

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Yehezkel: The Book of Ezekiel
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Shiur #18: Prophecies Concerning the Nations (25)

The second part of *Sefer Yehezkel*, chapters 25-32, is devoted to prophecies about the nations. These prophecies are concentrated in a single continuum and are located between the prophecies of rebuke and destruction (1-24) and those of revival (33-48). This is not incidental. A similar collection of prophecies for the nations is also found in other prophetic Books (Amos 1-2; *Yishayahu* 13-23; *Yirmiyahu* 46-51). Their purpose is to lay the foundation for Israel's revival. Israel's revival will cause the recognition of the unique transcendence of the Lord God of Israel and His control of all that has ever happened; and will also counter the desecration of God's Name among the nations which reached its nadir in the Destruction of the Temple and the exile of Am Yisrael.

The prevailing perception in the Ancient East was that kings were emissaries of the gods (or even gods themselves), and that every nation had its own god that ensured its victor in war. The prophet counters this perception by gathering all the prophecies about the nations into a single collection. This emphasizes that God, Lord of the entire world, decides the fate of each and every nation. The prophecies in these chapters speak of seven nations: Ammon, Moav (and Se'ir), Edom, Pelishtim, Tzor, Tzidon, and Egypt. The number seven, as a typological figure, may express the wholeness of God's supremacy over the world. The number seven is also repeated in Yehezkel's prophecy to Egypt, as we shall see.¹

These chapters in Yehezkel, unlike the prophecies addressed to other nations by other prophets, make scant mention of Israel's redemption as the "other side of the coin". The exceptions to this rule are two brief prophetic units: one in the prophecy to Tzor, in Chapter 28 (vv. 24-26), and the other in the prophecy to Egypt in Chapter 29 (v. 21); these will be discussed later. Yehezkel's prophecies of revival appear only in the latter (third) part of the Book.

The order of prophecies

¹ To these chapters we should add the prophecy in Chapter 35 concerning Edom, and the prophecy in Chapters 38-39 about Gog from the land of Magog. We shall discuss the place of these prophecies in the Book below.

Unlike the other prophecies in the Book, the order of Yehezkel's prophecies to the nations is not chronological. The first prophecy, to Egypt (29:1-15) was conveyed prior to the prophecy to Tzor (26:1-6), and the prophecy with the latest date (29:17-21) is not the last one in the collection.

Why this seeming jumble? Possibly because the prophecies are ordered by the geographical location of the various nations surrounding Israel, starting from the east, and then moving along the coastline on the west: the prophecies in Chapter 25 speak of Ammon, Moav, Se'ir, Edom and Pelishtim; Chapters 26-28 address Tzor and Tzidon; and Chapters 29-32 focus on Egypt. Alternatively, the order of prophecies may be related to their content: the prophet starts out by briefly speaking of the reactions of the nations to the destruction (Ammon, Moav, Se'ir, Edom, Peleshet); then he utters his prophecies to Tzor and Egypt, whose status at the time of the destruction represented a real challenge of faith for Bnei Yisrael – each for its own reasons. For this reason, the prophet discusses them at greater length. We will note here the rather conspicuous absence of any prophecy for Babylonia, which actually destroyed the Temple (as discussed previously).²

Brief prophecies (Chapter 25)

In Chapter 25, Yehezkel conveys brief prophecies concerning Ammon, Moav, Edom and the Pelishtim, each of which has a lengthy historical relationship with Israel.³ These prophecies share a uniform structure: the sin is detailed using the word “*ya'an*” (“because”, or “since...”); the punishment is described, beginning with the word “*lakhen*” (therefore...); and is followed by a concluding message, “they shall know that I am the Lord” – which is obviously the purpose of the prophecy as a whole.

Ammon (vv. 1-7)

The word of God that comes to Yehezkel begins as follows:

“Son of man, set your face against the children of Ammon, and prophesy against them, and say to the children of Ammon, Hear the word of the Lord God...” (vv. 2-3).

This preamble is unique to the prophecy to Ammon. The focus on introductory expressions (“set your face”, “and say”, “hear”) seems to serve as a

² Likewise, among the addresses to the nations in Yishayahu, there is no speech devoted to Ashur, which exiled the kingdom of Israel during the prophet's lifetime.

