YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Prophets vs. Empires: A Survey of Nevi’im Acharonim**

**Rav Yoel Bin-Nun**

**Shiur #28: Yeshayahu and His Disciples, From the Time of Menashe Until the Destruction (5)**

**Redemption for the remnant of God's servants**

Clearly, no edifice in the world can contain God's glory. As King Shlomo declares, "Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built" (*Melakhim* I 8:27). This was true while the Temple stood, and it is equally true after its destruction. The great question is whether the servants of God, those who "tremble [*charedim*] at his word" (*Yeshayahu* 66:5), are worthy of having God cause His Presence to dwell among them, in an edifice on earth and in Jerusalem, which should be a place of joy and happiness.

This question emerges in full force in the most "*charedi*" chapter of all of Tanakh; the answer, as we learned at the beginning of *Yeshayahu* (Chapter 1) and at the end (Chapter 58) is that it all depends on our attitude toward the downtrodden and destitute. If people are cruel-hearted, then even their sacrifices are considered worthless – no more than "swine’s blood":

So says the Lord: the heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool; where is the house that you may build for Me? And where is the place that may be My resting place?

For these things My hand made, and so all these things came to be, says the Lord, but upon this man I will look: upon him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.

He that kills an ox, slays a man; he that sacrifices a lamb, breaks a dog’s neck; he that offers a meal-offering, offered swine’s blood… (66:1-3)

Those who are worthy of standing before God are the humble, the poor, and the unassuming. God will repay harshly those who are guilty of arrogance and cruelty, just as He will punish those who offer up swine and those who consume "detestable things and mice" (66:3,17).

But how will it be possible to rebuild a living, healthy nation that aspires to stand before God and to be worthy of being chosen by Him? The harsh, forceful punishment on the future day of repayment will establish those who are upright and worthy as the victors – but this is not enough to rehabilitate a nation.

The prophetic answer (especially in *Yeshayahu* 11) is the ingathering of the exiles, but the description of it in the closing chapter of the *sefer* (66) is unusual: the nations that remain will bring our Jewish brethren who have assimilated in their midst as an offering to God, in processions of different forms of transport, old and new (!), and He will accept them:

And they shall bring all your brethren out of all the nations for an offering unto the Lord, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord, as *Bnei Yisrael* bring their offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord.

And of them also I will take for priests and Levites, says the Lord. (vv. 20-21)

Today, we are blessed to see the realization of many of the chapters of consolation, more than at any time in the Second Temple Period; however, Yeshayahu’s description is still greater than anything we have yet encountered:

For darkness shall cover the earth, and heavy darkness the peoples, but upon you the Lord will arise, and His glory shall be seen upon you.

Lift up your eyes round about, and see: they all are gathered together, and come to you; your sons come from far, and your daughters are borne on the side. (60:2,4)

The merchants of the nations will bring the sons and daughters of Tzion in processions from all over the world, as a gift to God, to the house of His glory, and they will bring with them gifts of gold and silver for the altar. The treasures brought by the nations will be gathered day and night at the gates of Jerusalem:

Your gates shall be open continually, day and night, they shall not be shut, that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, and their kings in procession.

For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly wasted….

And the sons of those that afflicted you shall come bending to you, and all those that despised you shall bow down at the soles of your feet, and they shall call you the city of the Lord, Tzion of the Holy One of Israel. (60:12,14)

Your sun shall no more go down, neither shall your moon withdraw itself, for the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.

And your people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever…

I the Lord will hasten it in its time. (60:20-22)

Everlasting joy shall be unto them. (61:7)

Even the most cursory reading of this prophecy indicates that there will be no more destruction; indeed, this is how the Rambam reads it (*Moreh Nevukhim* II:29), but he interprets these verses as talking about Mashiach – asserting that “the kingship of Israel” will then endure and never fall – even though the only "anointed one" referred to in the text is the prophet himself (61:1).

This prophecy has kindled a great deal of confidence in the hearts of mourning, suffering, tortured, believing Jews throughout the ages – but it came at a heavy cost, in two parts:

1. In the Second Temple Period, thousands of Jews were living in Jerusalem, full of faith that the Temple would not again be destroyed – not because God was in fact dwelling in Tzion (as in the First Temple Period), but rather because God had promised it, in these very prophecies. Without this belief, perhaps many of the zealots would not have dared to rebel against the Romans. Without this belief that there would be no more destruction, perhaps there truly would not have been a second destruction?!
2. There are masses of Jews today who believe in a complete Redemption – and nothing less. No matter how miraculous a development or event, it is measured solely against that perfect completeness. More than seven million Jews are already in Israel, in an ingathering of exiles the likes of which have never been seen. An independent, powerful Jewish state stands strong against its enemies round about, controlling the territories of Edom all the way to Eilat, “from the Reed Sea up to the sea of the Pelishtim” (*Shemot* 23:31), and yet not everyone sings praise to God “Who gathers the dispersed of His people” – perhaps because our enemies are not yet prostrate at our feet.

“Hear the word of the Lord, you that tremble at His word” (66:5).

The process started long ago; it has been some two hundred years since Moses Montefiore and the emergence from the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem. Four hundred and eighty years passed from the time of the Exodus until the building of the Temple (*Melakhim* I 6:1). The prophet tells us, in God’s Name: “*as in the days of your coming out of Egypt* shall I show him marvelous things” (*Mikha* 7:15) – i.e., through a long process. Not in 24 hours; not even in a single generation.

**A prophetic “*shir ha-shirim*”**

It is specifically at the lowest depths, at the time of the Destruction, and after repeated exhortations by the prophet:

Wake up; wake up; stand up, O Jerusalem… (51:17)

Arise, shine, for your light has come… (60:1)

that the bride will awaken and utter, for the first time, a nuptial song:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God,

For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,

He has covered me with the robe of righteousness… (61:10).

Can a single utterance of joy by an abandoned, desolate “bride” (62:4), suffice?

For the prophet in his vision, this was apparently enough, as he immediately goes on to describe (in the third person), “…as a bridegroom puts on a priestly diadem, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (61:10).

Then the “Bridegroom” – the Rock of Israel and their Redeemer – will arise and declare:

For Tzion’s sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest,

Until her triumph goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a torch that burns. (62:1)

Once again, the prophet returns to the glorious nuptials, culminating in conjugal intimacy (62:4-5), and the “Bridegroom” further declares:

I have set watchmen upon your walls, O Jerusalem, all day and all night, they shall never hold their peace… (62:6).

Inspired by the passion of this messianic vision and seeking to have it realized, the prophet beseeches his listeners:

You who make remembrance of the Lord – take no rest,

And give Him no rest, until He establishes and until He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

The Lord has sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength… (vv. 6-8)

This audacious prophecy shows the inconceivable chasm between the “prophetic *shir* *ha-shirim*” and the catastrophic reality. The prophet’s “*shir ha-shirim*” comes precisely at the darkest point of Destruction:

Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Tzion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.

Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised You, is burned with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste.

Will You restrain Yourself over these things, O Lord? (64:8-11)

It is interesting to note that in *Shir Ha-Shirim* too, a bitter reality is revealed in the third song, uttered by the “bride”:

I opened to my Beloved, but my Beloved had turned away, and was gone. My soul failed me when He spoke. I sought Him, but I could not find Him; I called Him; but He gave no answer.

The watchmen that go about the city found me; they smote me, they wounded me; the [gentile] keepers of the walls took away my mantle from me. (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 5:6-7)

The “prophetic *shir ha-shirim*” likewise makes no secret of the longing and the affliction – and this is precisely what has given strength to believers through all the generations since.

Translated by Kaeren Fish