YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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

**Understanding the haftarot**

**By Harav Yaakov Medan**

**SHABBAT PARA**

**Is repentance necessary?**

The word of the Lord came to me: "Man, the House of Israel dwelled upon their soil and defiled it with their ways and their deeds – their ways were like the impurity of the menstrual woman before Me. I poured out My fury upon them for the blood they spilled upon the land and the idols they defiled her with. I scattered them among the nations – they were strewn across the countries – and I punished them according to their ways and their deeds. There, in whichever nations they came to, they desecrated My holy name because it was said of them, 'These are the Lord's people, and they have left His land.' And I am concerned for My holy name, which the House of Israel has desecrated among the nations to which they have come. So, say to the House of Israel: So says the Lord God: It is not for your sake that I do this, House of Israel, but for My holy name that you desecrated among the nations to which you came. I will sanctify My great name that has been desecrated among the nations – that you desecrated among them. The nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when I am sanctified through you before their eyes. I will take you from the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you to your land. I will sprinkle over you purifying waters, and you will be cleansed; I will cleanse you of all your impurities and all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you; I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh; I will put My spirit into you; make sure that you follow My decrees and that you keep My laws and fulfill them. You will live in the land that I gave to your fathers; you will be My people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your impurities; I will summon the grain, make it plentiful; I will not bring famine upon you. I will make the fruit of the trees and the produce of the fields plentiful so that you will no longer have to endure the reproach of famine among the nations. You will remember your evil ways and your actions that were no good; you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. Not for your sake do I act, declares the Lord God; let that be known to you; be ashamed, disgraced by your own ways, House of Israel.[[1]](#footnote-1)

So says the Lord God: On the day when I cleanse you of all your iniquities, I will reinhabit the cities; the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be tilled there, where she was desolate in the sight of every passerby. They will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; its towns that were ruined, devastated, and destroyed have been fortified and inhabited.' And the nations that remain around you will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt what was destroyed, have sown what was desolated; I the Lord have spoken and will do it. So says the Lord God: This, too – I will respond to the House of Israel's request to do this for them: I will multiply their people like a flock of sheep, like the flocks for sacred offerings, like the flocks of Jerusalem during her holy times; this is how the ruined cities will be, filled with flocks of people, and they will know that I am the Lord." (*Yechezkel* 36:16-38)[[2]](#footnote-2)

**I. The Connection Between the *Maftir* Reading (*Para*) and the *Haftara***

*Parashat Para* deals with the purification of an individual from the ritual impurity contracted through contact with a corpse. In cases of minor impurity, it suffices to immerse in a *mikveh* (ritual bath) and wait for nightfall; in cases of severe impurity, "those who impart impurity to the places where they lie and sit," one must wait seven days of impurity, followed by immersion (a *nida*) or even a sacrifice (a *zav* or a *zava*), or a complicated process that we will not spell out here (*metzora*). In order to be cleansed from the impurity imparted by a corpse, in addition to the seven days of impurity and the immersion that follows them, water mixed with the ashes of a red heifer must be sprinkled upon the impure person, using a bunch of hyssops, on the third and the seventh days of the purification process.

The prophecy in the *haftara* deals with the purification of the entire nation of Israel from the impurity of its sins – including the impurity of bloodshed, which involves impurity contracted from a corpse (even touching a sword that had killed a person imparts such impurity), as well as the impurity of idolatry and the impurity of forbidden sexual relations (like the impurity of a *nida* mentioned in our *haftara*):

Their ways were like the impurity of the menstrual woman before Me. I poured out My fury upon them for the blood they spilled upon the land and the idols they defiled her with. (36:17-18)

The prophet connects the impurity of bloodshed to the impurity of idolatry.[[3]](#footnote-3) It stands to reason that he is referring to the slaughter of young children in honor of Baal and to burning them in honor of Molekh, as was the practice of idolaters and as the Israelites did when they sinned and followed in their footsteps. In any case, he obligates them to undergo the sprinkling of purification water as is done in the case of impurity imparted by a corpse (though he makes no mention of the ashes of a red heifer):

