

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Yechezkel: The Book of Ezekiel

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This week's shiurim are dedicated in memory of
Lillian Grossman z"l – Devorah Leah bas Shlomo Halevi
by Larry and Maureen Eisenberg

Dedicated *le-zekher nishmot* Amelia Ray and Morris Ray
on the occasion of their eighth *yahrtzeits*
by their children Patti Ray and Allen Ray

**Shiur #12: “And You Shall Know That Not Without Cause Have I Done”
(14:12-23)**

After considering the various categories of false prophets and prophecies, Yechezkel returns to the question: who could nevertheless be saved? This prophecy is uttered four times, each time similarly, but with slight stylistic variations. This technique echoes the prophet's earlier rhetorical devices and his repeated efforts to persuade his audience of the veracity of his message. The prophet begins by describing the famine that will befall the city; then the wild animals that will pass through the land, followed by the sword, and finally, the pestilence. Describing these imminent afflictions raises the question of whether any righteous people will survive the onslaught. And if so, might their families also be saved in their merit, as in similar situations described in the Torah? The prophetic response to this question is that if indeed there are any righteous individuals to be found in the city, they alone will be saved.

Perhaps this prophecy indicates that Yechezkel's audience is concerned with the question of the fate of the righteous. This may show they have internalized the fact that the Destruction is on its way, and the speculation now is about its scope.

To understand the content of this prophecy, let us examine it in a format that reveals its structure:

Chapter 14:12-20

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| <p>(12) The word of the Lord came again to me, saying:</p> <p>(13) Son of man, when the land sins against Me by trespassing grievously, then I will stretch out My hand upon it, and will break its staff of bread, and will send <u>famine</u> upon it, and will <i>cut off</i> man and beast from it.</p> <p>(14) Even if these three men – Noach, Daniel and Iyov – were in it, <i>they would save [only] their own lives by their righteousness</i>, says the Lord God.</p> | <p>(17) Or if I bring a <u>sword</u> upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land, so that I <i>cut off</i> man and beast from it;</p> <p>(18) Even if these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they should deliver neither sons nor daughters, but <i>they alone should be saved</i>.</p> |
| <p>(15) If I cause <u>evil beasts</u> to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it becomes desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts,</p> <p>(16) Then even if these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters; <i>they alone would be saved</i>, but the land would be desolate.</p> | <p>(19) Or if I send a <u>pestilence</u> into that land, and pour out My fury upon it in blood, to <i>cut off</i> from it man and beast –</p> <p>(20) Even if Noach, Daniel and Iyov were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they would deliver neither son nor daughter; <i>they would save only their own lives by their righteousness</i>.</p> |

The famine that awaits the inhabitants of Jerusalem

Prophecies about the famine in Jerusalem are found in Chapters 4, 5, 6, 12, and 14 – as part of the punishments facing the city. Of all the imminent afflictions, first the inhabitants will feel the effects of the famine, the first tangible punishment, growing increasingly severe as the siege continues. Perhaps this is why the famine is emphasized in the early chapters that rebuke the city (4-14) rather than in the latter ones (15-24). For instance, in Chapter 4, the symbolic act that Yechezkel performs is meant to dramatize the approaching famine:

“... Behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they shall eat break by weight, and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure, and in appalment; that they may lack bread and water, and be appalled with one another, and waste away for their iniquity.” (4:16-17)

Then, in Chapter 5, the famine is mentioned again:

“When I shall send upon them the evil arrows of famine, which shall be for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, and I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread, so will I send upon you famine and evil beasts, and they shall bereave you, and pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you.” (5:16-17)

Yechezkel speaks of the famine (among the other punishments) once again in Chapter 6:

“... for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. He that is far off shall die of the pestilence, and he that is near shall fall by the sword, and he that remains and is besieged shall die by the famine; thus will I spend My fury upon them.” (6:11-12)

And again in Chapter 12:

“But I will leave a few men of them over from the sword,¹ from the famine, and from the pestilence, that they may confess all their abominations among the nations where they come, and they shall know that I am the Lord.” (12:16)

Finally, we encounter the famine in Yechezkel’s symbolic act:

“Son of man, eat your break with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and with anxiety; and say to the people of the land, So says the Lord God of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and of the land of Israel: they shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink their water with appalment, that her land may be desolate, bare of its fullness, because of the violence of all who dwell in it...” (12:18-19)

As mentioned previously, the price demanded by the false women prophets – “handfuls of barley and pieces of bread” (see 13:19) may also be an expression of the famine in the city.