³ In this respect, too, Babylonia is different from the other nations addressed by Yehezkel in these chapters, since Babylonia has no long common history with Israel. From this perspective, as from many others, including the substance of the sins of the nations that are mentioned, this chapter is similar to Amos 1-2.

transition between the first part of the Book and the second, an indication that the content of the prophecy changes at this point.

Whether the order of the prophecies here is geographical or related to content, Ammon may be the nation that appears first because the two prophecies to Ammon in our chapter (vv. 1-5 and 6-7) complement the previous prophecy to Ammon, in Chapter 21 (vv. 33-37). Alternatively, Ammon may be first because of the severity of the prophet's accusation – their rejoicing over the fall of Israel, which is depicted twice in these verses: once through their cries of joy, and again through their clapping of hands and stamping of feet.⁴ Perhaps another technique that Yehezkel adopts in his efforts to depict the disdain of Ammon is his use of the word “*seit*”, a term unique to *Sefer Yehezkel*, denoting scorn.⁵

A similar depiction of Ammon's attitude towards Bnei Yisrael is to be found in the prophecy of Tzefania:

“I have heard... the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have taunted My people, and magnified themselves against their border. Therefore... the children of Ammon [shall be] like Amora... the residue of My people shall spoil them, and the remnant of My people shall possess them. This they shall have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts.”
(*Tzefania* 2:8-10)⁶

It may be because of the many years that Ammon showed scorn towards Israel that Yehezkel introduces his prophecies to the nations by foretelling the destruction and downfall of Ammon. The transition between the first and second parts of the Book is indirectly shown here through the content of the prophecy to Ammon, too: their joy over the desecration of the Temple and the desolation of the land and the exile of the inhabitants of Yehuda serve to define the Book's transition to the post-Destruction prophecies.

In response to the glee of Ammon, Yehezkel prophesies their disappearance and annihilation. There are further indications of the background to this in Yirmiyahu's attitude towards the relationship between Israel and Ammon. His prophecy indicates some degree of fear that Ammon would conquer the land:

⁴ “*Heach*” here expresses *schadenfreude* (likewise in vv. 3,6 of our chapter, and again in the prophecy to Tzor – 26:2 – and in the description of Israel's enemies in general [36:2]. This is a contrast to “*ach*”, expressing the prophet's own sorrow of the sins of the people (6:11). Likewise, we must distinguish between the clapping of hands in our chapter, expressing pleasure over the downfall of Israel, and the clapping by means of which the prophet conveys God's sorrow over the destruction of Jerusalem (6:11; 21:19, 22; 22:13).

⁵ The word appears six times throughout the *Sefer*. Two appearances are in our chapter, in vv. 6, 15; it also appears in 16:57; 28:24, 26 and in 36:5. The word is also part of the Accadean language: šâṭu (meaning, scorn). See M.Z. Kadari, *Milon Ha-Ivrit ha-Mikrait*, Ramat Gan 5766, p. 1066.

⁶ This description fits the humiliation of Israel at the hands of Ammon described in *Shmuel* I 11:2.

“Concerning the children of Ammon... Has Israel no sons? Has he no heir? Why, then, does Malkam inherit Gad, and his people dwell in his cities?” (*Yirmiyahu* 49:1)

Against the background of this fear we better understand the importance of Yehezkel’s prophetic message to Ammon, including their destruction.⁷

Moav and Se’ir (vv. 8-11)

For Moav, the Destruction represents proof that Israel is a nation like any other. Moav has an ongoing conflict with Bnei Yisrael, going back to the period of the wilderness, when Bil’am was enlisted to curse them. The inclusion of Se’ir along with Moav in this brief prophetic unit is rather surprising, since elsewhere in Tanakh (as also in *Yehezkel* 35:3, 15), Se’ir is usually mentioned along with Edom. Opinions are divided as to the geographic location of Se’ir; it would seem to be in the southern Negev region.