I will sprinkle over you purifying waters, and you will be cleansed; I will cleanse you of all your impurities and all your idols. (36:25)

Perhaps the impurity contracted from a corpse that adheres to them, which requires the sprinkling of purification water, is connected to the "open heart surgery" that God will one day perform on the people of Israel:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you; I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (36:26)

This operation is like death followed by resurrection – as the prophet will spell out in detail in the next chapter (37), in his vision of dry bones. In any case, coming back to life from a state of dry bones and from open heart surgery requires, according to the prophet, the sprinkling of purification water on the people of Israel to remove the impurity contracted from a corpse.

**II. Sanctification of God’s Name[[4]](#footnote-4) As a Reason for Redemption Without Repentance**

There, in whichever nations they came to, they desecrated My holy name because it was said of them, 'These are the Lord's people, and they have left His land.' And I am concerned for My holy name, which the House of Israel has desecrated among the nations to which they have come. So, say to the House of Israel: So says the Lord God: It is not for your sake that I do this, House of Israel, but for My holy name that you desecrated among the nations to which you came. I will sanctify My great name that has been desecrated among the nations – that you desecrated among them. The nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when I am sanctified through you before their eyes… (36:20-23)

Not for your sake do I act, declares the Lord God; let that be known to you; be ashamed, disgraced by your own ways, House of Israel. (Ibid. v.32)

The prophecy in our *haftara* is distinctive in that the Lord redeems Israel for the sake of His name, so that it not be desecrated – as we state in our prayer (the *Magen Avraham* blessing in the *Amida*): "and who, in love, brings a redeemer to their children's children, for the sake of His name." In an extreme situation, this redemption comes even without repentance that would justify redemption according to the principle of due recompense, reward and punishment.

**IIA. Concern About the Desecration of God’s Name**

For the most part, the nations of the world do not really understand God's words in the Torah:

Know then in your heart that just as a parent disciplines his child, so the Lord your God disciplines you. (*Devarim* 8:5)

They have typically interpreted Israel's exile from their land in one of three ways:

a. Among idolaters, Israel's exile was interpreted as a failure on the part of the God of Israel to return the people to their land and to protect them against the "power" of their idols.

b. In Christianity, the exile was interpreted for nearly two thousand years as evidence that God had abandoned His people Israel and rejected them, and that He chose Jesus and his disciples and followers as His "chosen people.”

c. In Islam, Israel's exile was interpreted as support for the successors of their "prophet." A significant part of the expression of this support is giving them the ability to totally humiliate all their opponents.

Yechezkel himself was, of course, familiar with the first approach, which sees the exile as an expression of God's weakness, as it were. God waits for Israel's return to Him so their redemption will be based on merit, and not on unearned grace – but if their repentance is delayed, He will redeem them for the sake of His name, so that it not be desecrated among the nations. This may be likened to Israel's need to fulfill their oath in the name of God to the Givonites (*Yehoshua* 9), even though the oath was groundless since it was obtained by the Givonites by way of deception. The fear of the desecration of God's name that would ensue from their breaking the oath they had taken in His name prevailed over the need to expel the Givonites from the land and not give them a permanent inheritance in the mountains that dominate Jerusalem.

