

# The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Themes and Ideas in the Haftara  
Yeshivat Har Etzion

---

\*\*\*\*\*

**This haftara series is dedicated in memory  
of our beloved Chaya Leah bat Efrayim Yitzchak  
(Mrs. Claire Reinitz), zichronah livracha,  
by her family.**

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PARASHAT EMOR**

### **RENEWAL OF RELATIONS**

**Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein**

## **HALAKHA AND REDEMPTION**

The *haftara* for *Parashat Emor* (*Yechezkel* 44:15-31) focuses on the service performed by the priests in the Temple and the laws that govern them, and thus it constitutes an appropriate *haftara* for the *parasha*. Attention should be paid, however, to the location and the function of the chapter within the framework of the book of *Yechezkel*.

In the *parasha*, the laws governing the priests and the sacrifices are integrated into the framework of the rest of the laws of the Temple found in the book of *Vayikra*, and as another unit belonging to the halakhic portions of the Torah. All this is important, but in the *haftara* the laws governing the priests serve yet another function, namely, they are part of the vision of redemption. Yechezkel does not prophesy about the Temple as a matter of importance in and of itself, but rather he sets it in the center of his description of the redemption of Israel. The prophecies of Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu focus primarily on Israel, and therefore they describe the redemption as a redemption of Israel, whereas Yechezkel comes and sets the redemption before us from God's perspective, that is, the establishment of the Temple and the resting of His *Shekhina* therein. The building of the Temple in the wake of the exile and the previous destruction bestows upon the description of the service and its laws the added significance of that which heralds and applies the redemption. This being the case, it will not suffice merely to analyze the details of the various laws, but rather it falls upon us to examine the prophecy and its description of the service in connection with the process of redemption, as will be clarified below.

## THE END OF DAYS

One who reads the *haftara* is impressed by the fact that *Yechezkel* builds his vision of the redemption on the "gray" day-to-day service in the Temple and "dry" halakhic details, rather than a lofty and exalted vision that soars to poetic heights and festive descriptions of the redemption. How far is our chapter as a chapter of redemption from Yeshayahu's description of wasteland and wilderness turning into a flowering garden:

The wilderness and the arid land shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom like the tulip. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of the Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellency of the Karmel and the Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.... Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs

of water: the habitation of jackals shall become a pasture for cattle, an enclosure of reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and a way, And it shall be called the way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it; and he shall be to them a guide, and fools shall not err in it. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go upon it, they shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (*Yeshayahu* 35)

Yeshayahu's prophecy about the Temple at the time of the redemption with its lofty and picturesque description of how the nations will stream to Jerusalem reflects this difference as well:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all the nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Yaakov; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (*ibid.* 2:2-3)

As is evident, Yeshayahu speaks of a change in the natural order and the creation of a new world; as he himself defines the situation, we are not dealing with a continuation of the world familiar to us, but with the "last days."

## **HALAKHIC DETAILS**

In the *haftara*, on the other hand, we find ourselves in an entirely different world. The tone is matter of fact, the focus is on the fine details, and the world is one with which we are entirely familiar. Yechezkel speaks neither about the blind and the deaf being cured nor about a massive universal streaming to the Temple, but rather he focuses his attention and that of those who hear his prophecy on the details of the priestly garments:

They shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come upon them, while they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within. They shall have linen turbans upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins. (*Yechezkel* 44:17-18)

And their personal grooming:

Nor shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; but they shall crop their heads. (*ibid.* v. 20)

Instead of proclaiming that the mountain of the house of God will be established at the top of the mountains, Yechezkel says of the priests that "they shall not gird themselves with anything that causes sweat" (*ibid.* v. 18). The detailed halakhic world of the Temple that Yechezkel sets before us focuses the redemption on man's obligation to God and his readiness to obey Him, and it emphasizes the issue of fearing the Temple, which necessitates stringent rules.

## **THE ROOT OF THE SIN OF THE BLASPHEMER**

Emphasizing the halakhic dimension of the Temple is of great importance, inasmuch as we are liable to be lured by an idea of the holy that is entirely spiritual and has no interest in technical halakhic details. Besides the general inclination to think in these terms, it is possible to arrive at this idea in reaction to this week's *parasha* and the story of the blasphemer. This incident appears at the end of *Parashat Emor*, following all the detailed laws governing the priests and the sacrificial service, and specifically following the law of the showbread (*lechem ha-panim*). It would not be totally groundless to suggest that his blasphemy was directed at the bread, in accordance with one of the opinions in the midrash on the matter:

Rabbi Berakhya said: "He went out" (*Vayikra* 24:10) from the previous section. He said: It is written: "And you shall take fine flour, and bake it" (*ibid.* v. 5) – it

is the way of the king to eat fresh bread; is it his way to eat stale bread [a week old]? (*Vayikra Rabba* 32)

The blasphemer denied the sanctity that is focused in the details and resides in material objects. This is the substance of his blasphemy and his war against the Torah, similar to the arguments raised against the Torah throughout the generations. Our *haftara*, with its focus on halakhic sanctity, comes to refute this idea and to confirm the importance of Halakha in the Temple.

