YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

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**Lecture 361: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(171) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (147)**

In the last *shiur*, we dealt with the beginning of the prophet Yechezkel's prophetic journey in the visions of God to the house of God in Jerusalem. We described the abominations that were revealed to the prophet in the house of God as they are described in *Yechezkel*,chapter 8.

In this *shiur*, we will continue to examine the prophet's journey which describes the destruction of the city and the Temple. While it is true that the city and the Temple will continue to stand until the month of Av in the eleventh year of Tzidkiyahu's reign, already now, on the fifth of Elul in the fifth year of Yehoyakhin's exile, the prophet sees in visions of God the destruction of the city and the Temple. This sight illustrates how the actions that were described in chapter 8, the idolatry in all its forms in the Temple in Jerusalem, had severe consequences for the city and the Temple within a few years.

The gap of years, on the one hand, and the detailed prophetic vision, on the other, well illustrate the words of *Chazal*, according to which "it was ground flour that they ground, a burnt Temple that they burned, and a destroyed Temple that they destroyed" (based on *Eikha Rabba* 1, 1). *Chazal* understand that when the Kasdim destroy the Temple, they destroy only its exterior walls, as the inner essence of the Temple had already been destroyed. The Temple is destroyed not by Israel's external enemies, but by the actions of Israel themselves (idol worship, prohibited sexual relations and bloodshed). And so the prophet already sees the Temple and the city in ruins several years before their actual physical destruction.

This is the essence of chapters 9 and 10 in Yechezkel's prophetic journey. Part of the prophetic vision involves the departure of God's glory from the Temple and from the city that will be described primarily in chapter 11.

Chapter 8 concluded with the statement: "Therefore will I also deal in fury; **My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity;** and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them" (*Yechezkel* 8:18). It is interesting that chapter 9, which describes the calamity that will take place in the city, repeats this phrase two more times. Thus in the words of the prophet to those in charge of the city who are commanded to smite those who are to be killed: "And to the others He said in my hearing: Go you through the city after him, and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have you pity" (*Yechezkel* 9:5). And in the continuation: "And as for Me also, My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will bring their way upon their head" (*Yechezkel* 9:10). There is here measure for measure – the people had said that God does not see; therefore the eye of the prophet shall not see nor have pity.

Scripture describes at the same time the approaching calamity of the destruction of Jerusalem and the beginning of the *Shekhina's* departure from the Temple and from the city:

Then he called in my ears with a loud voice, saying: Cause you them that have charge over the city to draw near, every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the upper gate, which lies toward the north, every man with his weapon of destruction in his hand; and one man in the midst of them clothed in linen, with a writer's inkhorn on his side. And they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the *keruv*, whereupon it was, to the threshold of the house; and He called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writer's inkhorn on his side. And the Lord said to him: Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof. And to the others He said in my hearing: Go you through the city after him, and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have you pity; slay utterly the old man, the young man and the maiden, and little children and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary. Then they began at the elders that were before the house. And He said to them: Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain; go you forth. And they went forth, and smote in the city. And it came to pass, while they were smiting, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said: Ah Lord God! will You destroy all the residue of Israel in Your pouring out of Your fury upon Jerusalem? Then He said to me: The iniquity of the house of Israel and Yehuda is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of wresting of judgment; for they say: The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord sees not. And as for Me also, My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will bring their way upon their head. And, behold, the man clothed in linen, who had the inkhorn on his side, reported, saying: I have done according to all that you have commanded me.

Then I looked, and, behold, upon the firmament that was over the head of the *keruvim*, there appeared above them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. And He spoke to the man clothed in linen, and said: Go in between the wheelwork, even under the *keruv*, and fill both your hands with coals of fire from between the *keruvim*, and dash them against the city. And he went in in my sight. Now the *keruvim* stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court. And the glory of the Lord mounted up from the *keruv* to the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory. And the sound of the wings of the *keruvim* was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of God Almighty when He speaks. And it came to pass, when He commanded the man clothed in linen, saying: Take fire from between the wheelwork, from between the *keruvim* - that he went in, and stood beside a wheel. And the *keruv* stretched forth his hand from between the *keruvim* to the fire that was between the *keruvim*, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed in linen, who took it and went out. And there appeared in the *keruvim* the form of a man's hand under their wings…. And the glory of the Lord went forth from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the *keruvim*. And the *keruvim* lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight when they went forth, and the wheels beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river Kevar; and I knew that they were *keruvim*. Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. And as for the likeness of their faces, they were the faces which I saw by the river Kevar, their appearances and themselves; they went every one straight forward. (*Yechezkel* 9-10)

