**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**Yechezkel: The Book of Ezekiel**

**By Dr. Tova Ganzel**

**Shiur #30a: The Vision of the Future Temple:**

**More concealment than revelation (43:10 - 44:31)**

“You, son of man – describe the House to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities, and let them measure the plan. And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the form of the House, and its fashion, and its exits, and its entrances, and all its forms, and its ordinances, and all its shapes, and all its teachings, and write it in their sight, that they may keep its whole form, and all its ordinances, and do them. This is the Torah of the House: Upon the top of the mountain its whole limit round about shall be most holy; behold, this is the Torah of the House.” (43:10-12)

The prophet now comes back to the plan of the Temple after recalling, towards the beginning of Chapter 43 (vv. 7-9) the past sins of idolatry. He still interweaves the message that the people should “be ashamed of their iniquities”. The command to the prophet – that he must make known the plan for the Temple, that he must set it down in writing before them and present it in all its detail – serves to make it tangible and concrete. But surprisingly enough, there is also no explicit mention here of the location of the Temple; the location is conveyed with the rather vague expression, “Upon the top of the mountain” (which recalls 40:2, where Yechezkel speaks of “a very high mountain”).

So we find that the description of the Temple and the city, like the details of the future Temple itself, has some concrete and precise elements, but at the very same time, lacks some very central details. The reader is left with a sense of being “in the dark”. This feeling continues to follow us as, in the coming chapters, Yechezkel reconstructs the place of the nation and its status, the role of the prophets, the *leviim*, the *kohanim*, and the *nasi*, and the degree to which these are connected to the future Temple. This Temple will be different from its predecessor, *inter alia* in that it exists in the midst of a people that has been reorganized, with new laws: laws that are left somewhat vague and unclear in the text.

**The place of the nation in the vision of the future Temple**

In these chapters, as in other places prior to the vision of the future Temple, the nation’s place in the Temple is limited; there is no general invitation for them to take an active part in either its establishment or the Divine service performed in it. The minimal involvement of the people in this vision of the future Temple is indicated by the small number of verses in which Yechezkel speaks of the people when dealing with the future Temple (Chapters 40-48) . As we have seen, Yechezkel is charged with informing the people of the plan for the Temple with all its details, so that the people keep to the plan and what it contains (40:4, and also here – 43:10). We have also seen that the people are mentioned with reference to their former sins having caused the defilement of God’s holy Name (43:7-11), and the emphasis on the need to distance these sinners from the future Temple (44:5-9). The only verses in which the people’s place in the Temple is mentioned are those which describe the people when the *kohanim* go out to them in the outer courtyard (44:19). Moreover, the prophet emphasizes that the place of the offering of sacrifices is in the inner courtyard, which is separated from the people (46:20). The closest place that the people are able to reach is “the gate of the inner court that faces east” (46:1), which is opened only on Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, and the people prostrate themselves outside of this gate, while it is open (46:3). In addition, the people are responsible for funding the communal sacrifices that are offered in the Temple – but once again, the actual sacrifice is carried out without the people present in the Temple (45:13-17)

Given the above, the impression arising from Yechezkel’s prophecy is that the Temple is not a spiritual center for the entire nation. The Temple serves the *kohanim* and *leviim*, who perform their service within it as representatives of the people, while the only roles that are given to the people are the auxiliary functions and appearances: funding of the sacrifices, prostration, and a partial view of the Divine service. Another significant aspect showing the distancing of the people from the Temple is that they (the people being those who caused the Temple's defilement in the past) are now only to be found in the outer courtyard. This is in contrast to the picture arising from the plain text in *Sefer Vayikra*, which suggests that a lay Israelite may approach the sacrificial altar. This distancing seems to be aimed at protecting the Temple from elements that may lead to its defilement, thereby causing its destruction. In this way, Yechezkel’s prophecy of an eternal dwelling, an eternal *nasi*, an eternal covenant and an eternal Temple can be fulfilled.

