

**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**  
**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**  
\*\*\*\*\*

**Yehezkel: The Book of Ezekiel**

**By Dr. Tova Ganzel**

**Shiur #08a: The Departure of God's Glory from the Temple (chapters 9-11)**

We will now discuss the Divine vision in Chapters 9-11, in which God's glory leaves the Temple. This continues our discussion of the journeying of the Divine Presence at the beginning of the Book of Yehezkel. The core element of the vision here is the final verse of Chapter 8: "Therefore I, too, will deal in fury; My eyes shall not spare, neither will I have pity..."<sup>1</sup> These chapters make manifest this warning, that God will act "in fury" and "without pity." The prophet refers perhaps not only to the outcome, but also to the manner in which the destruction will be carried out.

An interesting juxtaposition is formed by the end of Chapter 8 and the beginning of Chapter 9:

"They will cry in My ears with a loud voice, but I shall not hear them."  
(8:18)

"And He cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying: Cause those that have charge over the city to draw near, every man with his destroying weapon in his hand." (9:1)<sup>2</sup>

The people cry out loudly. But they remain unanswered. Not only that, but Yehezkel hears a loud voice calling upon those who have charge over the city to destroy it. This contrast highlights the chasm separating the nation from God. Yehezkel then sees:

"And behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lies towards the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed in linen, with a writer's inkwell by his side; and they went in and stood beside the bronze altar." (9:2)

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the last time we will discuss this phrase, which recurs frequently in the early part of the Sefer (see 5:11; 7:4,9). Here, it occurs relating to God's response to the deeds of the nation, which the prophet observed in Chapters 8-11. This verse appears three more times (8:18; 9:5,10) but after Chapter 9, the prophet does not mention it again.

<sup>2</sup> This verse can be understood in two ways. One is as punctuated above. Alternatively, the voice cries: "Cause those that have charge over the city to draw near," and Yehezkel himself describes how they each hold a weapon of destruction.

Six men holding weapons of slaughter arrive from the north (familiar to us already as the origin of punishment). One is there to document proceedings. The detailed and graphic description, including the garb of the scribe and the exact location of the group, alongside the bronze altar, is meant to convey the message that this is not a theoretical depiction. And as the men appear, the glory of the God of Israel begins its journey out of the Temple. Again God cries out, this time to the scribe:

“And He called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writer’s inkwell by his side” (v. 3).

Now it now becomes clear that the scribe’s role is to draw a sign on the forehead of those who express sorrow over the abominations committed in the city (“the men that sigh and that cry on account of all the abominations that are done in its midst” – v. 4), marking them so that they will be passed over. As for the rest, the command is to slay them without mercy.

This image further reinforces the idea of personal retribution (3:16-21, as discussed previously). We see clearly – even in this generation, even when the decree of Destruction is irreversible – that Divine justice is evident. The righteous person will live in his righteousness; only the wicked will die for their sins. But at the same time, it is emphasized that all sinners will indeed be slain (“Slay utterly old and young, both maidens and little children, and women...” – 9:6).

The description in verses 6-7 of old men being slain in the courts of the Temple is horrifying. Whereas the Torah portrays the defilement of the Temple as the result of the sins by the nation, Yehezkel presents a situation where the defilement is caused by a Divine command that people be killed in its courtyards. This is a situation unparalleled in all of the Tanakh. How can God command an action that will result in the defilement of the Temple, contravening the command that its sanctity be strictly preserved? Furthermore, who are these “old men who were before the House” (v. 6)? To address the first question we must recall that the Temple is already defiled because of the deeds of the nation – foremost among them, its leaders. This slaughter, then, demonstrates once again that God’s glory is no longer present, and the responsibility for this situation rests principally with the officials of the people. The defilement of the Temple by God’s own command serves as proof that by the month of Elul in the sixth year of Yehoyakhin’s exile, almost five years before the Destruction, God’s glory was no longer there.