Apart from these similarities, the prophecies describing the famine that the inhabitants of the city will suffer also have differences between them. Firstly, in Chapter 4, through his symbolic act and its interpretation Yechezkel announces

¹ “The sword” is a motif that recurs over and over throughout the Book; we will discuss this in #21. The motifs of famine and the sword coexist with Yechezkel’s rhetorical diversity (in contrast to Yirmiyahu), as manifest, inter alia, in the fact that the order of the punishments awaiting the city is different in almost every chapter in which they appear (except for Chapter 6, where the order follows that of 12:16).

that the inhabitants of the city will hunger and thirst to death, among the other punishments that will befall them. In Chapter 6, he emphasizes that this punishment will be shared by all. After the distant and the nearby die, the remnant, still besieged in the city, will also die of hunger. In the description of the famine in Chapter 12, Yechezkel first mentions the possibility of survivors. He emphasizes that they will remain alive in order to recount the abominations perpetrated in the city. Finally, in Chapter 14, the prophet addresses the identity of the survivors and makes it clear that if indeed there are righteous people, they will save only themselves.

The description of the punishment awaiting the city (and especially the “evil beasts”) in these prophecies fits the description of the punishment set forth in *Sefer Vayikra*:

“I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number, and your highways shall be desolate... and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge My covenant, and when you are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall return you your bread by weight, and you shall eat, and not be satisfied.” (*Vayikra* 26:22-26)

The identity of the righteous

Nowhere in the *Sefer* is there any mention of the possibility that the people might be saved by the merit of their ancestors. But throughout our chapter, the prophet states that the city will not be saved by virtue of the righteous dwelling in it. Twice (for the first and last time) he even names the three righteous individuals who represent the righteous who might be saved through their own merit: Noach, Daniel, and Iyov. Yirmiyahu, too, like Yechezkel, rejects the possibility that the inhabitants of Jerusalem could be saved by virtue of the righteous present there:

“Then the Lord said to me: If Moshe and Shmuel were to stand before Me, My mind could not incline towards this people; send them out of My sight, and let them depart.” (*Yirmiyahu* 15:1)

This comparison with Yirmiyahu adds to our surprise at the particular figures named by Yechezkel: Noach, Daniel, and Iyov. It is difficult to know what particular aspect or manifestation of righteousness is represented by each of these individuals. Perhaps what they share is their universality. Noach lived at the time of the Flood, before the patriarchs of the Jewish nation. Daniel appears to have been known internationally for his wisdom, as we find in Yechezkel’s prophecy to Tyre:

“Behold, you are wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that can be hidden from you” (28:3).²

While the commentaries are divided about the identity of the biblical Iyov, he too represents a universal symbol of a righteous person who suffers.³

Yechezkel emphasizes that even the sons and daughters of such exceptional individuals will not be saved; certainly not other inhabitants of the city. Through the comparison to Noah, the anticipated Destruction seems even more devastating than the Flood. Noah saved his entire family, but now even that possibility does not exist. Similarly, Daniel remained alone after he and his friends earn the king’s recognition, and Iyov too remained alone. The fulfillment of this prophecy is illustrated very tangibly in 9:6, where the man clothed in linen is commanded to slay even the little children.

Ultimately, there are some survivors of the destruction of Jerusalem. But they are left alive not by virtue of the righteous individuals, but because of God’s desire that the terrible actions and the resulting punishment of the inhabitants of the city be made known. The prophet thus deflects the claim made by his opponents that the punishment that he foretells for Jerusalem does not match its actions. He emphasizes that the punishment is indeed proportional: “...it is not without cause that I have done it” (14:23); “... it is not without cause that I have said...” (6:10). The importance of this prophetic message is reinforced by the fact that another prophecy, in Chapter 21, reiterates that God’s sword will leave no survivors in the city – neither righteous nor wicked – and this will make God recognized:

“... I will draw My sword from its sheath, and will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked. Seeing then that I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore My sword shall emerge from its sheath, against all flesh from the south to the north, that all flesh may know that I the Lord have drawn My sword out of its sheath, it shall not return any more.” (21:8-10)

² The biblical Book of Daniel appears to be of later origin than the Book of Yechezkel. The name “Daniel” as mentioned by Yechezkel is consistent with the Daniel who is famed among the nations as a sage. The name “Daniel” (or “Danel”) was a universal name; this is documented as early as the Ugaritic *Epic of Aqhat*, where Danel is a wise man and righteous judge. See U. Cassuto, “Daniel,” in the *Encyclopedia Mikraït* 2, Jerusalem 5714, pp. 683-685.