**IIB. Two Types of Redemption in the Torah**

The Torah refers to redemption for the purpose of preventing the desecration of God's name, rather than in response to repentance of the people of Israel, in its closing song, the song of *Haazinu*. The song describes the sins of Israel resulting precisely from all the good that God bestowed upon them, and then it moves on to the severe calamity that will befall them (in the song itself, the calamity appears without exile!) and to redemption, but does not refer at all to repentance. It describes redemption that will arrive because of God's concern, as it were, that Israel's oppressors will think they are stronger than God, the protector of Israel:

I thought I would scatter them, erasing their memory from man, were it not for fear of the enemy's taunts, lest their adversaries misunderstand and say, "Our hand has triumphed; it was not the Lord who did all this." (*Devarim* 32:26-27)

For the Lord will vindicate His people, bring solace to His servants, when He sees their strength has slipped away, no one remains, no bond nor free. He will say: Where are these gods of theirs, the rock they went to for refuge, that ate their sacrificial fat and drank their wine of libation? Let those rise up and help you now, let them be your protection! See now that I, I alone, am He; there is no god apart from Me. I deal death and I bring life; I wounded but will heal; and there is no rescue from My hand. (Ibid. vv. 36-39)

O nations, sing out of His people, for He will avenge His servants' blood, take vengeance upon His foes, and cleanse His land and His people. (Ibid. v. 43)

There were, indeed, redemptions of this kind. Scripture testifies about Yorovam son of Yoash, king of Israel, who did what was evil in the eyes of God but nevertheless overcame his enemies, expanded the borders of Israel, and enhanced their strength:

In the fifteenth year of Amatzyahu son of Yoash, king of Yehuda, Yorovam son of Yoash, king of Israel, became king in Shomron for forty-one years. He did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not turn away from all the sins of Yorovam son of Nevat, who led Israel to sin. He was the one who restored Israel’s border from Levo Hamat to the Arava Sea, fulfilling the word of the Lord, God of Israel, as He had promised through His servant Yona son of Amitai, the prophet from Gat Hefer. (II *Melakhim* 15:23-25)

For the Lord had seen the depth of Israel's bitter suffering, with neither bond nor free left and no helper for Israel. But the Lord had not decreed to blot out Israel's name from under the heavens, so He delivered them through Yorovam son of Yoash. (Ibid. vv. 26:27)

The reason, "with neither bond nor free left," is taken from the song of *Haazinu* cited above: "When He sees their strength has slipped away, no one remains, no bond nor free."

\*

The song of *Haazinu* is exceptional in the Torah in that it heralds redemption without repentance. In contrast, the rebuke in the covenant at Mount Sinai briefly mentioned at least partial repentance as a condition for redemption:

Those of you who survive will waste away in their enemies' lands because of their sins – for their ancestors' sins also, they will waste away. But if they confess their sins and those of their ancestors – their trespass against Me and their walking contrary to Me, which made Me walk contrary to them, bringing them into their enemies' lands – if their obstinate hearts are humbled and they atone for their sin, then I will remember My covenant with Yaakov; and My covenant with Yitzhak and My covenant with Avraham I will also remember, and I will remember the land. (*Vayikra* 26:39-42)

This rebuke does not explicitly mention repentance, but it does mention confession and humbling of the heart. The rebuke at the wilderness of Moav (*Devarim* 28) is more explicit, describing in detail the process of repentance that will merit Israel’s redemption from destruction:

When all these things have come upon you, the blessings and the curses I have set before you, and you – amidst all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you – take them to heart, and return, you and your children, to the Lord your God, obeying Him with all your heart and all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then the Lord your God will bring your captives back and show you compassion. He will bring you back together from all the nations among which the Lord your God has scattered you. (*Devarim* 30:1-3)

So too in another passage:

The Lord will scatter you among the peoples. Only a few of you will remain among the nations that the Lord will drive you away to. There you will worship manmade gods of wood and of stone, ones that do not see, do not hear, do not eat or smell. Yet there, if you seek the Lord your God, you will find Him: if you search after Him with all your heart and all your soul. In your distress, when all these things have happened to you, in the days to come, you will finally return to the Lord your God and heed His voice. For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not forsake or destroy you. He will not forget the covenant that He forged on oath with your ancestors. (*Devarim* 4:27-31)

The prophet Yirmeyahu followed the same style as the declarations regarding redemption in these verses:

But this is what the Lord has said: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I take note of you and will I fulfill for you My good word, to bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans that I have in store for you - declares the Lord - plans for welfare and not for harm, to grant you a hopeful future. Then, when you call upon Me and follow and pray to Me, I will hear you. And when you search you will find Me, if you seek Me with all your heart. I shall be accessible to you – declares the Lord – and I shall bring back your captives and gather you from all the nations and from all the places to which I have driven you, declares the Lord. (*Yirmeyahu* 29:10-14)

**IIc. Additional Biblical Passages that Speak About Redemption without Repentance**

1. The exodus from Egypt is the most striking example of redemption without a clear process of repentance – and even despite the fact that the redeemed Israelites, as *Chazal* said, had sunk down to the forty-ninth of fifty levels of the impurity of idolatry. The brazen words of the two fighting Hebrews to Moshe, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us?" open a narrow window through which we can see the spiritual state of the enslaved Israelites. But we should note two reservations: a) There is no explicit mention in the Torah of a clear sin that led to Israel’s exile to Egypt. Therefore, reason dictates that repentance would not be necessary for their redemption, as the prophet said: "You were sold away for nothing, and it is not for silver that you will be redeemed" (*Yeshayahu* 52:3). b) In the end, before the redemption, the Israelites were required to stand a test of loyalty to God, with the Passover offering and all its laws. Those who did not bring the offering did not leave Egypt, and their sons died in the plague of the firstborns.

2. When the people sinned with the golden calf, Moshe prayed for God's mercy for them (also) because His name might be desecrated if He destroys them:

Why should the Egyptians be able to say that You brought them out with evil intent, to kill them in the mountains and purge them from the face of the earth? Turn from Your fierce anger and relent from doing evil to Your people. (*Shemot* 32:12)

3. After the sin of the spies, Moshe prayed for God's mercy only because of the desecration of God's name that would follow from His destruction of the people of Israel:

But Moshe said to the Lord, "The Egyptians will hear about it, for by Your power You brought this people up from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, Lord, are among these people, that You, Lord, are seen face-to-face, that Your cloud stands over them, that You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. If You kill this people like a single man, the nations that have heard of Your fame will say, 'It was because the Lord was unable to bring this people into the land He swore to them; that is why He slaughtered them in the wilderness.' So now, let my Lord's power be great, as You declared when You said: 'The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in kindness, forgiving sin and rebellion, though He does not acquit the guilty, but holds the descendants to account for the sins of the fathers; children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.'" (*Bamidbar* 14:13-18)

This is also how Yechezkel viewed the exodus from Egypt and Israel's sins in the wilderness:

But they defied Me; they were not prepared to listen to Me; none threw off the detestable things before their eyes; they did not relinquish their Egyptian idols. And I thought of pouring out My fury, exhausting My anger upon them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I acted for the sake of My name so that it would not be desecrated in the eyes of the nations among whom they were – and before whose eyes I had made Myself known in taking them out from the land of Egypt. (*Yechezkel* 20:8-9)

But the House of Israel defied me in the wilderness. They did not follow My statutes; they rejected My laws, by which each person was to live; they wholly desecrated My Sabbaths. I thought of pouring out My fury upon them in the wilderness and destroying them, but I acted for the sake of My name so that it would not be desecrated in the eyes of the nations before whose eyes I had taken them out. (Ibid. vv. 13-14)

But the children defied me: they did not follow My statutes, they did not take care to keep My laws… and I thought to pour out My fury upon them, exhausting My anger upon them there in the wilderness. But I drew back My hand; I acted for the sake of My name so that it would not be desecrated in the eyes of the nations before whose eyes I had taken them out. (Ibid. vv. 21-22)

This is why God will redeem Israel from their exile, even against their will and without their wanting it; He will do it for the sake of His name in the eyes of the nations. At the same time, Yechezkel compares the future redemption to the redemption of the generation of the wilderness, who were taken out of Egypt without the merit of their good deeds, and who therefore died in the wilderness and never reached the land:

As I live, declares the Lord God, with a strong hand, with an outstretched arm, and with an outpouring of fury, I will rule over you. I will take you out from the nations; I will gather you in from the countries where you have been scattered; with a strong hand, with an outstretched arm, and with an outpouring of fury I will bring you into the wilderness of the nations, and I will enter into judgment with you there, face-to-face. Just as I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord God. I will make you pass beneath the rod; I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge you of the rebellious and of those who transgress against Me; I will take them out of the land in which they are living, but they will not come onto the soil of Israel. (Ibid. vv. 33-38)

And you will know that I am the Lord when I act toward you for the sake of My name, not for your evil ways and your corrupt deeds, House of Israel, declares the Lord God. (ibid. v. 44)

This redemption, against the will of Israel and only for the sake of God's name, raises many points to think about with respect to our redemption today.

**IId. Redemption for the Sake of God’s Name, Without Repentance, from the Point of View of *Chazal***

*Chazal* discussed the possibility of redemption without repentance:

Rav said: All the predestined dates [for redemption] have passed, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds. But Shmuel said: it is sufficient for a mourner to keep his [period of] mourning. This matter is the subject of a Tannaitic dispute: Rabbi Eliezer said: If Israel repent, they will be redeemed; if not, they will not be redeemed. Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: If they do not repent, will they not be redeemed! But the Holy One, blessed be He, will set up a king over them, whose decrees shall be as cruel as Haman's, whereby Israel shall engage in repentance, and he will thus bring them back to the right path. (*Sanhedrin* 97b)

Rav explicitly says as stated above in *Yirmeyahu*: Even after the seventy years of exile following the destruction of the First Temple, at the end of which God had promised redemption, Israel will only be redeemed if they repent, and the same applies to all the calculations of the end of the present exile. Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua agree that Israel will only be redeemed if they repent, but Rabbi Yehoshua promises that God will bring them to repent by inflicting them with harsh decrees, as happened in the days of Haman. Shmuel asserts that it is enough for Israel to suffer the torments of their punishment, and when their torments are complete, God will redeem them.

The Jerusalem Talmud, however, records a different version of their dispute:

Rabbi Liezer says: If Israel does not repent, they will never be redeemed, as it is stated: "In stillness [or: in return] and in peace shall you be saved" (*Yeshayahu* 30:15). Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: If Israel stand [in their rebellion] and fail to repent, they will never be redeemed? Rabbi Eliezer said to him: The Holy One, blessed be He, will set up a king over them as harsh as Haman, and immediately they will repent and they will be redeemed. (Jerusalem Talmud, *Ta'anit* 1:1)

This implies that according to Rabbi Yehoshua, Israel will be redeemed even without any repentance at all. Later in the discussion (and also in the Babylonian Talmud), Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua both cite verses that support their respective positions (and the Babylonian Talmud also records a different version, which presents the dispute as in the Jerusalem Talmud).

Similarly in another passage:

Rabbi Yochanan also said: The son of David will come only in a generation that is either altogether righteous or altogether wicked. In a generation that is altogether righteous, as it is written: "Your people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land forever" (*Yeshayahu* 60:21). Or altogether wicked, as it is written: "And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor" (*Yeshayahu* 59:16), and it is written: "For Mine own sake, even for Mine own sake, will I do it" (*Yeshayahu* 68:11). (*Sanhedrin* 98a)

Redemption in a generation that is altogether righteous is redemption based on the merit of Israel's actions and repentance, whereas redemption in a generation that is altogether wicked is redemption for the sake of God's name and in order to prevent its desecration, as in the verse brought as a prooftext.

But if redemption comes even without repentance, as stated in detail in our *haftara*, what motivation do the people have to return to God, and what is the value of the doctrine of retribution? We will deal with this question below, but even before that, let us examine how our prophecy relates to people who enjoy the benefits of redemption without the effort of repentance:

Not for your sake do I act, declares the Lord God; let that be known to you; be ashamed, disgraced by your own ways, House of Israel.