At this point, it is worthwhile to cite the words of the Netziv in *Kidmat Ha'emek*, his introduction to *Ha'amek She'ela* (the Netziv's commentary to the *She'iltot*), where he expands on the transition between the mode of governance in the first Temple and that in the second Temple. During the first Temple period, the mode of governance was more prophetic and spiritual, whereas during the time of the second Temple, the focus shifted to halakhic governance and Torah creativity. This is not the forum to discuss this idea at great length; we will merely note that this prophecy of Yechezkel, like the prophecy of Chaggai concerning the laws of purity and impurity in the Temple, fit in well with this approach.

## **THE PROPHET'S DEVIATION FROM RECOGNIZED HALAKHA**

When we examine the details of the laws, we encounter elements that differ from what is stated in the Torah, leaving us quite perplexed. In this respect, they join with other halakhic particulars in neighboring chapters, e.g., the sacrifices of the month of Nisan which we came across in the *haftara* for *Parashat Ha-chodesh*, which also share this problematic quality. *Chazal* go as far as to report a tradition that there had been a desire to conceal the book of *Yechezkel* because of the contradictions to what is stated in the Torah found therein:

That man, Chananya the son of Chizkiya by name, is to be remembered for blessing: but for him, the book of *Yechezkel* would have been hidden, for its words contradicted the Torah. What did he do? Three hundred barrels of oil were

taken up to him and he sat in an upper chamber and reconciled them.  
(*Shabbat* 13b)

Unfortunately, *Chazal* did not record Chananya's resolutions of the contradictions; all that we have are the attempts made by the various commentators to unravel the mystery.

Generally speaking, we can talk about two distinct approaches among the commentators to these questions. The first tries to adjust the details that contradict classical Halakha through exegesis that reconciles them with the simple meaning of the text. Its underlying assumption is that "the Torah will never be replaced," and therefore Yechezkel's words must be able to be reconciled with the halakhic particulars found in the Torah. The second approach does not try to push aside the plain meaning of the verses and make them match what is stated in the Torah, but rather it tries to resolve the problem on the basis of the assumption that halakhic changes in the future are possible. Yechezkel's deviations from recognized Halakha reflect changes that will transpire in the future, and therefore they are legitimate.

A good example of both these approaches is found in the words of the Radak (vv. 21-22) at the end of our *haftara*:

He wrote the laws governing the priests, even though they are [already] written in the Torah, because he proposed new laws **that are not explicit in the Written Law**. It is also possible that he proposed things that will apply **in the future for added sanctity**.

"A widow" – if he said this with respect to all priests, this would be an addition of holiness for the future. This is because the widow of the High Priest, and even that of an ordinary priest, may be taken by another priest. This is what he said: "They shall take the widow of a priest" (*Yechezkel* 44:22). And if we say that he speaks about the High Priest, this will mean: "Of the priests shall take" – some of the priests shall take. As our Sages have explained, and as Yonatan translated [the verse]: *she'ar kohanaya yisbun* - "the other priests will take. And he omitted *azona* and a *chalala*; since they are written in the Torah, he did not mention everything.

## RAISING THE LEVEL OF THE PRIESTS

In order to understand the changes found in our *haftara*, let us follow in the footsteps of the Malbim's suggestion. According to him, Yechezkel's goal was to elevate the priest from the level of an ordinary priest to that of a High Priest. As he puts it:

He informed him that in the future the priests who are the descendants of Tzadok would be elevated so that in certain ways they would enjoy the importance of a High Priest, for they would be between the level of the High Priest and that of an ordinary priest.

Indeed, the points that he notes comply with this definition. It begins with a description of the priestly garments as "linen turbans." The Malbim himself focuses on the priestly belt, the *avnet*, because that is the garment concerning which there is a difference between that of the ordinary priest and that of the High Priest.<sup>[1]</sup> But it is not only the details but also the very description and the emphasis on the linen that purposely rouses up the association with the white garments worn by the High Priest on *Yom Kippur*. This impression is reinforced by verse 19:

And when they go out into the outer court, into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their garments in which they minister, and lay them in the holy chambers, and they shall put on other garments; so as not to hallow the people with their garments.

This detail parallels that which is stated regarding the High Priest at the end of the *Yom Kippur* service -

And Aharon shall come into the Tent of Meeting, and shall put off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there. (*Vayikra* 16:23)

and *Chazal's* statement that emphasizes that "he shall leave them there" is an obligation falling upon the priest. We shall return to the significance of this matter below, but first, let us finish presenting the points of similarity between Yechezkel's priests and the High Priest.