³ Commenting on 14:14, Radak cites the midrash: “These three righteous individuals are mentioned because each of them saw three worlds: [a world that was] built, [a world that was] destroyed, and [a world that was re-] built.” In Noah’s case this refers to the physical world; in Daniel’s case, the “world” is the Temple; and for Iyov, the “world” was his family. Thus, although Yechezkel’s prophecy foretells that the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not be saved by virtue of the righteous, the mention of these three men nevertheless carries a covert message of consolation that Jerusalem will eventually be rebuilt.

Three and four

Following the verses that foretell that there will be no survivors from the city, the prophet goes on to enumerate, for the first time, not only the number of righteous individuals, but also the number of punishments (“severe judgments”) that they will suffer:

“For so says the Lord God: How much more when I send My **four⁴ severe judgments upon Jerusalem, namely – the sword, and the famine, and the evil beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast.**” (14:21)

Note that the number of hypothetical righteous individuals (three) is smaller than the number of punishments that will befall the city (four) – another indication that ultimately the four “severe judgments” will prevail over the three righteous people.⁵ The prophet now adds that not only will all the human inhabitants of the city be annihilated, but the animals too, just as warned in *Sefer Vayikra*.

The prophecy then ends on a surprising note: despite everything we have heard until this point, it turns out there will be survivors after all:

“Yet behold, a remnant will be left in it to be brought out, both sons and daughters; behold, they shall come out to you...” (14:22).

The purpose of leaving this remnant is for the exiles to know what happened to the city:

“... and you shall see their way and their doings, and you shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon it. And they shall console you, when you see their ways and their doings, and you shall know that not without cause have I done all that I have done in it, says the Lord God.” (14:22-23)

These verses inform us, like 12:16, that despite everything there will be a remnant: sons and daughters of Jerusalem who will survive, their purpose being to testify that the Destruction was deserved. Throughout *Sefer Yechezkel* there is a noticeable lack of expressions of consolation. So it is startling that it is specifically here that the prophet states *twice* that the survivors of the Destruction will bring consolation: “You shall be comforted,” “They shall console you.” It may

⁴ In *Yirmiyahu* 15:2-3 (continuing on from v. 1, which mentions the potential righteous individuals in whose merit the city might be saved) we likewise find a “four-fold” punishment. V.2 speaks of death, the sword, famine, and captivity, and v. 3 reads, “I will appoint over them four groups [of ravagers]....”

⁵ For a discussion of three and four as a numerical model for a situation of ranking or hierarchy, rather than merely as defined numbers, see M. Weiss, “*Al Shelosha... ve-al Arba'a*,” *Tarbitz* 36, 5726, pp. 307-318.

be that the very survival of this remnant is itself a consolation (as R. Eliezer of Beaugency explains). But the language of the text seems to suggest that the surviving sons and daughters, along with their consolation, are the exception: their survival and the consolation are unusual, and remind us of the norm: a picture of utter desolation, with no community that lives on, and no longed-for consolation.⁶

Appendix: “When the land sins” (14:13) – an actual reality or a rhetorical device?

In many of his prophecies, Yechezkel begins by addressing the land – or specific places in the land – rather than the people. He speaks to “the mountains of Israel” (6:1-2; 36:1,4); the “ground of Israel” (7:2, 21:8); “the forest land of the Negev” (21:2-3); “Jerusalem” (16:2); “the bloody city” (22:2; 24:6,9); and “Mount Se’ir” (35:2). This form of presentation of a prophecy is quite unusual in Tanakh and therefore commands our attention. In some of these prophecies the “land” is addressed not only as an opening statement, but as the target audience throughout the prophetic unit (for instance, the prophecy to the “mountains of Israel” in 6:1-11). What is the significance of the prophet’s appeal to the land? While such an appeal is to be found in five different chapters of the Book, we will explore this question here, since Chapter 14 is the central example.