The redemption described by *Yechezkel* is of the aspect of "*nahama de-kisufa*" ("bread of shame"). The people of Israel did not earn their redemption through their efforts, and therefore their legacy is shame and disgrace. This is sufficient reason our ambitions should go beyond redemption that is wholly "for the sake of His name," and not by merit of our actions.

**III. The Price of Redemption Without Repentance**

As mentioned, redemption without repentance seems to contradict the principles of the doctrine of retribution. In my opinion, *Chazal* address this problem with respect to the exodus from Egypt:

Because it is stated: "And the children of Israel went up armed [*chamushim*] out of the land of Egypt" (*Shemot* 13:18) – one out of five [*chamisha*]. And some say: One out of fifty [*chamishim*]. And some say: One out of five hundred [*chamesh me'ot*]. (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael masekhet de-Pischa* 12)

It seems from here (and in my humble opinion, this is proven from the verses) that when Israel left Egypt, many died in a plague (perhaps in the plague of darkness). This may be the price of redemption without repentance.

Another example: During the period of Israel's servitude to Amon, on the eve of the ascent of Yiftach, the Israelites worshiped idols and forsook God. When they cried out in their distress, God no longer wanted to save them:

The Israelites resumed doing evil in the eyes of the Lord; they worshipped the Be'alim, the Ashtarot, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moav, the gods of the Amonites, and the gods of the Philistines. They abandoned the Lord and did not worship Him… The Israelites cried out to the Lord, wailing, "We have sinned against You, for we abandoned You our God and served the Be'alim." The Lord said to the Israelites, "Indeed, Egypt and the Amorites and the Amonites and the Philistines and the Sidonites and Amalek and Maon oppressed you; then you cried out to Me, and I saved you from their hands. But you abandoned Me and worshipped other gods – I will save you no longer. Go and cry out to the other gods you chose – let them save you in your times of trouble." "We have sinned," the Israelites said to the Lord. "Do to us as You see fit – but please, save us this very day." They purged the alien gods from their midst and worshipped the Lord, and He could not bear Israel's misery any longer. (*Shoftim* 10:6-16)

Their repentance was incomplete, but God could no longer bear seeing their distress and enslavement to the cruel Amonites, and He delivered them through the hands of Yiftach. The price of this redemption was terrible: forty-two thousand of the people of Efrayim were slaughtered by Yiftach and his men.

Even the redemption without repentance in *Yechezkel* bears a heavy price – the war of Gog and Magog, which will be waged in the Land of Israel against the people of Israel after the redemption:

After many days you will be summoned; at the end of years, you will come against the land which has been restored after the sword, which has been gathered back from many nations upon the mountains of Israel that long lay in ruins – she who will have been brought out from the nations, a people who all now live securely. You will advance, you will come like a devastating storm, and you will be like a cloud covering the land – you, all your forces, and the many peoples with you. (*Yechezkel* 38:8-9)

In this war as well, in the end, God's name will be sanctified, but the price is not specified in the prophecy. Perhaps that price will depend on the degree of innocence and culpability of the generation of redemption.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**IV. Free Choice at the Time of the Redemption**

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you; I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh; I will put My spirit into you; make sure that you follow My decrees and that you keep My laws and fulfill them. (36:26)

The reader may ask: At the time of the redemption, will there no longer be free choice? Will we all turn into angels?

