

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



Perek 42

In perek 42 Yechezkel continues his tour of the future temple, and returns to the outer court after his visit to the holy sanctuary. In pesukim 1-14 the tour of the northern and southern chambers is described, and in pesukim 15-20 Yechezkel goes out onto the temple mount and sees its measurements and the wall which surrounds it.

- 1 In pesukim 13-14, with the conclusion of the tour of the chambers, the man turns to Yechezkel and speaks to him for the fourth and final time.
 - a) Two laws are included in what the man says. What is the common principle shared by them? Note the linguistic similarities between them (*there shall they lay... for... holy*).
 - b) The main innovation in what he says is found in the law of the changing of the clothes (14). What trend is expressed in this law? See the **Metzudot**:
for they are holy, and it is not appropriate for them to come in contact with common clothes, and if they will come with them to the Courtyard of Israel they will come in contact with the common clothes which the people are wearing.
- 2 In the final stage of his tour, Yechezkel sees a square wall which surrounds the temple on all four sides. What is the purpose of this wall (20)? Note the connection between this purpose and the laws which were mentioned in pesukim 13-14.





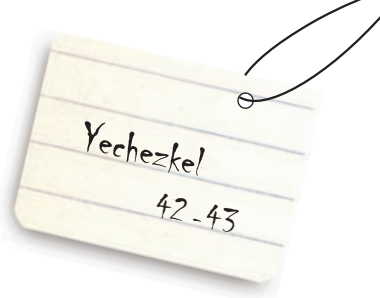
Perek 43

In Perek 43 the vision of the future temple comes to its climax with the return of the Glory of God to the temple through the eastern gate through which it left in perek 11. Just as the first tour of the temple ends with the Spirit of God leaving the temple, so too the tour of the future temple ends with the return of the Spirit of God to the temple. In the second half of the perek (13-27), the dimensions of the altar and the dedication of the altar are described. This section is a connecting link between the description of the temple and its dimensions and the laws of the temple and the priests which will be described in the coming perakim.

3 “And I heard one speaking to me out of the house”(6) After the return of the Glory of God to the temple, Yechezkel hears the voice of God Himself speaking to him from within the temple (6-11). God describes the circumstances in the temple in the past and the future changes which are intended to prevent the Spirit of God from leaving the temple again.

a) Pesukim 7-8 describe the difficult reality which was prevalent in the time of the First Temple. Examine Melachim II 21:18,26 and discuss the nature of these acts and how they are problematic. Use **Rashi**:

and with the corpses of their kings: whose houses were near the Temple, as we find with Shlomo and with Atalia. Sometimes they would bury them in the gardens of their houses...



b) The connection between the house of God and the house of the king is clearly indicated by their proximity in the description of the temple of Shlomo (Melachim I, end of perek 6 and beginning of perek 7), and the combined dedication of the two houses (Perek 9, pesukim 1 and 10). What do you think Shlomo's intention was in putting these two buildings next to each other, and what danger lies with this decision? In light of this, think about the meaning of the distancing of the two houses in the future temple.

- 4 “You, Son of man, describe the House to the House of Israel” (10) The section describing the temple ends with a command to Yechezkel to teach the plan of the temple to the people (10-11), a command which also appears at the beginning of the section (40:4). Here the element of the shame of the people is added as a condition as well as a purpose for giving the plan to the people. Think about the connection between these changes, using the following commentaries as well:

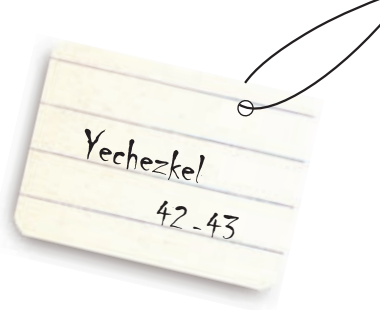
Rashi: that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: when I show them My loving-kindness that I do not reject them for their iniquity.

Metzudot: For when you tell them of the future building they will remember the First Temple which was destroyed because of their sins and they will be ashamed of it.

R Eliezer of Beaugency: And if they will not be ashamed I will not dwell amongst them at all, for if I dwell amongst them My house and courtyards will become defiled.

The **Radak** spoke of the importance of teaching the plan to the people:

They will keep them in their hearts and believe that it will be so and they will make these buildings and patterns and teachings in the future, for if they do not keep them in their hearts and believe, they will not build them. For this is the attribute of the Holy One Blessed be He, he pays a man in kind, whoever believes in the coming of the redeemer will merit redemption, and if he does not believe, he will not merit...



- 5 “*And these are the measurements of the altar in cubits*” (13) According to the detailed description given by Yechezkel, the altar is built of four box-like units, with each unit being narrower than the one before it. This construction is similar to the construction of a ziggurat – a tall tower dedicated to the gods which has been found in archeological excavations in important cities in Mesopotamia. One of the most grandiose and well-known ziggurats is the Babylonian Ziggurat, which some people connect to the story of the Tower of Babel. What do you think is the meaning of the similarity between the two constructions? See the writings of **Rabbi Ariel**:

Yechezkel, who stood in Babylonia on the ruins of its tower, saw the future altar as a correction for the earlier sin of the tower. The Tower of Babel and the altar are two polar opposites: at the top of the Tower of Babel man tried to control the heavens and the earth, while on the altar he stands submissively and sacrifices himself before God. (Y. Ariel, Lev Chadash, p.346)

