

FROM GORY TO GLORY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's concluding parsha of the book of Vayikra contains a doleful prophecy - the tochacha - of troubles and exile that would befall the Jewish people in its future. It is not only the depressing content of the tochacha but also its gory detail that has always troubled me. And, I also questioned why the Torah should include a tochacha of this nature at all in its writings. After all, warning people about what will happen to them centuries later down the road of history rarely affects their current behavior. People do all sorts of things when they are younger that they know will be injurious to their health and even eventually shorten their lifespan. And yet, they persist for the moment in doing what seems enjoyable and pleasant to them, no matter what the later consequences will be. A fair assessment of Jewish history will indicate that the threat of the tochacha did not prevent the destruction of the First and Second Temples and of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel. It is therefore almost reasonable to state that the tochacha is not so much a warning to Israel as it is a sad prediction of events that will happen. But that still begs the question of why so much detail. A general statement of the ills of the destruction of national sovereignty and of forced exile from one's own homeland would apparently have sufficed as a prediction of future events.

The Talmud at the conclusion of mesechet Makot relates the story of Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues who viewed the ruins of the Second Temple. As they stood there and gazed in awe at the site of what once was the most beautiful structure in the world, a fox emerged from the ruins of where the Holy of Holies had stood. Rabbi Akiva's companions wept at the sight of desolation and despair that now unfolded before their eyes. Rabbi Akiva however laughed in delight. When asked by his incredulous colleagues as to why he was laughing, he answered: "There are two prophecies recorded regarding the future of the Jewish people. One predicted that a fox would emerge from the ruins of the Temple. The other prediction was that Jewish old men and women would sit in joy and contentment in the streets of Jerusalem and watch children at play. Only when the first prophecy about the fox emerged in reality and exact detail before my very eyes did I realize that the second prophecy would also come true in full detail and accuracy." The Torah told us in awful detail everything that the tochacha entailed. We are living witness to the chilling accuracy of every one of its words. There is no prose or hyperbole in the holy Torah. Every word is the truth. Therefore the Torah spent space and detail in describing the tochacha to us, so that we can rest assured that all of the blessings that also appear in this week's parsha will be fulfilled in every glorious detail. May we merit that speedily and in our days.

Shabat shalom.

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