The appeals to the land, in order, are as follows:

1. In Chapter 7, Yechezkel speaks of the destruction of the land: “... the end is come upon the four corners of the land” (7:2). This prophecy begins with an appeal to the land (ground) of Israel with no explicit mention of its inhabitants.
2. In Chapter 14, it is the land itself that sins: “When the land sins against Me by treacherous betrayal (*li-me’al ma’al*)...” (14:13).⁷ The sin of the land here does not include a description of human actions; rather, it depicts a trespassing of the land itself against God. God’s response to the acts of the land is formulated with the words, “I will stretch out My hand upon it, and will break its staff of bread, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it” (14:13). This is an earthly, natural punishment; not a political one relating to human actions. In its proper state, the land causes food to grow and crops to flourish. Now, owing to its sin, it can no longer offer a staff of bread. As a result, its inhabitants, both human and animal, go hungry and will no longer be able to live in it. Verses 15-20 too seem to describe the destruction of the land as a

⁶ Radak explains: “Your seeing them in their wickedness will be a consolation for you, for [it will be clear that] I acted justly in bringing all that I brought upon it.” However, it is difficult to conceive of the punishment itself – even if it was clearly just and well-deserved – bringing consolation to the exiles.

⁷ This expression is quite common in *Sefer Yechezkel* - 14:13; 15:8; 17:20; 18:24; 20:27; 39:23, 26.

punishment to the land, rather than to the inhabitants who are exiled and are gone.

3. In 22:24 we find: “Son of man, say to her, You are a land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation.” The land is “not cleansed” (or “not pure”) and the prophet goes on to enumerate the reasons for this, all of which relate to the actions of the office-bearers:

“There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravaging the prey... Her priests have violated my Torah... Her princes in the midst of her are like wolves ravaging the prey... And her prophets have daubed them with whitewash... The people of the land have used oppression and committed robbery...” (22:25-29)

4. In Chapter 36, the prophet addresses himself to “the land (ground) of Israel: “... and say to the mountains and to the hills, to the water courses and to the valleys, saying, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and in My fury, because you have suffered the insult of the nations...” (36:6). Later on, Yechezkel speaks to the mountains of Israel and the ground of Israel in a prophecy of consolation, in which the land flourishes: “But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to My people Israel...” (v. 8). These verses describe the revival of the people hand in hand with the flowering of the land. In doing so, Yechezkel emphasizes the scope of the redemption, against the background of the present state of the land. Note that even here, the motivation for God causing the land to flourish is the “insult of the nations” that has been inflicted on it, rather than Israel’s actions.⁸

The more common references to the land describe the Destruction, impurity, and exile as the result of the actions of the land’s inhabitants. These prophetic units are different: Yechezkel conveys his prophetic message by presenting the land as an independent entity. While this change appears to be merely semantic, done for the sake of rhetoric diversity, the contrast with the biblical perspective that appeals to man and his actions, is another way the prophet draws the attention of his target audience.⁹ Out of a desire to make a real impression and affect them deeply, he presents his messages in a way that draws in his listeners, using different devices: the use of harsh and blatant

⁸ To these verses we might also add 25:3,6, in which there is anthropomorphism of the land: “... and say to the children of Ammon... Because you said, Aha, against My Sanctuary when it was profaned, **and against the land of Israel when it was made desolate**, and against the house of Yehuda, when they went into exile...”

⁹ In many places throughout Tanakh we see that human actions influence the land to the extent that God’s words, or the prophet’s words, are addressed to the land rather than its human inhabitants. Thus, for instance, the sin of Adam brings in its wake a punishment to all of mankind whose object is actually the land: “Cursed be the land on your account... thorns and thistles shall it bring forth for you” (*Bereishit* 3:17-18). IN the description of the punishment meted out to Kayin, we read, “When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you” (*ibid.* 4:12), and so on.

language (for instance, the term “*gilulim*”); the awarding of “independence status,” as it were, to the land; and the use of animation (anthropomorphism). Thus the prophet emphasizes that the land is given to Israel by God, but the connection between the nation and the land is conditional upon the people’s actions and God’s will.

Having discussed the rhetorical precision of Yechezkel’s prophecy to the people, we will now turn our attention to another example of the diverse linguistic devices that he employs in conveying God’s word.

Translated by Kaeren Fish