

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Yechezkel: The Book of Ezekiel
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Shiur#25: The Nation's Revival (36:32-38;)

At the end of Chapter 36, there is a reappearance of themes that have appeared in previous chapters, such that this unit should be viewed as an addition and complement to them. In vv. 31-32, the prophet emphasizes that the people have not changed their behavior, and therefore they are not worthy in their own merit of having God return them to their land. In vv. 33-35, he completes the order of events in the future and prophesizes that when they reach the land, God will cleanse His nation of all their iniquities, whereupon the cities will be rebuilt, the desolate land will become like the Garden of Eden, and the cities that now stand in ruins will once again be fortified. In v. 36, the prophet emphasizes that the nations will thereby know that it is God Who has rebuilt the ruins of His land, and this is in fact God's motivation for bringing the people back. In addition, in vv. 37-38 the prophet concludes the allegory of the shepherds which appeared in Chapter 34 (his appeal to the leaders of the people) and the prophecy of revival to the mountains of Israel in Chapter 36.

Within this unit we discern an echo of the organization of the prophecies in Sefer Yechezkel, and its significance: first, the prophet presents the allegory of the shepherds, by appealing to the flock as God's people, only after addressing the status of the people in Chapters 35-36, as we have seen. Afterwards, he adds the final link in the allegory of the shepherds, describing the flock (the people/sacrifices brought by the people) in the future, based on the multitudes that visited Jerusalem in the past:

"Thus says the Lord God, Moreover, this request I will grant to the house of Israel, to do it for them: I will increase them with men like a flock. Like the flock of sacrifices, like the flock of Jerusalem in her appointed times, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men, and they shall know that I am the Lord." (36:37-38)

The Garden of Eden

The prophet then adds another dimension to the change in the status of the people, stating that the land will flourish and produce trees and fruit. It seems that it is with this message in mind that Yechezkel chooses an expression that depicts the land as giving more and better fruit than any other land – the "Garden of Eden".

The Garden of Eden is familiar to us as a vision of utopia going back to Bereishit 2-3, but in Sefer Yechezkel, somewhat surprisingly, the image is used mainly in prophecies concerning Tyre and Egypt. In the prophecy to Tyre, it describes the place of the king – “You were in Eden, the Garden of God” (28:13), while in the prophecy to Egypt it appears several times in different variations. In Chapter 31:8-9 we find:

“The cedars in the Garden of God could not obscure it... nor did any tree in the Garden of God compare with it in beauty... So that all the trees of Eden, that were in the Garden of God, envied him.”

Further on in the chapter (vv. 16,18) the prophet describes the fate of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who descends to Sheol along with his trees of the Garden of Eden:

“And all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, were comforted in the nether parts of the earth... To whom are you thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? Yet you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the nether parts of the earth...”.

Now, Yechezkel completes the prophetic message on this topic. Indirectly, it turns out that in the future, the Garden of Eden will not be associated with the other nations, but will be a description of the land and the dwelling place of Am Yisrael. The significance of the transition of the Garden of Eden from Yechezkel’s prophecies concerning the nations to his prophecies of the revival of Israel, is amplified by the fact that this description of the land is completely exposed to the view of the nations. In this way, Yechezkel sharpens the contrast between the future of the nations and the future of Israel:

“And they shall say, This land that was blighted has become like the Garden of Eden, and the waste and blighted and ruined cities are fortified, and inhabited. Then the nations that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord have rebuilt the ruined places, and have replanted that which was blighted; I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it.” (36:35-36)

Seeking God

It appears that the change in God’s attitude towards His people in Yechezkel’s prophecy may be discerned in the conspicuous use of the root “*d-r-sh*”, with the climax of this new attitude finding expression in 36:36. If we track the appearance of this root throughout the Sefer we find that in the past, God’s relations with His people were in crisis, and the seeking (*derisha*) of God by the people during the years of destruction received a negative response. With regard to the future, there is a transformation in the use of the verb, and the two contexts in which it appears in a positive sense, speak of the future. In Chapter 14 we find this root in vv. 3,7 and 10, all evincing the distance between God and His people. For example, in verse 3 we read, “Should I let Myself be inquired of at all (*ha-idaresh idaresh*) by

them?” Later, in Chapter 20, the root appears in vv. 1, 3, 31, 40 – and once again, in each instance the context is one of distancing and lack of concession to their requests. For instance, v. 3: “Is it in order to inquire of Me (*ha-lidrosh otí*) that you come? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of (*im idaresh*) by you.” Likewise v. 31: “And shall I be inquired of (*va-ani idaresh*) by you, O House of Israel? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of (*im idaresh*) by you.”

The possibility of a future situation in which God inquires of, seeks out, or shows a positive interest in His people appears for the first time within the framework of the vision of the revival (20:39-44): “There I will accept them and there I will require (*edrosh*) your offerings...” (v. 40). A requiring/inquiring of a different sort, expressing concern and closeness, appears in 33:6, where God demands the meting out of justice to the observer who fails to warn His people. Thereafter, in the chapters devoted to the future revival of the nation, God demands that justice be meted out to the leaders who do not inquire after or care about His flock: “... and none searched (*ein doresh*) or sought after them” (34:6; likewise v. 8). In contrast, vv. 10-11 state that God will seek after His flock and gather them to Him. The process reaches its climax in 36:37, where, for the first time in the Sefer, we find God initiating contact with His people: “Moreover I will grant/accede/seek out (*idaresh*) to the House of Israel...”. This image complements the theme set down in Chapter 34, of God seeking out His flock at the hands of the shepherds. However, while in that context the “*derisha*” was not oriented directly towards the people but rather towards the leaders who had been criminally negligent in their duty, here the prophet describes a direct seeking. Thus, this verse testifies to a significant change in the bond between God and His people.

R. Eliezer of Beaugency draws a connection in his commentary between the end of Chapter 36 and Chapter 37:

“And if one should say, ‘But this is a promise to those who would be living at that time. For those who had died in exile, captive and despoiled, by the sword and by fire, in sanctification of God’s Name, and [those] who died of old age, who had awaited consolation and deliverance all their lives, but did not see it – how are they to be consoled? The response to this is, ‘The hand of the Lord was upon me...’ (37:1).”

The idea here is that the uniqueness of Yechezkel’s prophecy in Chapter 37 arises from the fact that it addresses even the dead, announcing that there is hope for them, too, and that the renewal of the bond between God and His people includes them, too.

Translated by Kaeren Fish