A similar prophecy was also delivered by Yirmeyahu, and it is more detailed:

In those days they will no longer say, "Fathers eat sour grapes, but the teeth of the children are set on edge." Instead, everyone will perish for his own sins; anyone who eats sour grapes, only his own teeth shall be set on edge. Days are soon coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Yehuda, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers at the time that I held fast to their hands in order to take them out of Egypt; they broke that covenant with Me although I was master over them, declares the Lord. For this covenant, which I will make with the House of Israel after these days, declares the Lord, I will deliver My teaching into their midst and inscribe it upon their hearts, and I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will each person teach a neighbor and each person a brother, saying, "Know the Lord!" For they will all know Me, from the least of them to their greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquities and no longer remember their transgressions. (*Yirmeyahu* 31:28-33)

The reality of "fathers eat sour grapes, but the teeth of the children are set on edge" – or, as this concept is formulated in the Torah, "holding descendants to account for the sins of the fathers [when they continue in the ways of their fathers]" (*Shemot* 34:7) – is true in relation to the entire nation. God delays punishment in the hope that the descendants will repent from the sins of their ancestors, and He punishes them if they fail to do so. We do not find that God holds an individual to account for the sins of his father or grandfather. For this reason, the Torah explicitly states: "Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents" (*Devarim* 24:16). The new covenant of which Yirmeyahu speaks is a covenant with the entire people, that it will not sin again as a nation, but each individual retains free will and will have to face a reckoning for his own deeds, good or bad. Even when all will know God, the freedom to choose and the possibility to rebel against God will remain, but there will not be a situation in which all of the people will do so.

These principles may also be the prophetic principles of Yechezkel regarding the future redemption, and according to his prophecy as well, each individual will retain his freedom to choose.

**V. Redemption of the Land and its Cities**

So says the Lord God: On the day when I cleanse you of all your iniquities, I will reinhabit the cities; the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be tilled there, where she was desolate in the sight of every passerby. They will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden; its towns that were ruined, devastated, and destroyed have been fortified and inhabited.' And the nations that remain around you will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt what was destroyed, have sown what was desolated; I the Lord have spoken and will do it. So says the Lord God: This, too – I will respond to the House of Israel's request to do this for them: I will multiply their people like a flock of sheep, like the flocks for sacred offerings, like the flocks of Jerusalem during her holy times; this is how the ruined cities will be, filled with flocks of people, and they will know that I am the Lord." (36:33-38)

In this passage, the prophet does not refer to the people of Israel but to the land of God and its cities, as in his prophecy at the beginning of chapter 36 and above in chapter 6. The desolation of the land evident to every passer-by causes a desecration of God's name, for this is the land that He treasures and that He chose to give to His people. The Torah (*Vayikra* 26:32) promises that when the people will be in exile, "I Myself will devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle there will be appalled." The Ramban saw this as a blessing:

Similarly, that which He stated here, "so that your enemies who settle there will be appalled," constitutes a good tiding, proclaiming that during all our exiles, our land will not accept our enemies. This also is a great proof and assurance to us, for in the whole inhabited part of the world one cannot find such a good and large land which was always lived in and yet is as ruined as it is [today], for since the time that we left it, it has not accepted any nation or people, and they all try to settle it, but to no avail. (Ramban, *Vayikra* 26:16)

The desecration of God's name caused by the desolate land and cities will turn into a sanctification of His name when the land becomes like the Garden of Eden, as it was before the sin committed by Adam let the Garden of Eden to be hidden away, and the cities will be filled with flocks of sheep and become fortified.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. I have divided the *haftara* into two sections based on its contents, as will be explained below. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Unless otherwise specified, all references are to the book of *Yechezkel.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In the Tosefta (*Zavim* 5:6, and see also Gemara *Shabbat* 82-83), Rabbi Akiva (based on another verse) compares the impurity of idolatry to the impurity of a *nida*, which in our verse precedes the impurity of idolatry. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The prophecy clearly speaks about the profanation of God's **name**, about His concern for His **name** and the sanctification of His **name**. The same is true in the Torah and elsewhere in the Bible. People mistakenly write about the "sanctification of God" and the "desecration of God," but the correct expression is the "sanctification of God's name" and the "desecration of His name," as in our *haftara.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. We will deal at length with the issue of Gog and Magog in the *haftara* for Shabbat Chol ha-Mo'ed Sukkot [↑](#footnote-ref-5)