

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Yechezkel: The Book of Ezekiel
By Dr. Tova Ganzel

Shiur #31: End of the Sefer (Chapters 45-48)

Allocation of inheritances (45:1-15)

The first part of Chapter 45 deals with the division of the land among the tribes of Israel. But the division here is fundamentally different to that familiar to us: the one dating to the period when the land was originally settled. The most conspicuous difference is the allocation of an inheritance to the *kohanim*, “the ministers of the Sanctuary who come near to minister to the Lord” (v. 4), the *leviim*, “the ministers of the House” (v. 5), and the *nasi*, so that “My princes shall no more oppress My people” (v. 8). This new division apparently serves two different purposes. First, the placement of the Levite inheritance between the inheritance of the other tribes and the Temple is meant to prevent the Temple from being defiled. In addition, this new arrangement will prevent the office-bearers from being dependent, to some extent, on the people – a situation which in the past (during the period of the Judges and during the First Temple Period) had led to the misuse of the leaders’ power.

Aside from discussing the allocation of portions of land, the prophet emphasizes the need for a regime of judgment and justice (vv. 9-10) to prevent oppression of the people by the *nasi*. Thereafter, the prophet moves on to other subjects, and Chapters 45-46 include attention to the laws of sacrifices, the role of the prophet, and the place where the meat of the sacrifices is cooked.

“Its words contradict words of the Torah” (45:16 – 46:18)

Yechezkel is the only prophet whose prophecies also include laws meant for the people. There are some significant discrepancies between the laws that he sets down (in Chapters 40-48) and the laws of the Torah. This leads to the obvious question raised by the *Amoraim*:

“Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: That man is to be remembered for good, and Chanina ben Chizkiya is his name. Were it not for him, the Book of Yechezkel would have been suppressed, since its words contradict the words of the Torah. What did [Chanina ben Chizkiya] do?”

He took up with him three hundred barrels of oil, and remained in the upper chamber, resolving the text...”¹

There are numerous differences between the sacrifices set forth in Chapters 45-46 in *Sefer Yechezkel* and those described in Chapters 28-29 in *Bamidbar*. In *Yechezkel*, a bullock is offered as a sin offering on the 14th of Nissan (45:21-22), but there is no mention of any such sacrifice in *Bamidbar*. According to *Yechezkel*, on the Festival of *Matzot*, seven bullocks are offered, along with seven rams and a meal offering of an ‘*efah*’ and a ‘*hin*’ of oil, as well as a goat kid as a sin offering (45:22-25). In *Bamidbar*, in contrast, we find two bullocks and one ram, and an accompanying meal offering consisting of three tenth-measures of fine flour for the bullocks and two tenth-measures of fine flour for the ram, along with seven lambs and the goat kid as a sin offering (*Bamidbar* 28:16-22).

On Sukkot, according to *Yechezkel*, seven bullocks are offered along with seven rams and a meal offering of an ‘*efah*’ and a ‘*hin*’ of oil (as on the Festival of *Matzot*), and a goat kid as a sin offering (45:25). But in *Sefer Bamidbar* we find a descending number of bullocks offered each day, starting with thirteen on the first day and ending with seven on the last day; the meal offering for each bullock is three tenth-measures; there are two rams which each have a meal offering of two tenth-measures; there are fourteen lambs with an accompanying meal offering of a tenth-measure for each; and a goat kid is brought as a sin offering with no accompanying meal offering.

In addition, *Sefer Bamidbar* enumerates the sacrifices to be brought at other times: Shavuot, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Shemini Atzeret. *Yechezkel* mentions none of these. Each of these holidays last for a single day, and perhaps *Sefer Yechezkel* does not mention any of them because *Yechezkel*’s prophecy makes no change in any of them. But, alternatively, this may be a deliberate omission. This would imply no future commemoration of these holidays if the Temple is built in keeping with the plan that *Yechezkel* presents, in accordance with God’s will.