The reason that prophecy for Moav follows immediately after Ammon’s may be related to the idolatrous influence that both these nations had on Israel. This had already begun filtering into Israel during the time of Shlomo and had thus become implanted deeply in the Temple from its very inception:

“Then Shlomo built a high place for Kemosh, the abomination of Moav, in the hill that faces Jerusalem, and to Molekh, the abomination of the children of Ammon.” (*Melakhim I* 11:7)

The destruction of the Temple in the days of Yehezkel’s prophecy therefore, to a great extent, brings an end to the direct and indirect influence that nations had exerted over Jerusalem for many years.⁸

Edom (vv. 12-14)

The prophecy to Edom is concise and proportionate: God repays the vengeance of Edom on Israel. Although the relationship between the two nations has had its ups and downs over the years, Edom has systematically harmed Am

⁷ The prophet mentions Ammon again in v. 10, at the end of the next prophecy about Moav, and emphasizes that Ammon will not be remembered among the nations. It is possible that vv. 10-11 represent a concluding unit for vv. 1-11, and this would explain why Ammon is mentioned here again.

⁸ In contrast to Yehezkel, Yishayahu (15-16) and Yirmiyahu (48) record lengthy prophecies about Moav. The discrepancy between the respective lengths of the prophetic units devoted to Ammon by the different prophets may perhaps symbolize the fact that the prophecies in Yishayahu and Yirmiyahu (which overlap partially) are profoundly bound up with the geographical areas in which they were uttered (a phenomenon made even more prominent by the proliferation of names of places and areas). The conciseness of Yehezkel’s message, in contrast, reflects the distance from which Yehezkel addresses Moav.

Yisrael throughout its existence. Another prophecy is devoted to Edom in Chapter 35, as part of the prophecies of revival, and there the prophet deals with the long-term ramifications of the hostility between Edom and Israel (with its roots in the relationship between Yaakov and Esav).

Pelishtim (vv. 15-17)

Like the other nations addressed in this chapter, the Pelishtim too have a relationship with Bnei Yisrael that goes back a long way. In fact, the Pelishtim determined the location of the country's south-western border for many years. It would seem that it is for this reason that the prophet emphasizes that the Pelishtim will disappear, and the coastline that they controlled will no longer be under their rule. The prophet thus indirectly ties the fate of the Pelishtim with the expansion of Israel's southern border. The long and convoluted relationship between these nations, and perhaps the sharp words of revenge that Yehezkel aims at the Pelishtim, are related to Israel's wars with them, which began in the days of Shimshon at the end of *Sefer Shoftim*.

The prophecies, as noted, follow a uniform structure in this chapter:

Ammon 1	Ammon 2	Moav and Se'ir	Edom	Pelishim
So says the Lord God	So says the Lord God	So says the Lord God	So says the Lord God	So says the Lord God
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,	Because you have clapped your hands and stamped with the feet, and rejoiced with all the disdain of your soul against the land of Israel,	Because Moav and Se'ir say, Behold, the house of Yehuda is like all the nations,	Because Edom has dealt against the house of Yehuda by taking vengeance, and has greatly offended, and revenged himself upon them,	Because the Pelishtim have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with disdain of soul, to destroy with everlasting hatred,
Behold, therefore I will deliver you to the men of the east for a possession, and they will	Behold, therefore I have stretched out My hand upon you, and I will deliver you for	Therefore, behold, I will open the flank of Moav on the side of the cities, and the side of his	Therefore, thus says the Lord God: I will also stretch out My hand upon Edom, and	Therefore, thus says the Lord God: Behold, I stretch out My hand upon the Pelishtim, and

<p>set their palaces in you, and make their dwellings in you. They shall eat your fruit and they shall drink your milk. And I will make Rabba a pasture for camels, and the children of Ammon a couching place for flocks,</p>	<p>a spoil to the nations, and I will cut you off from the peoples, and I will cause you to perish out of the countries; I will destroy you,</p>	<p>cities which are on his frontiers, the beautiful country of Bet HaYeshimot, Ba'al Me'on, and Kiryatayim, to the children of the east I will give it, along with the children of Ammon, as a possession, so that the children of Ammon may not be remembered among the nations. And I will execute judgments upon Moav,</p>	<p>will cut off man and beast from it, and I will make it desolate from Teman, and they of Dedan shall fall by the sword. And I will lay My vengeance upon Edom by the hand of My people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to My anger and according to My fury,</p>	<p>I will cut off the Keretim, and destroy the remnant of the sea coast, and I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes,</p>
<p>And you shall know that I am the Lord.</p>	<p>And you shall know that I am the Lord.</p>	<p>And they shall know that I am the Lord.</p>	<p>And they shall know My vengeance, says the Lord God.</p>	<p>And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall lay My vengeance upon them.</p>

Translated by Kaeren Fish