**Purification ceremonies for the altar and the Temple – “This *parasha* will be explained in the future by Eliyahu” (43:13-27)**

We have seen that Yechezkel's prophecies seek to counter the factors leading to the Destruction of the First Temple. His prophecies now emphasize the need to protect the Temple from impurity on a permanent basis, and therefore prohibit the people from entering the Temple, and limit the people's involvement in its activities.[[1]](#footnote-1) Admittedly, one might offer the opposite interpretation: from now on, God will rest His Presence even with no entry into the Temple:

“Nor shall I hide My face any more from them, for I have poured out My spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God” (39:29).

The people's lack of inclusion in the sacrificial service and entry into the Temple is a function of their higher spiritual level, which has no need for the Temple. This process accords with Yechezkel’s words in Chapter 36:

“I will also give you a new heart, and I will put within you a new spirit; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you…” (36:26-27).

The next prophecy is devoted to the ceremony of purification of the altar, and appended to it is a prophecy about purification and atonement of the Temple in Chapter 45. The commentators debate whether the descriptions of the offering of sacrifices in these chapters in Yechezkel refer to a one-time ceremony of inauguration of the Temple – like the inauguration of the *Mishkan* – or whether they are meant to be performed each year.[[2]](#footnote-2) These verses are difficult to explain; this is also reflected in the statement of the Gemara (*Menachot* 45a) that Eliyahu will solve these difficulties in the future. Indeed, the plain language of the verses makes it difficult to determine this question one way or the other; but it seems that the verses devoted to the purification and atonement of the Temple (45:18-20) describe a one-time ceremony, representing a continuation of the purification of the altar in our chapter (43:18-27). This is the conclusion drawn in the Gemara:

“Thus says the Lord God: ‘In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a young bullock without blemish, and you shall offer it as a sin offering in the Sanctuary’. [Why does the text say] ‘a sin offering’? It is a burnt offering! R. Yochanan said, This *parasha* will be explained by Eliyahu in the future. Rav Ashi said: [It refers to] the special consecration offering that they offered at the time of Ezra, just as it was offered in the days of Moshe [at the inauguration of the *Mishkan*]. There is also a *beraita* to the same effect: Rabbi Yehuda said, ‘This parsha will be explained by Eliyahu in the future.’ R. Yossi said to him: ‘[It refers to] the consecration sacrifices that were offered in the days of Ezra, in the same way that they were offered in the days of Moshe.’ He replied, ‘Set your mind at ease, for you have set my mind at ease.’” (*Menachot* 45a)[[3]](#footnote-3)

In other words, just as Chapter 43 contained a description of the ceremony of inauguration of the altar, so too Chapter 45 contains a description of the ceremony of inauguration of the Temple. The purification of the altar and the atonement of the Temple in Yechezkel’s prophecy will be performed as one-time acts. We should therefore understand the atonement of the Temple “for everyone who sins out of error or ignorance” (45:20), as describing the purification of the Temple and the altar from impure contact which has adhered to it up until the inauguration, rather than from the impurity of the nation’s sins (which Yechezkel mentions also in vv. 7-9 preceding this prophecy). If these are indeed one-time events, and these chapters in *Yechezkel* are arranged in chronological order, then Yechezkel describes: first a ceremony of inauguration of the altar (Chapter 43); followed next by a description of the entry of God’s glory into the House and the tithes given to the *kohanim* (Chapter 4); and finally about the *nasi's* role, and the inauguration of the Temple (Chapter 45).

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. Another example of this is the location of the ceremonies in Yechezkel’s prophecies in comparison with *Vayikra* 16: Yechezkel describes the ceremony taking place in the courtyard, while in Sefer Vayikra it takes place within the Sanctuary. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I discuss this question in more detail in my article, “Haftarah of Tetzaveh, *Yechezkel* 43:6-27” in Eldad A. (ed.) *Maftirin be-Navi: Iyyunim be-Haftarot u-ve-Divrei ha-Neviim*, Jerusalem 5770, pp. 341-343. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This also represents the Rambam’s ruling in his Laws of Sacrifices 2:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)