

Parashat Tetzaveh, 5774, 2014:

*Who Will Build the Third Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple)*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, and Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, and the refuah shlaimah of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam.

This week's Haftorah contains Yechezkel's celebrated prophecy of the Third *Beit Hamikdash* (*Sefer Yechezkel* 43:10-43:27). The first three *pasukim* (verses) serve as a general statement of context and content:

You, Son of man, describe the House [i.e. *Beit Hamikdash*] to the House of Israel... let them measure its plan... let them know the form of the House and its scheme, its exits and its entrances, and all its forms, and all its laws and all its teachings, and write it down in their sight so that they keep the whole form thereof and the laws thereof, and do them. This is the teaching of the House; upon the top of the mountain, all its boundary round about shall be most holy; behold, this is the teaching of the House. (This and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, brackets my own)

Afterwards, we find 15 verses that depict the measurements of the *mizbeach* (altar) and the initial *korbanot* (sacrifices) to be offered thereupon.

Yechezkel lived nearly 2600 years ago during the time of the First *Beit Hamikdash* (622 BCE-570 BCE), and prophesized its destruction at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BCE. It was subsequently rebuilt by the returning Babylonian exiles - only to be followed by its annihilation by the Romans in 70 CE. Judaism's eschatological vision maintains that the soon-to-be-rebuilt Third *Beit Hamikdash* will never be destroyed and thereby exist for evermore. Therefore, one may very well ask, "Who will build the eternal Third *Beit Hamikdash*?"

According to Rashi (1040-1105), the Third Temple will be built by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* (the Holy One blessed be He):

The future *Mikdash* that we long for, completely constructed and perfect in all aspects will be revealed to us and come from Heaven. As it states in the Torah: “the sanctuary, O L-rd, [which] Your hands established.” (*Sefer Shemot* 15:17, Commentary to *Talmud Bavli, Succah* 41a, s.v. *ee nami*)

Rashi reiterates this opinion in *Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashanah* 30a s.v. *lo tzricha*: “... but the building of the future [*Mikdash*] is in the hands of Heaven.” Significantly, Tosafot, in *Talmud Bavli, Shevuot* 15b s.v. *ain binyan Beit Hamikdash b’lilah*, follow this view: “There are those who say this refers to the future *Beit Hamikdash* that will be built by itself [i.e. without man’s involvement]. As it states in the Torah: ‘the sanctuary, O L-rd, [which] Your hands established.’” Clearly for both Rashi and Tosafot, G-d, not man, will construct the next *Beit Hamikdash*.

In stark contrast, the Rambam (Maimonides 1135-1204) maintains that man will build the Third *Beit Hamikdash* at the onset of the Messianic era:

In the future, the Messianic king will arise and renew the Davidic dynasty, restoring it to its initial sovereignty. He will build the Temple and gather the dispersed of Israel... If a king will arise from the House of David who diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its mitzvot as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law as David, his ancestor, will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of G-d, we may, with assurance, consider him the Messiah. If he succeeds in the above, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is definitely the Messiah. (*Mishneh Torah, Sefer Shoftim, Hilchot Melachim* 11:1, 4, this and all *Mishneh Torah* translations, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, with my emendations for clarity)

Maimonides affirms this position, as well, in the following statement regarding the *mizbeach* (the Altar):

The dimensions of the Altar must be very precise. Its design has been passed down from one to another [over the course of the generations]. The altar built by the exiles [returning from Babylon] was constructed according to the design of the Altar to be built in the

Messianic age. We may not increase or reduce its dimensions. (*Mishneh Torah, Sefer Avodah, Hilchot Bet Habechirah 1:3*)

We have seen that two intellectual and spiritual giants of our *Mesorah* (Holy Tradition) have two very different opinions as to who will build the next and final *Beit Hamikdash* – G-d (Rashi) or man (Rambam). Regardless as to which approach one follows, may each of us be *zocheh* (merit) to see the *Beit Hamikdash* soon and in our days, so that we may once again serve Hashem as one indivisible and united nation. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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