## **THE GROOMING OF THE HIGH PRIEST**

The second point is the obligatory haircut mentioned here. The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 22b casts a special obligation on the High Priest to cut his hair once a week, and on an ordinary priest to cut his hair once a month, referring to our chapter as the source. The difference between the High Priest and an ordinary priest is not merely quantitative, but rather it marks the entirely different status enjoyed by the High Priest. An ordinary priest is not obligated to cut his hair in order to achieve some positive result, but rather in order to prevent him from appearing in the Temple with wildly growing hair. In essence, we are dealing with a prohibition against wild hair and disrespectful appearance in the Temple, a state that is defined by thirty days of growth. Regarding the High Priest, on the other hand, the goal is not to avoid the violation of a prohibition, but rather to positively fulfill the obligation of glory and majesty. Just as the Torah defined the High Priest's garments as expressing and representing glory and majesty, so too his body must present those same qualities, and therefore he must cut his hair once a week. What is interesting is that this law is nowhere mentioned in the Torah, the words of Yechezkel serving as the sole source. The Gemara points to this astonishing fact, and then establishes that "they knew this by tradition, and Yechezkel came and hung it on a verse." That is to say, we are dealing with a law given to Moshe at Sinai which Yechezkel committed to writing. In this way the Gemara resolved the difficulty concerning the law's authority, but the question remains why did Yechezkel deem it necessary to record this law in writing.

The third point regarding which the Malbim sees Yechezkel as elevating the ordinary priest to the level of a High Priest, is, of course, the prohibition to marry a widow, which in *Parashat Emor* is reserved exclusively for the High Priest.

## **RESTORING THE SITUATION TO ITS ORIGINAL SPLENDOR**

In short, Yechezkel prophesies about raising the status of the ordinary priests to a level approaching that of the High Priest. On this point, the Malbim's proposal appears persuasive.<sup>[2]</sup> We are, however, still left with several questions that were

raised in the course of our presentation, namely, why did Yechezkel find this necessary, and what is the meaning of his taking a law known by tradition from Sinai and turning it into a written law.[\[3\]](#)

We can, of course, follow in the footsteps of the Radak and speak of additional sanctity in the future, when the demands made of the priests will be higher. It seems, however, that we are dealing here not only with the result of a situation of added sanctity, but rather that this itself is part of the prophecy's goal, namely, to console the people of Israel and tell them that they will be able to sanctify and elevate themselves when the Temple will be rebuilt. To appreciate this idea, we must understand the uncertainty that was eating away in the hearts of the people in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple, that perhaps it will not be possible to restore the youthful love between Israel and their Father in heaven, and that even if the Temple is rebuilt, the *Shekhina* will never again reside therein as it had in the past. This is no small matter; let us not forget that this is precisely the situation described by *Chazal* regarding the relationship between the first Temple and the second Temple. Despite the fact that the Temple was rebuilt and the sacrificial service returned to Zion, the resting of the *Shekhina* characteristic of the first Temple was not reproduced in the second Temple. A similar dilemma existed when the *Mishkan* was constructed after the sin of the golden calf – will the *Mishkan* built in the wake of the sin reflect the love expressed at Mount Sinai, or perhaps the love will be impaired and the *Shekhina* will not rest in the *Mishkan* as had been intended? This is the question that Yechezkel is struggling with when he comes to prophesy about the construction of the future Temple, and his message to the people is one of restoring the situation to its original splendor.

## **ELEVATING THE STATUS OF THE FAITHFUL PRIESTS**

This accounts for the emphasis placed on the faithful priests "who had kept the charge of God's sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray." There are two groups of priests – those that strayed from God and those that kept His charge. Choosing the faithful priests is important in and of itself, but even more so for the Temple that will be reconstructed after the destruction. This is also the reason that Yechezkel focuses on the descendants of Tzadok. Tzadok was the first priest to serve in Shelomo's Temple, and the selection of his descendants as the heads of the priests creates a connection between the future Temple and the first Temple.

We can now understand the raising of the status of the ordinary priests to a level similar to that of a High Priest. The aspiration is expressed and the promise is made that in comparison to its predecessor the future Temple will be lacking neither in sanctity nor in the resting of the *Shekhina*; on the contrary, despite the destruction the new Temple will be even greater and more exalted. The additional sanctity that will find expression in the laws governing the priests is the consolation that Yechezkel offers his people in this prophecy.

It might also be suggested that the similarity alluded to in the prophecy between the priestly garments and the white garments that the High Priest would wear on *Yom Kippur* alludes to renewal and renewed love. For the essence of *Yom Kippur* lies in the renewing of the relationship between man and God, in the wiping out of the past and in the hope for the future. This is what happened on the first *Yom Kippur* in the wilderness, and this remains true for all generations. Outfitting the priests in white garments in the future Temple symbolizes the renewal that will be ushered in by that Temple.

(Translated by David Strauss)

---

[1] The Gemara in *Yoma* records a dispute on the matter. The Malbim in his commentary to verse 17 relates to this point.

[2] For an interpretation that adopts the alternative approach of reconciling the prophecy with Halakha, see the *Meshekh Chokhma* on the *haftara*.

[3] The discussion of the more general and fundamental question, whether *mitzvot* can change, and what are the parameters of such change, requires separate treatment which would go well beyond the framework of this series.

