

**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**  
**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**  
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**Yehezkel: The Book of Ezekiel**  
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**Shiur #05: The Biblical Background for the Nation's Sins (6:1-10)**

Chapters 6 and 8 of *Sefer Yehezkel* are each devoted in their own way to describing, in detail, the sins that ultimately led to the Destruction and the exile. In chapter 6, Yehezkel is commanded to prophesy to the mountains of Israel that the places of pagan worship will be destroyed (a complementary prophecy, speaking of revival for the mountains of Israel, is to be found in chapter 36). To fully understand the meaning of verses 3-6 and the idolatry that they depict, we will return to their biblical source in *Vayikra* 26.<sup>1</sup> This method of study is known as intra-textual exegesis, and is based on the assumption that much can be learnt from “the light that one biblical text shines on another.”<sup>2</sup> In our instance, the prophet consciously evokes the text in *Vayikra* in order to indicate that it is being actualized in his own time. As such, the whole picture is clarified by looking at chapter 26 in its entirety, including the blessing promised to those who observe God's commandments at the beginning of that chapter (*Vayikra* 26:3-13; these verses should be compared with *Yehezkel* 34:24-28).

This chapter opens with the prohibition of serving idols, and continues with the reward for those who follow God's path, and the punishment awaiting those who violate God's covenant with His people. The retribution for these sinners is described in detail in *Vayikra* 26:16–41.

The prophetic message in Yehezkel chapter 6 is that at this point in time, the nation is being punished for the deeds depicted in *Vayikra* 26. What they are suffering now is what was defined in *Vayikra* as the punishment for those sins. The verses of rebuke in *Vayikra* are linked to the situation in Yehezkel's prophecy by describing the people's sins with the same expressions that appear in *Sefer Vayikra*. These expressions are not common in Tanakh; therefore their very mention causes the warnings and punishments set down in *Sefer Vayikra* to echo in the ears of Yehezkel's listeners (as well as in the consciousness of later readers).

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed discussion of the connection between *Vayikra* 26 and *Sefer Yehezkel*, see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus* (Anchor Bible), New York 2000, pp. 23-27.

<sup>2</sup> Y. Zakovitch, *Mavo le-Parshanut Penim Mikrait*, Even Yehuda 1992, p. 9, and see also pp. 126-128, although Zakovitch does not address *Sefer Yehezkel* at all. Adopting his terminology, we could say that “the exegetical endeavors in this instance are an aspiration for concretization as well as for actualization.” In our instance, chapter 26 of *Vayikra* is imbued with “a concrete anchoring and illustration” along with “its accordance with the present reality: there is a similarity between the text written in the past and its reader in the present.”

Let us start by presenting the similarity between the two descriptions:

<i>Vayikra</i> 26:30-33	<i>Yehezkel</i> 6:3-8
<p>“And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your sun images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and My soul shall abhor you. And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the savor of your sweet odors. And I will bring the land into desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you, and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.”</p>	<p>“... I will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your sun images shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones round about your altars. In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate, that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your sun images may be cut down, and your works may be wiped out. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and you shall know that I am the Lord.<sup>3</sup> Still, I will leave a remnant, that you may have some who shall escape the sword among the nations, when you shall be scattered through the countries.”</p>

The connection between these two chapters is especially pronounced through the use of the unusual expression “sun images” (*chamaneikhem*) and the description of the corpses of Bnei Yisrael being placed before, or upon, their idols – likewise a striking image. Let us examine the significance of these two expressions more closely.

“Sun images” were a type of idolatry: the term appears only once in the Torah<sup>4</sup> and only rarely in the Prophets. Rashi explains that the “sun image” (*chaman*) was “a sort of idolatrous image that was placed on roofs, for the sun (*chama*).”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, it is possible that “*chaman*” denotes a structure for idolatrous worship, at the center of which there stood a great square stone, sometimes with indentations, or a room, in which to exhibit idols. The stone was surrounded by pillars, and had a flat roof over it. An altar would be built in front of the stone.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the entire purpose of Yehezkel’s prophetic mission might be summed up in these words, “And you shall know that I am the Lord,” which appear here for the first time. So it comes as no surprise that this statement appears in exactly this form no less than 45 times in *Sefer Yehezkel*, along with another approximately 20 instances of this statement with slight variations.

<sup>4</sup> *Vayikra* 26:30.

<sup>5</sup> See also the careful distinction made by R. Menachem ben-Shimon in his commentary on this verse.

<sup>6</sup> This reflects the view of Rimon Kasher, *Yehezkel 1-24, Mikra le-Yisrael*, Tel Aviv-Jerusalem 5764, p. 217. Kasher cites proof for his interpretation from verses in *Yishayahu* and in *Divrei Hayamim*. In *Yishayahu* (17:8; 27:9) the “sun images” are mentioned together with “*asherim*” (trees

In order to grasp the meaning of “placing carcasses before idols (*gilulim*),” we must first clarify the meaning of the term “*gilulim*.” Since Yehezkel uses this term extensively, it is appropriate to differentiate “*gilulim*” from “*shikkutzim*,” “*elilim*” or “*atzabim*.” We can reach a more precise understanding of the term by analyzing of the root of the word. The root, though, is not self-evident; there are several possibilities:

a. ‘*Gala’* – a stone [for covering a well]. Both in the Aramaic and Greek translations and in a similar form in Akkadian (*galālu*), the term refers to a stone that is engraved with inscriptions and pictures.

b. ‘*Gele’* – meaning dung (as in the plural – ‘*gelalim*’); Rashi adopts this interpretation.

c. The root g-l-l might also be employed to create a deliberate ambiguity (considering the similarity among a circle, a pile of stones, and dung), resting in the same semantic field. In this case the basic meaning of the term is something “rolled-up” (round), with the connotation of round dung.

