**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

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

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**Yechezkel: The Book of Ezekiel**

**By Dr. Tova Ganzel**

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

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

**Those who perform the service of the Sanctuary (44:1-14)**[[1]](#footnote-1)

“Then He brought me back the way of the outer gate of the Sanctuary which looks toward the east, and it was shut. Then the Lord said to me, This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut.” (44:1-2)

These verses show the process we have seen so far stepping up. The clearest expression perhaps of the isolation of the Temple from the people is the emphasis on the gate through which God entered: it now remains shut. In fact, even the *nasi*, who must be able to reach the Temple, will do so indirectly, without passing through the gate:

“As for the prince (*nasi*), he – being a prince – shall sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by the way of the same.” (v. 3)

Among the various details pertaining to the structure of the Temple, the prophet suddenly perceives God’s presence within it:

“Then he brought me the way of the north gate before the House, and I looked, and, behold the glory of the Lord filled the House of the Lord, and I fell upon my face. And the Lord said to me, Son of man, mark well, and behold with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I say to you concerning all the ordinances of the House of the Lord, and all its teachings, and mark well the entrance of the House, with all the exits of the Sanctuary. And you shall say to the rebellious ones, to the House of Israel: Thus says the Lord God: O House of Israel, enough now of all your disgusting deeds, in that you have brought into My Sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary, to pollute it, even My House, when you offer My bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken My covenant because of all your disgusting deeds, and you have not kept the charge of My holy things, but you have set keepers of My charge in My Sanctuary to please yourselves.” (44:4-8)

Like the start of Chapter 43, the prophecy once again emphasizes the need to convey the details of the plan to the people. But this time there is an additional prophetic message about distancing strangers. This Temple of Yechezkel is not a Temple that will be a magnet, an international center; rather, it will be a place in which – in light of the sins of the past – there is no place for strangers:

“Thus says the Lord God: No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into My Sanctuary, of any stranger that is among Bnei Yisrael” (v. 9).

**Leviim and Kohanim**

Going even further, even the faithfulness of the office-bearers who served in the Temple in the past must be re-examined. Yechezkel blames the *leviim* for having misled the people (vv. 10-11) and ministering for people visiting the Temple while engaged in serving idols:

“Because they ministered to them before their idols, and became a stumbling-block of iniquity to the House of Israel; therefore I have lifted up My hand against them, says the Lord God, and they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall not come near to Me, to perform the office of a Kohen to Me, nor to come near to any of My holy things, to the most holy things, but their shall bear their shame and their disgusting deeds which they have committed.” (vv. 12-13)

Despite their status and their role, the *leviim* did not take responsibility for the behavior of the people. So while they will serve in the Temple, they will not share in the authority bestowed on the *kohanim*:

“And I will make them keepers of the charge of the House, for all its service, and for all that shall be done in it” (v. 14).

In contrast, Yechezkel entrusts the *kohanim* with a range of tasks: the offering of sacrifices, instruction of the people, sitting in judgment, and guarding the Torah. Why does Yechezkel transfer all the leadership functions to the *kohanim*? Moreover, why does his description of the service of the *kohanim* not center not on the Temple, but rather on instructing the people? The reason for appears to be that there were also kohanim who misused their position. At a time of crisis, as well as the Temple service, the role of the kohanim is to teach the ways of Torah. Instead, what the kohanim actually did is described by Yechezkel as follows:

“Her priests have violated My Torah and have profaned My holy things; they have put no difference between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have hidden their eyes from My *shabbatot*, and I am profaned among them.” (22:26)

The *kohanim* who neglected their role and failed to instruct the people during their difficult time – evenif they did not actually mislead them – will not be given a role in the future Temple. (These *kohanim* seem to be the descendants of Itamar.) Those *kohanim* who are descendants of Tzaddok, who demonstrated faithfulness to the house of David and followed God’s ways, even in times of crisis, will indeed merit to minister in the Temple:

“But the *kohanim*, the *leviim*, the sons of Tzaddok, who kept the charge of My Sanctuary when Bnei Yisrael went astray from Me – they shall come near to Me to minister to Me” (44:15).[[2]](#footnote-2)

To the extent that the Temple service is performed by a smaller team of *kohanim*, the expectation is that it will be performed with greater skill and with more punctilious attention to the laws of ritual purity. In this way, the future Temple will be protected from the defilement that brought about the destruction of its predecessor in Yechezkel’s time. This is why Yechezkel emphasizes that the most important function of the *kohanim* in the future – as in the past and the present – is instructing the people to follow the ways of God; this is even more important than offering sacrifices. What caused the destruction of the Temple was not a lack of sacrifices, but rather a lack of basic understanding among the people about what the service of God entails, what it means to have an exclusive commitment to Him and His Torah. This role of the *kohanim* is amplified and emphasized by Yechezkel over and above the ritual roles involved in the Temple service. Later in the chapter, after listing the instructions concerning the clothing to be worn by the *kohanim* (vv. 17-19), the prohibition against shaving their hair (v. 20) and against their drinking wine (v. 21) and the limitations on whom they are permitted to marry (v. 22), the prophet states once again:

“And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the common, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. And in a controversy they shall stand in judgment, and they shall judge it according to My judgments, and they shall keep My teachings and My statutes in all My appointed times, and they shall sanctify My *shabbatot*.” (44:23-24)

R. Eliezer of Beaugency writes, in his commentary on Yechezkel 40:45:

“’And I will make them keepers of the charge of the House, for all its service, and for all that shall be done in it’ – but they will not perform the sacrificial service, but rather will perform the service of the *leviim*, ‘to be singers’… these are the *kohanim* who are not of the seed of Tzaddok ha-*Kohen* (see *Yechezkel* 48:11). In the future they will be disqualified from the sacrificial service, but will be singers and gatekeepers like the *leviim*, because they ‘have violated My Torah’ (see *Yechezkel* 22:26), and they became like priests for idolatry. They led Bnei Yisrael astray, and distanced themselves from the Holy One, blessed be He; therefore, they, too, will be distanced.”

**King and prophet**

In addition to the changes that we have seen, Yechezkel’s prophecy reveals a fundamental change with regard to the leadership of the nation: in this Temple, there will be no role for the kings of Israel. Instead of a king, in the future there will be a *nasi*, whose functions will be to mediate between God and His people by means of his seat of power, which is in the Temple precinct; offering of sacrifices, and more (Chapter 46). The place of the prophets is likewise left empty, because in the past some of them caused the people to become defiled:

“And if a prophet is deceived when he has spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet and I will stretch out My hand upon him and will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel…that the house of Israel may no more go astray from Me, neither be defiled any more by all their transgressions…” (14:9-11).

So for these prophets too, there is no room in Yechezkel’s vision of the future Temple:

“And My hand shall be against the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies; they shall not be in the counsel of My people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel, and you shall know that I am the Lord God” (13:9).

Thus, Yechezkel foretells that the prophets will have no portion and no role in the future leadership. This would seem to explain why the terms “prophets”, “prophecy” and “vision” appear in *Sefer Yechezkel* only up to Chapter 39, and not in Chapters 40-48.[[3]](#footnote-3) Yechezkel’s avoidance of any use of the root ‘*n-b-a*’ (prophecy) in these chapters seems to reinforce the sense that prophecy in its present form will have no place in the future.

Perhaps one can detect an echo of a substitute for the connection between God and His people that is effected through prophecy in the First Temple Period, in the closing prophecy before the chapters devoted to the vision of the future Temple: “Nor will 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) This “pouring of the spirit” upon the entire nation, according to the prophet Yoel, ultimately transforms the entire nation into prophets:

“And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions…” (*Yoel* 3:1).

We have seen in Yechezkel's prophecy that the changes in this Temple include not only the outer structure of the edifice, but also fundamental difference in who enters it. This change relates both to the measure of access afforded the people, but also the division of roles among the various leaders of the nation, and the degree to which they are connected to the Temple.

Now the connection between Yechezkel’s prophecy of rebuke and the vision of the future Temple becomes clearer: the actions of the people and their leaders in the years prior to the Destruction are what lead to the (limited) extent of their involvement in and access to the future Temple as described by the prophet. Once again, despite the level of detail in the description of the roles of the various officials, we cannot translate these descriptions into practice because some critical details are missing: does the lack of mention of any *Kohen* *Gadol* in Yechezkel’s prophecy indicate that this office no longer exists? If so, how are we to understand this? Will this future Temple have an area that is designated the “most holy place” (41:4), to which no-one, ever, enters? Here, too, we remain in the dark. Perhaps this ambiguity is meant to further reinforce our hypothesis that the absence of some critical details is intentional? That is, it is meant to rule out any possibility of the people attempting, out of longing for the Temple, to initiate its establishment, along the lines of this prophetic vision, before the proper time arrives.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. A detailed comparison of these sections with Bamidbar 15-18 and various places in Sefer Vayikra is to be found in Kasher’s commentary, pp. 844-847; the comparison and the questions that arise will not be addressed here. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. At the same time, the choice of the descendants of Tzaddok has an historical basis. Radak mentions, in his commentary on 40:46, that Tzaddok – the first Kohen Gadol to serve in the Temple built by Shlomo – was a descendant of Pinchas, who was given a promise of eternal priesthood, while the curse upon Eli doomed the descendants of Itamar. For the actions of the *kohanim* from the house of Tzaddok, see *Shmuel* II 15-16; 19:12; 20:25; Melakhim I 1:8; 4:2; *Divrei Ha-Yamim* I 15:11; 16:39; 18:!6; 29:22. The preference shown to the house of Tzaddok is clearly apparent in *Shmuel* II 15:24-29, and was institutionalized at the time of Adoniya’s rebellion against David, when Evyatar joined Adoniya, while Tzaddok remained faithful to David. Immediately upon ascending the throne, Shlomo chose Tzaddok as *Kohen Gadol* and removed Evyatar from serving. During the period of Chizkiyahu, too, the *Kohen* was a descendant of the house of Tzaddok (*Divrei Ha-yamim* II 31:10), and later on Ezra’s lineage is traced to Tzaddok son of Achituv (*Ezra* 7:2). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Notably, even the word “prophecy” which appears frequently in Chapters 1-39 to emphasize Yechezkel’s divine mission to Israel or to other nations, appears nowhere in the last nine chapters. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)