Yehezkel is not unmoved by this sight:

“And it happened, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah, Lord God! Will You then destroy all the remnant of Israel in the pouring of Your fury upon Jerusalem?” (v. 8)

Yehezkel's reaction tells us a number of things. First, in his Divine vision he does not see those people being passed over thanks to the mark on their forehead. We can infer, then, that by the time of the Destruction there were no righteous people worthy of being saved (likewise in 14:12-23). Next, the expression "remnant of Israel" shows that Yehezkel regards the inhabitants of Jerusalem as the remnant of the nation. This sense of national doom – the fear that not a single survivor will remain in Jerusalem – is compounded by the prophet's personal involvement in the situation, by his fright at witnessing the fulfillment of his prophecy. This very real vision even leaves the prophet himself shaken, and may perhaps indicate to us the message that he conveyed to the elders sitting before him.

God's response to the prophet's broken cry ("Then He said to me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Yehuda is exceedingly great, and the land is full of blood, and city full of injustice" – 9:9) explains the reason for this terrible deed. We hear another iteration of the nation's sins: the bloodshed and the injustice perpetrated in Jerusalem. Finally, we see the people's rationalization that has led to all this evil: "For they say, The Lord has forsaken the land and the Lord does not see." This verse (like 38:12) informs us that the corruption and idolatry that have overtaken Jerusalem have been caused by a feeling on the part of the leaders that God no longer has His eye on what is happening in the land. Moshe Greenberg proposes:

"The general picture arising here is better suited to the first chapter of Tzefania before the reforms of Yoshiyahu. Besides the various types of idolatry, Tzefania mentions 'those who say in their heart, The Lord does neither good nor evil' (*Tzefania* 1:12 – a parallel to Yehezkel's formulation 'the Lord does not see'). This mood seems to belong to the period preceding the reforms of Yoshiyahu, because following those great acts the nation relied greatly upon their God and had tremendous faith in Him; they were encouraged in this by the prophets of peace and salvation who multiplied during the generation of Yehoyakim and Tzidkiyahu... Therefore [Yehezkel] mentions the lawless mood of times gone by to describe the way Jerusalem now appears in God's eyes."<sup>3</sup>

Against this background, once again it is emphasized that the Divine response will be devoid of compassion: "And as for Me, also, My eye shall not spare, not will I have pity, but I will repay their way upon their head" (9:10). Finally, the report of the man clothed in linen – "I have done as You have commanded me" (v. 11) – answers Yehezkel's question as to how it was that the entire remnant of the people in Jerusalem could be condemned to die. The reply is that none were found who sighed and wept over the state of the city.

---

<sup>3</sup> M. Greenberg, "Ha-Mevo'ot be-Sefer Yehezkel ke-Reka la-Nevu'ot," *Beit Mikra* 17, 5732, pp. 273-278.

In Chapter 10 the prophet moves on to a description of the Divine vision he encountered at the start of his prophetic mission. There is here an additional aspect from which we deduce two things: not only does the defilement of the city have its source inside the Temple, but also a fire that originates in the Temple causes the burning of the city. This fire is brought out by the man through whom we see that there is no one in the city worthy of rescue from the impending disaster. First, we encounter the command:

“And He spoke to the man clothed in linen, and said, Go in between the wheelwork, under the *keruv*, and fill your hands with coals of fire from between the *keruvim*, and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight.” (10:2)

This is followed by a description of the departure of God’s glory from the Temple, and then finally the implementation of this command:

“And it was, when He had commanded the man clothed with linen, saying, Take fire from between the wheelwork, from between the *keruvim*... And one *keruv* stretched out his hand from between the *keruvim* to the fire that was between the *keruvim*, and took, and put it into the hands of him who was clothed in linen, and he took it, and went out... And the *keruvim* mounted up; this is the same living creature that I saw by the river Kevar... And the glory of God departed from above the threshold of the House, and stood over the *keruvim*... and every one 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*... the faces were the same which I saw by the river Kevar...” (10:6-22)

In the next shiur, we shall see who the Divine vision holds responsible for the destruction of the Temple.

Translated by Kaeren Fish