

MATAN AL HAPEREREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



Perek 40-41

Perek 40 begins the last section of the book, which deals with the vision of the future temple and the borders of the land inheritances of the tribes after the redemption. In perakim 40-42 we find a description of Yechezkel's visionary tour through the temple *"in the visions of God"*, which parallels the tour described in the first section of the book, in perakim 8-11. While the first tour is meant to demonstrate to the prophet the sins which defiled the temple and caused the Shechina (spirit of God) to leave and the destruction of the temple, here the tour is meant to herald the return of the Shechina to the temple and the rebuilding of the temple in the future. The unique characteristics of the future temple embody the trend of repair and sanctification as compared to the first temple which was defiled and destroyed.

The vision opens with an introduction which describes the time setting of the vision and the encounter with the man (40:1-4). This is followed by the man and Yechezkel beginning to tour the wall which surrounds the temple through the eastern gate, the hall (*ulam*) of the gate and the cells on the sides of gate (5-16), and entering the outer court (17-27).





In the next stage he enters the inner court and its various gates (28-37), sees the tables and other implements in the court for the purpose of the sacrifices (38-43) and the chambers of the priests in the inner court (44-46). Subsequently, Yechezkel enters the temple and sees the hall of the temple, the inner temple and the holy of holies (40:47-41:26).

- 1 “In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, in the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month” (1). The perek opens with a double description of the date of the prophetic vision. This double description is explained by the Rabbis: “Now which is the year the beginning of which falls on the tenth of Tishrei? Say: This is the jubilee year.” (Arachin 12a) What is the hidden symbolism in the choice of this unique date? Use the **Radak** to help you understand:

Since the slaves would be freed in the Jubilee year on Yom Kippur, the Holy One Blessed be He showed him the end of the exile and the building of the temple in the Jubilee year, and on Yom Kippur when God forgives the sins of Israel and does not remember their transgressions any more.

See the description of the purpose of Yom Kippur in the Torah (Vayikra 16:30-33) and note the additional connection between the date and Yechezkel’s vision of the temple.

- 2 “And He placed me on a very lofty mountain, and upon it was like the building of a city from the south.”(2)
 - a) The first detail which is unique to the future temple is its topographical location. What is the symbolism of this location? See the prophecy of the end of days in Yishayahu 2:2 and its context.



b) The topographical location of the temple and its isolation from the city are mentioned in the continuation of the vision, in perek 43:12. What detail is added there, and how can this help us understand the role of the new location? Use the **Malbim**:

He said that in these ways He would differentiate the third temple from the previous temples: a) that it would be “on the top of the mountain”, and this indicates that the mountain itself which the temple would be built on would be at the top of the other mountains so that it would be the top of all the mountains, while the previous temples were on the side of the mountain it would be at the top of the mountain, which shows that it is lifted above them all, b) and secondly, “*all its boundary round about shall be most holy*” because the city will be far away from the temple, and the 25 thousand cubits in which the temple of God stands would all be holy and God’s contribution to the priests.

3 Twice (in Perakim 8-11 and here), Yechezkel is brought by the hand of God to the land of Israel for a prophetic tour in the temple “*in the visions of God*” (2). In both tours Yechezkel is accompanied by an angel who brings him in, stage by stage. Compare these two tours, paying attention to the following points:

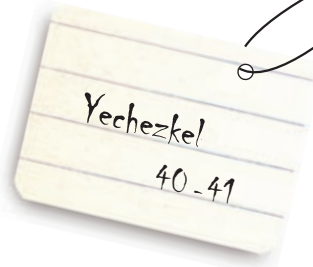
a) The prophet meets people holding implements both in the first vision (9:2-5) and in the second vision (40:3) – pay attention to the implements which are in the hands of the people in each vision and discuss the symbolic meaning of each of them.

b) What is the focus of each of these visions? See the **Radak**:

And he showed him the future temple, as he had shown him the destruction, to comfort the house of Israel who had been exiled so that they would not lose hope that they would still return to the land and live in it securely, and that the rebuilding of the temple would be greater than the original.