The power of such terms in *Sefer Yehezkel* is also evident from a comparison with *Vayikra* 26:30, where both sun images and ‘*gilulim*’ are mentioned, as in *Yehezkel*. In *Vayikra*, these terms appear at the climax of the list of curses that will befall the nation, after the verse that depicts parents eating the flesh of their children, and before the verse describing the destruction of the land and of the Temple. Perhaps the purpose of this verse is to emphasize the message that “because you attached yourselves to places of idol worship, there you will be killed,” as Ibn Ezra explains (and similarly Rashbam). In other words, the carcasses of the people will be left in the place where they served idols.<sup>7</sup> The expression in *Vayikra*, “the carcasses of your idols” (*pigrei giluleikhem*), thus refers to the carcasses of the animals offered to idols; perhaps the meaning of “*peger*” in the expression “*pigrei giluleikhem*” is a pillar/statue/monument (“*matzeva*”), like its meaning in Ugaritic. In this case, we must interpret the expression “*pigrei giluleikhem*” as a reference to the monuments where idolatry was performed. This recalls “the carcasses of their kings” (43:7-8), which might be understood as an allusion to the fact that the pagan kings were buried at their places of pagan worship (in contrast to the prohibition on any burial at the Temple site).

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used for idolatrous worship), along with “altars.” In *Divrei Ha-yamim* (II 14:4) “sun images” are mentioned together with “*bamo’*” (high places used for idolatry), and according to *Divrei Ha-yamim* II 34:4, sun images are to be found above the altars. (The only other mention is in verse 7 of our chapter.)

<sup>7</sup> See *Melakhim* I 13:2 – “And he cried out against the altar by the word of God, and said, O altar, altar, thus says the Lord: Behold, a child shall be born to the house of David – Yoshiyahu by name – and upon you shall he slay the priests of the high places that burn incense upon you, and men’s bones shall they burn upon you.” Further evidence of this situation is to be found in *Melakhim* II 23:14, 20.

Aside from this verse in *Vayikra*, “*gilulim*” are mentioned in the Torah only in *Devarim* 29:16 – “You have seen their [the Egyptians’] abominations, and their idols – [made of] wood and stone, silver and gold – which were among them.” Rashi comments (ad loc.):

“You have seen their ‘*shikkutzim*’ – [their idols,] so called because they are as loathsome as impure things (*sheketz*); ‘*giluleihem*’ – [so called because they are] as foul and abominable as dung (*gelel*).”

The combination of “loathsomeness” and “abomination” sits well with the assumption that the prophet is using these terms in a negative sense. The above definitions of the word “*gilulim*,” and its frequent appearance in *Sefer Yehezkel* with the term “abominations” (*to’evot*), show that the deeds of the nation are described harshly and frankly in Yehezkel’s prophecies. These auxiliary connotations and meanings describing the nation’s idol worship should be kept in mind by the contemporary reader, too. Only then can one understand the full significance of God’s fierce anger at His people.

Thus, we have seen the effect of the use of shared terminology in prophecy. The prophet describes the actions of the people in detail, so the obvious ramifications of their acts, hailing back to *Sefer Vayikra*, echo in their ears by association, without the prophet having to describe the results with the same level of detail.

However, there seems to be more of a link between our prophecy and *Sefer Vayikra* – this time, on a more optimistic note. Chapter 26 of *Sefer Vayikra* makes mention of God’s covenant with His people right after the rebuke for their unspeakable deeds. This covenant is absent from the prophecy of harsh rebuke in Chapter 6 of Yehezkel. The technique employed here by the prophet generates an important complementary message that hovers, implicitly, in the background. *Vayikra* chapter 26 begins by setting down the blessing that awaits the nation of Israel if it follows God’s ways. The text states,

“If you will walk in My statutes... I will set My Tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be My people. I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bars of your yoke, and made you walk upright.” (*Vayikra* 26:3-13)<sup>8</sup>

Admittedly, the phrase “My soul shall not abhor you” expresses the extent of loathing that may arise if the people do not walk in God’s ways. But this extreme expression is also accompanied by a formulation of the covenant that testifies to

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<sup>8</sup> This connection between the people’s sins and the formulation of the covenant is already hinted at in Chizkuni’s commentary on *Vayikra* 26:30 – “And will place your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols’ – this is the opposite of: ‘I will be your God, and you will be My people.’”

the depth of the connection between God and His people (“and I will be your God...”). This message is even repeated at the end of *Vayikra* 26, where the Torah emphasizes that even where the nation’s actions causes a rift between itself and God, the covenant forged between them will stand the nation in good stead and protect them, even in the most difficult times:

“Then I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. The land also shall be forsaken by them, and shall enjoy her *shabbatot*, while she lies desolate without them, and they shall make amends for their sin, because, because they despised My judgments and because their soul abhorred My statutes. And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt, in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God; I am the Lord.” (*Vayikra* 26:42-45)

Translated by Kaeren Fish