**Cause you them who have charge (*pekudot*) over the city to draw near… and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men**

The term *pekudot* alludes to punishment, as we find by various prophets, e.g., Yeshayahu: "And what will you do in the day of visitation [*pekuda*], and in the ruin which shall come from far? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory?" (*Yeshayahu* 10:3). Or in *Yirmeyahu*: "They are vanity, a work of delusion; in the time of their visitation [*pekudatam*} they shall perish" (*Yirmeyahu* 10:15). And in the continuation: "And there shall be no remnant unto them; for I will bring evil upon the men of Anatot, even the year of their visitation [*pekudatam*]" (*Yirmeyahu* 11:23)**.**

We are dealing here with those who have charge over the city and whose role it is to destroy the city. Six people arrive, apparently from the northern area of the Temple, each man with his destroying weapon in his hand. That is to say, with the weapon with which he destroys everything that stands in his path.

Who are these six people?

- Abravanel identifies them with Yoshiyahu and his six sons. Yoshiyahu is the man clothed in linen. His six sons – Yochanan, Yehoyakim, Tzidkiyahu, and Shalom (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 3:15), and also Yehoachaz and Yehoyakhin – all sinned and caused others to sin and brought about the destruction of the city.

- The Gemara in *Shabbat* sees the six people as the forces of evil and destruction: "And who were the six men? Rav Chisda said: Indignation [*ketzef*], Anger [*Af*], Wrath [*Chema*], Destroyer [*Mashchit*], Breaker [*Meshaber*], and Annihilator [*Mekhaleh*]" (*Shabbat* 55a). The Maharal explains in his *Chidushei Agadot* that these forces express the opposition to the reality of man and his functioning in the world.

One of them is clothed in linen, that is to say, in clothing that is similar to the priestly garments, and he has a writer's inkhorn on his side. His job appears to be to document everything that is happening.

The prophet describes how the *Shekhina* begins its departure, with the glory of the God of Israel going up from the *keruv* to the threshold of the house. God calls to the man clothed in linen and commands him to go through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh for the abominations that are done in the city.

The purpose of marking the people is that they should be passed over and thus saved. The command is to strike mercilessly at all the others who are not marked, without showing compassion to any one of them, old man, young man, virgin, child or woman. This gives expression to the prophetic conception formulated by the prophet Yechezkel in chapter 3, according to which the righteous man will live in his righteousness and the wicked man will die in his sin:

And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; and when you shall hear a word at My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me. When I say to the wicked: You shall surely die; and you give him not warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at your hand. Yet if you warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. Again, when a righteous man does turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, I will lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you have not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; and you have delivered your soul. (*Yechezkel* 3:16-21)

This distinction between those people who are to be saved and those who are not to be saved brings to mind the blood that the Israelites in Egypt were commanded to put on the lintels and doorposts of their houses: "And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall no plague be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt" (*Shemot* 12:13). In Egypt, however, the mark was placed on the houses of the people of Israel, whereas by Yechezkel, the mark is placed on the forehead of the person.

After the setting of the marks, the prophet describes: "And He said to them: Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain; go you forth. And they went forth, and smote in the city." In the wake of the defiling of the house, the prophet falls upon his face and cries out: "Ah Lord God! will You destroy all the residue of Israel in Your pouring out of Your fury upon Jerusalem?" The prophet's response indicates that righteous men worthy of being saved at the time of the destruction were not found. That is to say, despite the distinction made by the man clothed in linen, in practice, the prophet does not see in his prophetic journey people whose foreheads are marked by a sign that they are to be passed over. *Chazal* address the matter in the Gemara in *Shabbat*:

For Rav Acha bar Rabbi Chanina said: Never did a favorable word go forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, of which He retracted for evil, save the following, where it is written: "And the Lord said to him: Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark [*tav*]upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (*Yechezkel* 9:4). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gavriel: Go and set a *tav* of ink upon the foreheads of the righteous, that the destroying angels may have no power over them; and a *tav* of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked, that the destroying angels may have power over them. The attribute of Justice said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe! Wherein are these different from those? He said: Those are completely righteous men, while these are completely wicked. It said before Him: Sovereign of the Universe, they had the power to protest but did not. He said to it: It was fully known to them that had they protested they would not have heeded them. It said before Him: Sovereign of the Universe, if it was revealed to You, was it revealed to them? Hence it is written: "[Slay utterly] the old man, the young and the maiden, and little children and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my Sanctuary [*mikdashi*]. Then they began at the elders which were before the house" (*Yechezkel* 9:6). Rav Yosef taught: Read not *mikdashi* but *mekuddashai* [my sanctified ones]: this refers to the people who fulfilled the Torah from *alef* to *tav.* (*Shabbat* 55a)

Ultimately, according to the position presented here, despite the prophet's fundamental distinction between the righteous who will live and the wicked who will be punished, there is complete punishment here. The attribute of Justice that is aroused here examines to what extent should people be saved from the inferno, and the conclusion is exceedingly harsh: Even the righteous cannot wash their hands of guilt, if they did not protest to the best of their abilities and try to prevent the wicked from sinning.

Injustice is a major and central reason for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. It turns out that in addition to idolatry, prohibited sexual relations, and bloodshed, cited by *Chazal* as the primary causes of the destruction of the First Temple (*Yoma* 9a), injustice is another of its major causes. Therefore, it is not by chance that in addition to the abominations of idol worship described in detail in chapter 8, the prophet Yechezkel adds here another reason for the destruction.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is interesting to see that in this regard, the prophets Mikha, Yirmeyahu, and Yechezkel, each in his own time, place, style, and special way, point to one central cause of the destruction of the city and the Temple – injustice. Mikha during the reign of Chizkiyahu, Yirmeyahu primarily during the days of Yehoyakim and Tzidkiyahu, and Yechezkel in the exile in Babylonian from the exile of Yehoyakhin and the days of Tzidkiyahu.

The fundamental point is that the essence of Jerusalem is justice, and therefore when there is no justice in the city, there is no justification for its existence. The connection to justice finds expression also in the names of the kings of the city (Malkitzedek the king of Shalem – *Bereishit* 14:18); Adonitzedek the king of Jerusalem – *Yehoshua* 10:11; Tzidkiyahu – II *Melakhim* 24:17); and also in the full identification between the name of the king and the name of the city, "the Lord is our righteousness" (*Yirmeyahu* 23:5-6; 33:14-16); and also in the clear connection between kingship and justice, both by God and by human kings; and thus the direct connection between them and the existence and the destruction of Jerusalem: in the house of God itself, the obligatory proximity between the Sanhedrin and the site of the altar, and the fact that the priests clothe themselves in righteousness (*Tehilim* 132:9).

**The Burning of the City**

At the beginning of chapter 10, the man who is clothed in linen is sent to go in between the wheelwork, under the *keruv*, and fill both his hands with coals of fire from the *keruvim*, and dash them against the city and thus bring about its destruction.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In chapter 9, the prophet described the killing of all the people, the old men, the young men, the virgins, the women and the children. In chapter 10, he describes the burning of the city and the Temple. It is interesting that inside the Temple area the image of jealousy which provokes to jealousy was on the northern side, whereas the *keruvim* are described here as standing to the right of the Temple from the south.

Later in the chapter there is a second description of the animals of the chariot which was described in detail in chapter 1, with slight changes. Here the animals are called *keruvim*.

In the next *shiur*, we will continue our examination of Yechezkel's prophetic journey, in the visions of God that he saw in the Temple in Jerusalem. We will relate both to the description of the departure of the *Shekhina* from the Temple eastward to the Mount of Olives and the wilderness, and to the account of the chariot appearing in chapter 10.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. This issue requires a separate *shiur*. We have briefly noted here several points that express the fundamental idea. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The chapter relates here both to the departure of the *Shekhina* from the Temple and to the chariot in the Holy of Holies. We will deal with these issues in the coming *shiurim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)