The rest of the chapter deals with the sacrifices of Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh.² Here, too, there are discrepancies between the sacrifices set forth in *Yechezkel*’s prophecy and those stipulated in *Sefer Bamidbar*. According to *Yechezkel*, on Shabbat six lambs are offered along with a meal offering “as he is able to give”, and oil, as well as ram with an ‘*efah*’ measure as its accompanying meal offering (46:4-5). According to *Sefer Bamidbar*, the offering for Shabbat is two lambs whose meal offering consists of two tenth-measures and a libation offering (28:9-10). On Rosh Chodesh, according to *Yechezkel*, the offering is a bullock and a ram, with a meal offering of an ‘*efah*’ and oil, as well as six lambs whose meal offering is “as he is able to give” (46:6-7). *Sefer Bamidbar*, on the

¹ Menachot 45a; see also Shabbat 13b and Chagiga 13a with slight changes.

² It is for this reason that this chapter is read as the haftara for Shabbat Rosh Chodesh.

other hand, mentions two bullocks whose meal offering is six tenth-measures and oil, a single ram whose meal offering is two tenth-measures and oil; and seven lambs whose meal offering is seven tenth-measures and libations of wine (28:11-15). In addition, there are other differences concerning the additional meal offerings for the free-will sacrifice (See *Bamidbar* 15:4-10 and *Yechezkel* 46:11).

Many commentators have noted the differences between the sacrifices as prescribed in the Torah and those described by Yechezkel. For instance, Radak notes in his commentary on *Yechezkel* 46:4:

“This is not the sacrifice that is written in the Torah – neither for Shabbat nor for Yom Tov. The sacrifices will follow a new format.”

See also Rashi (46:4), who explains the differences in relation to the number of lambs offered on Shabbat and the number of bullocks offered on Rosh Chodesh (46:6), as well as the commentary of R. Eliezer of Beaugency (45:14,25; 46:5; and elsewhere). Below we shall attempt to propose a different partial explanation for the differences.

It is difficult to characterize all the differences between the sacrifices set down in the Torah and those we encounter in Yechezkel's prophecy. Perhaps the reason for the differences in Yechezkel lies in the historical background to his prophecies, which included the destruction of the Temple, and exile. Accordingly, the changes to the sacrifices listed in Yechezkel should be viewed as part of a broader totality of change that we have discussed earlier, including a new order of leadership with the aim of preventing a repetition of the catastrophe of the departure of the Divine Presence and the subsequent destruction of the Temple.

Sefer Yechezkel – Protection for the future Temple

We note a number of other changes in Yechezkel's vision of the future Temple; the purpose of these, too, is to maintain the sanctity of the Temple and ensure that God's Presence will remain there forever. We have already discussed the extension of the courtyards surrounding the Temple and the strict security placed at their gates; the special windows; the limitations as to the *kohanim* who are worthy of serving in the Temple; limitations on the access of the *nasi* to specific areas within the Temple precinct; and the decreased involvement of the people in the offering of sacrifices. These changes are designed to prevent ritually impure people from approaching. In addition, the geographic location of the Temple changes, too. It is removed from the city; distancing of the Temple from the population center is likewise aimed at protecting it from the possibility of defilement.

The changes extend from the Temple itself to Jerusalem and to the other parts of the country: the city becomes shared by all the tribes of Israel, and the land is divided among the tribes in an egalitarian manner (47:13 – 48:35). This redivision of the inheritances will help to reduce antagonism among the tribes,

and perhaps help to prevent oppression and theft, since these, too, were among the reasons for God's departure from the Temple in the past. *Sefer Yechezkel* ends with the words, "And the name of the city from that day shall be, 'The Lord is there'." (48:35) The new name given to Jerusalem expresses the constant presence of God within it. In light of our discussion in previous chapters, these words reflect the essence of the prophecy as a whole, which deals with the new appearance of Jerusalem and the Temple, facilitating the eternal Divine Presence in the city.³

It should be emphasized that in the Temple described by Yechezkel, we have no hint of an Ark, *keruvim*, a table for showbread, or a menorah; all that is mentioned is an altar of wood. Perhaps, one may posit, the absence of the holy vessels from Yechezkel's vision does not necessarily imply their absence from the Temple. But they may be absent from the text because they will indeed not exist in the future Temple. If so, this change might also be meant to preserve the sanctity of the Temple. The absence of any holy vessels means less involvement on the part of all the various office-bearers in the Temple, which lessens the chance of defilement.