Appendix

The description of the graduated altar in Yechezkel is the basis for the descriptions of the altar in the second temple as mentioned in the Mishna in Massechet Middot 3:1, which describes its structure and quotes pesukim from Yechezkel. However, according to some opinions, this does not reflect the altar in the First Temple period. Around 30 years ago, a surprising development occurred which caused a turnabout on this issue. This was the discovery of the altar on Mt. ‘Ebal by the archeologist Adam Zertal. He identified this altar with the altar built by Yehoshua for the forging of the covenant in Yehoshua Perek 8. This early altar structure which was found is similar in construction to the structure described in Yechezkel and in the mishna:



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Unlike other sites, where the archaeologist knows what he is excavating - a house, a room, a wall or other structure - the structure on Mt. 'Ebal was enigmatic from the outset. To this day, no architectural parallels to it have been found within Israel. Two years of work, comprising three seasons of laborious excavation, elapsed before we got the brainstorm which solved the riddle of the nature of the site by piecing together our scientific data with literary sources on Israelite cultic worship.

When we excavated the isolated structure in the center of the walled area which encompassed approximately one acre, it became clear that we were dealing with a far more elaborate complex than we had imagined at the outset. A large elevated structure, measuring 29.5 by 23 feet, rose in the center. It was built as a frame structure with walls about 5 feet thick, made of large rough, unhewn stones. Inside the frame two thick walls were built facing each other and leaving an open space between them. The empty space itself was filled by the builders with four deliberately laid strata of fill... A ramp of unhewn stones, 4 feet wide by 23 feet long, rises to the top of the platform from the southwest. The gentle incline, easily climbed and the presence of the ramp itself accord with the explicit scriptural injunction: "*Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto Mine altar, that thy nakedness be not uncovered thereon*" (Shmot 2:23).

Adjacent to the northern side of the ramp is another small, narrow wall, somewhat lower than the one beside it. It turns out that this smaller ramp, which greatly intrigued us since we could find no constructional logic for it, was intended as a means of ascent for the priests to reach another part of the altar, the surround or ledge. This is none other than the above-mentioned terrace adjacent to the altar, which was reached by climbing the smaller ramp adjacent to the larger one. All this became clear to us only after reading the extremely precise mishnaic descriptions of the Second Temple in Jerusalem: "The altar was thirty-two [cubits] by thirty-two [cubits]. It rose up one cubit and receded one cubit; this was the base. [Thus] we find left [a square space

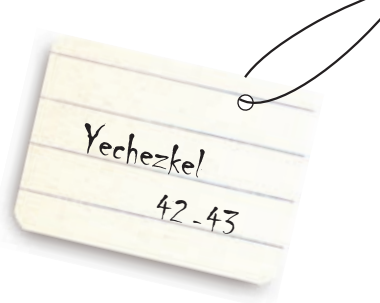
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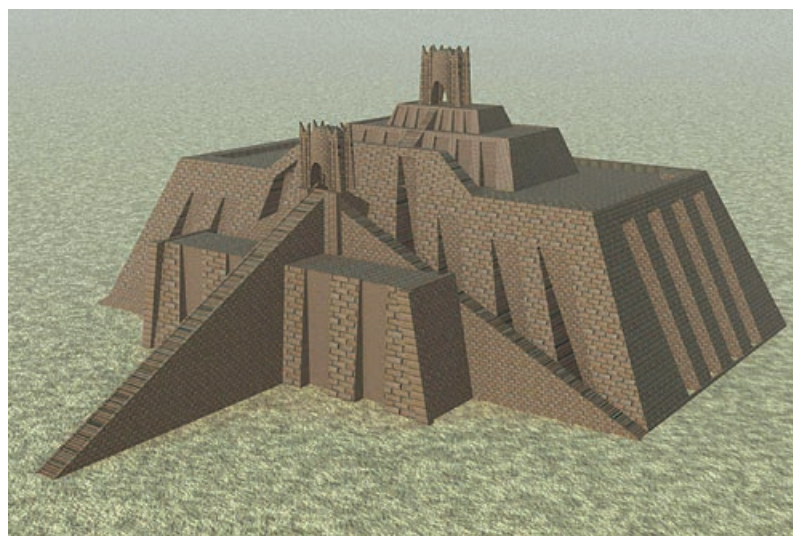
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of] thirty by thirty. [The next part built up on the base] rose up five [cubits] and receded one cubit; this was the surround. Thus we are left with twenty-eight by twenty-eight... And there was a ramp at the south of the altar, thirty-two cubits by sixteen cubits in width..." (Middot 3:1-3). About the smaller ramp the Mishnah writes: "How was this performed? The priest went up the ramp and passed around the ledge, and came to the southeast corner..." (Zevachim 5:3). The mishnaic description of the altar depicts a sort of graduated tower in which each successive level is somewhat smaller than the one below it. In the Second Temple period there were three levels, whereas the altar on Mt. 'Ebal has only two. These levels are formed by the surrounding ledge. Interestingly enough, the future altar, described by Ezekiel, which most scholars believe reflects the altar in the First Temple, was also built in successive levels: "*And these are the measures of the altar by cubits - the cubit is a cubit and a handbreadth: the bottom shall be a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and the border thereof by the edge thereof roundabout a span; and this shall be the base of the altar. And from the bottom upon the ground to the lower settle shall be two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from the lesser settle to the greater settle shall be four cubits, and the breadth a cubit: And the hearth shall be four cubits; and from the hearth and upward there shall be four horns*" (Ezekiel 43:13-15).

(Adam Zertal, *The Cult Site on Mount 'Ebal*)



(Wikipedia / wikiwkiyarou)

The Great Ziggurat of Ur

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