son to Avraham our father, who knows to speculate upon, and to investigate, and to expound the 'Work of the Chariot' — There are some who preach well but do not act well, others act well but do not preach well, but you preach well and act well. Happy are you, O Avraham our father, that R. Eleazar b. 'Arak has come forth from your loins. Now when these things were told R. Yehoshua, he and R. Yosse the priest were going on a journey. They said: Let us also expound the 'Work of the Chariot'; so R. Yehoshua began an exposition. Now that day was the summer solstice; nevertheless the heavens became overcast with clouds and a kind of rainbow appeared in the cloud, and the ministering angels assembled and came to listen like people who assemble and come to watch the entertainments of a bridegroom and bride. [Thereupon] R. Yosse the priest went and related what happened before R. Yochanan b. Zakkai; and [the latter] said: Happy are you, and happy is she that bore you; happy are my eyes that have seen thus. Moreover, in my dream, I and you were reclining on Mount Sinai, when a Bat Kol (voice from heaven) was sent to us, [saying]: Ascend hither, ascend hither! Here are great banqueting chambers, and fine dining couches prepared for you; you and your disciples and your disciples' disciples are designated for the third class. (Chagiga 14b)

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Kedusha

The pesukim of praise which are said by the angels are central to the Kedusha which is said in the cantor's repetition of the silent prayer in the Shacharit and Mussaf prayers. In Kedusha, we join the angels and together we praise God:

A crown they will give You, O Hashem, our God – the angels of the multitude above, together with your people Israel who are assembled below.

Together all of them will thrice recite 'Holy' as the word spoken by your prophet: "And one will call another and say: 'Holy, holy, holy is Hashem, Master of Legions, the whole world is filled with His glory.'

His glory fills the world. His ministering angels ask one another, 'Where is the place of His glory to revere Him?'

Facing them they give praise, saying...

(Translation from The Complete Artscroll Siddur, Sefard)