It therefore seems that the changes in the future Temple – the distancing of the people, and the new format of leadership by the *kohanim* and the *nasi* – are a prophetic response to the Destruction of the Temple. In Yechezkel's time the people were not observing God's word in accordance with the Torah of Moshe, and as a result, the worst possible scenario became reality: the Temple was destroyed and the people was exiled from the land. In response, the Temple that appears in Yechezkel's vision is protected from any future destruction. In various different ways, Yechezkel envisions a protected Temple whose existence is assured forever, and a city whose entire purpose is to have God's Presence in its midst. (It may well be that our prayers for the Third Temple are that it be rebuilt following Yechezkel's new plan, which ensures the eternal presence of God among his people. And this may have been the intention of Chanina ben Chizkiya, thanks to whom *Sefer Yechezkel* was not buried and forgotten.)

Who heals – God vs. His people (47:1-12)

Chapter 47 offers a surprising turning-point in the vision of the future Temple. The prophet speaks here neither of the structure nor of the order of service, but rather describes a wondrous stream that emerges from the entrance to God's House and flows all the way to the Arava:

"Then he brought me back to the door of the House, and behold, water issued out from under the threshold of the House eastward, for the front of the House looked toward the east, and the water came down from

³ See M. Greenberg, "The Design and Themes of Ezekiel's Program of Restoration", *Interpretation* 38, 1984, pp. 181-208. (The article mentions some of the elements that are aimed at protecting the sanctity of the Temple in the future; we have expanded on his list here.)

beneath, from the right side of the House, at the south side of the altar. Then he brought me out by the way of the gate northward, and led me round the way outside to the outer gate by the way that looks eastward, and behold, there ran out water on the right side.” (47:1-2)

At first, the water level is low. But then it rises until it becomes a raging river, impossible to cross:

“When the man that had the line in his hand went out eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he made me pass through the water; the water was up to the ankles. Again he measured a thousand, and made me pass through the water; the water was up to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and made me pass through water up to the loins. And he measured a further thousand, and it was a stream that I could not pass over, for the water had risen, water to swim in, a stream that could not be passed over.” (vv. 3-5)

The prophetic description of Yechezkel’s encounter with the stream brings us right in: we identify with the depiction presented. (This is in contrast to the descriptions of the awe-inspiring and imposing descriptions of the plans of the Temple.) Then the prophet is commanded to sit on the banks of the stream and to observe its wonders:

“And he said to me, Son of man, have you seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the edge of the stream. Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the stream were very many trees on the one side and on the other. Then he said to me, These waters issue out towards the eastern region, and go down into the Arava, and on their entering the sea, the sea of issuing waters, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that every living thing with which it swarms, wherever the streams shall come, shall live; and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come to here, so that everything shall be healed, and shall live where that stream comes. And it shall come to pass, that the fishermen shall stand upon it from Ein-Gedi as far as Ein-Eglayim; there shall be a place for the spreading of nets; their fish shall be of various kinds, like the fish of the great sea, exceeding many. But its miry places and its marshes shall not be healed; they shall be given for salt. And by the stream upon its bank, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for food, whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall its fruit fail; it shall bring forth new fruit every month, because their waters have issued out of the Sanctuary, and its fruit shall be for food, and its leaf for medicine.” (vv. 6-12)

Yechezkel’s sitting at the bank of the stream – unlike his tour inside the plan of the Temple or his falling upon his face when he experiences the Divine vision –conveys a feeling of calm and tranquility and, most of all, humanity. We

see here a point of encounter between the Divine and the human that is not inside the Temple, a place that inspires awe and fear. But the properties of this stream are nonetheless unique and wondrous: all who take refuge in it are healed; the salty water of the Dead Sea is sweetened; the fishermen are promised an abundance of fish; the trees growing on the banks not only do not wither, but will bear fruit throughout the year, and their leaves have medicinal properties.

Owing to the wonders of this stream and the trees on its banks, many scholars treat this chapter as a complementary description of the Garden of Eden, or even of the days of Creation.⁴ But in addition this description has special significance in the context of *Sefer Yechezkel*. The profusion of trees and the encounter with the different forms of life do not occur in a place used for idolatry. Rather, this is a place of encounter with the Divine. This appears to be part of the profound healing that the nation undergoes.

If we regard this description as the climax – although not the conclusion – of *Sefer Yechezkel* as a whole, we have here an important complement to a theme we have described throughout the chapters of revival. Although Yechezkel has distanced the people from anything connected to the Temple, now he is also creating a Divine connection with the people that has never existed before.