- 4 Unlike the first tour in which the man speaks at every stage, for the majority of the second tour the man measures the temple without speaking, except for three comments which refer to the central buildings and reveal the uniqueness of the future temple and the trend of seclusion and sanctification of the temple as compared to the first temple.
- a) *“And he said to me, this chamber, which faces southward”* (40:45) In pesukim 45-46 the man differentiates between two groups of priests. Examine what he says and determine how different the roles of the priests are. The reason for the differentiation is explained in 44:10-16. How does this separation atone for the actions which took place during the first temple, some of which are described in Yechezkel’s first tour in perek 8?
- b) In 41:4 the man points out the holy of holies – why is this necessary? Pay attention to the exceptional language in pasuk 3 – *“Then he came”* instead of *“then he brought me”* in the rest of the stages. What is the meaning of this change in style?
- c) In 41:22 the altar/table *“that is before the Lord”* is mentioned. This is the only vessel in the temple which is mentioned during the tour, and its work was outside – the altar and the other facilities for sacrificing were in the court, while the inner area of the temple and the holy of holies remained distant from the people. This is unlike other descriptions of the temple in which the vessels are described in detail. What is the meaning of this difference?
- d) In conclusion – think about how the trend of seclusion and sanctification are a negative reaction to the actions of the people during the first temple.



Appendix

The detailed description of the future temple in the book of Yechezkel is a kind of architectural plan for the building of the temple. However, the actual building of the second temple did not match the temple structure as described in Yechezkel. The question of why this was so was addressed throughout the generations. The Rambam wrote:

Hilchot Beit Habechira 1:4 The [design of the] structure built by [King] Solomon is described explicitly in [the Book of] Kings. [In contrast, the design of] the Messianic Temple, though mentioned in [the Book of] Ezekiel, is not explicit or explained. Thus, the people [in the time] of Ezra built the Second Temple according to the structure of Solomon, [including] certain aspects which are explicitly stated in Ezekiel.

Unlike the Rambam, there were many commentators who saw the vision of Yechezkel as the plan for the third temple. The **Malbim on Yechezkel 43:11** explains the difference between the temples:

And it says here three times the plan of the temple, because the temple had three plans. A) The plan which was required in every temple which would be built to God and that it was not possible to build without and which was the same in the tabernacle, and the first, second and third temples. This plan required a court and a sanctuary and a holy of holies, and the vessels which were required in all, the altar for sacrifices, the incense altar, the table, the candelabrum, etc. B) Those things which were not required and could change according to the time, as things changed from the tabernacle to the temple, from the first temple to the second temple. C) Those things which are specific only to the third temple in the time of the redemption, **and they could not make these in the time of Ezra, even though they knew of them from the words of Yechezkel, because they knew that the time of redemption had not yet come, and that only some of the things told to them by the prophets could be made.** As the Rambam wrote in the Hilchot Beit HaBechira, for the first temple he described “*the form of the temple and its scheme, its entrances and its exits*” (43:11) – that

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is to say, the required plan for all the temples and the rooms and gates which must be in all of them. About the special structure for the future, which they could not build now because it involved laws which are lost and will not be revealed until future times, he said: “*and all its forms and all its laws*” (43:11) – for these laws are laws whose reason has been lost. And about the things which are common to the first and third temples, these they were able to build during the second temple as well, as the Rambam wrote: “for these things are not lost laws but rather teachings whose reason is known, about these he said: “*let them know ... all its laws and all its teachings*” (43:11)

Yechezkel’s vision of the temple is part of the prophecies of consolation which are found in many of the writings of the prophets, but it has its own unique angle. In the midst of the difficult exile, while the nation groans under the yoke of its captors, Yechezkel stands and prophesies in detail an architectural plan of the future temple. The dissonance cries out: what does this vision provide for the people? What can a nation in the depths of exile do with this plan? The **Midrash Tanchuma 96:14** deals with this question, and its answer calls out to us even today:

When God revealed the details of the construction of the temple to the prophet Yechezkel, He said, “Go and *describe the House to the House of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; let them measure its plan.*” Yechezkel replied, “Lord of the Universe, we are now in exile, in the land of our enemies and You command me to tell them about the details of the form of the house and write it before them that they should keep the form and the laws. Is there anything they can do about it? Leave them until they return from exile and then I will tell them.” ... The Holy One Blessed be He answered Yechezkel, “Just because My children happen to be in exile, should My House remain desolate? Go, tell them to engage in reading in the Torah about the form of the House and in reward for occupying themselves in reading about it, I will count it for them as if they are occupied in building the House.”

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