The language used to describe Yechezkel's encounter with the river is similar to the language of his tour of the future Temple (v. 2). And there are additional parallels between the Temple and the river: the measuring of the level of the water (vv. 3-5) recalls the measuring of the plan of the building; the addressing of the prophet with the words, "Do you see, son of man" (v. 6) is similar to God's addressing Yechezkel when He shows him the deeds of the people in the Temple; and it also accords with the appeal to Yechezkel to see the plan of the Temple.

So the wondrous river that appears at the end of the *Sefer* seems to be a way of bringing the Sanctuary into the very midst of the people more than ever before: through connecting with the miraculous abundance and healing forces of the river, powers not found in the usual course of nature.

This connection between God and the people through the water that emerges from the Sanctuary has a special significance coming at the end of *Sefer Yechezkel*, where the ceremony of purification of the whole people is performed using "purifying waters" (36:25). It turns out that in order to heal the people, the prophet foresees a fissure in the regular order of nature. Beyond purification - a necessary condition for the revival of the people in the future - there will also be possible forms of healing that pass through the Sanctuary, but

⁴ For elaboration, see L. Mazor, "Masa Nachal ha-Pela'im min ha-Mikdash el ha-Yam (Yechezkel 47:1-12): Siluk ha-Tohu u-Beria Chadasha", in R. Elior (ed.), *Gan be-Eden mi-Kedem*, Jerusalem 5770, pp. 81-104.

that do not require the people to approach. If so, this resolves a series of questions that have remained unanswered: If, as the words of the prophet thus far suggest, the nation persists in its sinful ways, and their purification is the result of God's will alone, then surely there is no atonement for the deeds of the past. In addition, does the distancing of the people from the Temple mean that the connection between them is severed? Will the final impression of the nation's actions in the Temple be forever remembered as those deeds that caused the Destruction and the exile to Babylon – since, in the future, the conclusions will already have been drawn and the people will be kept away from the Temple?

Now we see that the healing properties of the river in fact have the wondrous ability to repair the flaws that caused the Destruction. The distancing of the people from the Temple turns out to be a physical measure that does not reflect any spiritual distancing: God connects the people to the Temple by means of the river that flows from the very midst of the House, notwithstanding the geographical distance.

So it turns out that ultimately the bond between God and His people is not only renewed unilaterally by God; but the entire nation is part of the process as they are nourished, by the river from the Temple, more directly than ever before.

Perhaps an echo of this is to be found in the prophecy of Zekharia, which came later than the prophecy of Yechezkel:

“On that day, living waters shall emerge from Jerusalem – half of them towards the eastern sea, and half of them towards the western sea; in summer and in winter shall it be. And the Lord shall be King over all the earth; on that day the Lord shall be One and His Name One.” (*Zekharia* 14:8-9)

It seems that the river connecting the Temple and the people carries within it the prayer arising from our study of *Sefer Yechezkel* as a whole. May we merit to see God's Presence in our world as foreseen by Yechezkel in his prophecies, in which the Source of Divine blessing is revealed and known to all.

Epilogue

Having completed the *Sefer*, we are left with a lingering question as to the relationship between the prophet and his prophecy. Who is Yechezkel, the man? Where do his qualities, his thoughts, and his sorrow find expression? When are his words the words of God alone? We are familiar with Chazal's teaching that “No two prophets prophesied in the same style” (Sanhedrin 89a). Does the absence of love, compassion and sorrow in this *Sefer* express a different aspect of God's connection with His people? What is the relationship between the prophecies of Yirmiyahu and Yishayahu and those of Yechezkel? Should we strive to arrive at a harmonious understanding of these prophetic messages,

which seem so different from one another? Or are they perhaps meant to be studied as different aspects of God?

The question becomes even more pressing with the chapters describing the future Temple. Was the hope that the Second Temple would be built on this model? And after the destruction of the Second Temple, is the model presented by Yechezkel in these chapters still relevant and achievable? Do we hope and pray for its implementation? And how?

Yechezkel's prophetic messages present the connection between God and His people, as well as the anticipated revival of the nation, in a unique light. Sometimes it seems that the work of Yechezkel, the observer, is not yet complete.

Translated by Kaeren Fish