YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

**Lecture 371: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(181) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (157)**

In the previous *shiur*, we dealt with the prophet Yirmeyahu's situation from the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem in the tenth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign until the destruction. In this *shiur* we will deal with the prophet's prophecy of consolation in chapter 32.

Chapter 32 is part of the book of consolations which the prophet is commanded to write (*Yirmeyahu* 30:2), which includes chapters 30-33. In this *shiur* we will focus on chapter 32 which was told to the prophet in the tenth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign, when the Babylonian king began to lay siege on Jerusalem and the prophet was imprisoned in the court of the guard.

Before we examine the chapter itself, let us preface with a few words about Yirmeyahu's prophecies of consolation.

### Yirmeyahu's prophecies of consolation

Israel's covenant with God is eternal and it includes, on the one hand, Israel's commitment to keep the Torah (and many punishments for one who breaks the covenant and defiles the Torah), and on the other hand, reward and blessings for one who observes the Torah and fulfills the commandments. The covenant is rooted in God's eternal love for His people.

Even if at times the manifestations of the covenant are exceedingly harsh, as in a significant number of Yirmeyahu's prophecies in which he foresees the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as well as the exile, this does not contradict the fact that God will restore the people of Israel to its land and fulfill all of the blessings written in the covenant. Just as the destruction took place, so the redemption will happen, these being two essential and complementary aspects of the covenant itself.

When Yirmeyahu was consecrated as a prophet, he was commanded: "See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to overthrow; to build, and to plant" (*Yirmeyahu* 1:10). The two aspects are part of the same essence, the essence of the prophet's mission – both to destroy and to build, to root out and to plant, all in accordance with the spiritual reality of the people at the particular time.

The fact that this is a built-in and integral part of the prophet's mission well explains the need to bring, alongside the very harsh prophecies heralding the destruction, prophecies of consolation proclaiming the future redemption. This prophetic perspective is the perspective of eternity and it declares that the impending destruction is only temporary and can be fixed.

The prophecies of consolation abound in descriptions of the rebuilding of the land and the people. The division between the kingdoms of Israel and Yehuda will eventually come to an end and they will once again be united. God will return His people to His land, gathering in the exiles from all the lands of their dispersion. The land will be settled and will once again yield its crops and give its fruit to its people who will have returned to it. The destroyed cities will be rebuilt. God will create for the people of Israel a new heart, the Torah will from now on be written on their hearts and not be forgotten. The kingdom of the house of David will return to its former greatness. The king who will reign will be a righteous king. The priests, the sons of Aharon, will once again minister in the Holy.

In general, there will be a return to a harmonious and perfect reality, and a return to a kingdom of justice and a worthy priesthood. A rebuilding of the land, a miraculous ingathering of the exiles from all the distant countries, a new blossoming of the land, the people of Israel with a new heart and the Torah eternally etched in their hearts, so that it will never be forgotten.

The people of Israel will once again go up to the house of God with song and musical instruments, while bringing offerings of thanksgiving for the redemption. Jerusalem will then be called Neveh Tzedek, "a habitation of righteousness," and a mountain of holiness (*Yirmeyahu* 31:22). The destruction of the city was rooted in the fact that there was no righteousness in any of the arms of government (*Mikha* 3:9 and on). The fact that from now on it will be called Neveh Tzedek is the perfect spiritual revelation of the renewed building of the city and the Temple.

One of the most beautiful and exciting expressions of the consolation and the transformation of mourning into joy is that once again there will be sounded in the cities of Yehuda "the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride" (*Yirmeyahu* 33:11). The world will be restored to a state of harmony and perfection.

The sheer wonder described here, the amazing novelty of this miraculous reality, is greatly heightened by the fact that some of the prophecies were told to the prophet when the destruction was about to happen. The Babylonian army was besieging Jerusalem. The prophet himself was imprisoned in the court of the guard, and he was unable to deliver this prophecy to the entire people in the city or in the Temple.

### THe Purchase of the field of Chanamel the son of Shalum in Anatot by Yirmeyahu the Prophet

Beyond the book that was written and all the lofty ideas that we mentioned, which describe the future reality as a miraculous redemption, the prophet is commanded in our chapter to translate the ideology into practice, and just a moment before the destruction of the city and the Temple, to buy the field of Chanamel the son of Shalum his uncle in Anatot.

Chapter 32 is divided into three parts. Verses 1-15 describe the purchase of the field and its meaning; verses 16-25 describe Yirmeyahu's prayer; and verses 26-44 describe God's answer to Yirmeyahu.

The word that came to Yirmeyahu from the Lord in the tenth year of Tzidkiyahu king of Yehuda, which was the eighteenth year of Nevuchadnetzar. Now at that time the king of Babylonia's army was besieging Jerusalem; and Yirmeyahu the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard, which was in the king of Yehuda's house. For Tzidkiyahu king of Yehuda had shut him up…

And Yirmeyahu said: The word of the Lord came to me, saying: Behold, Chanamel, the son of Shalum your uncle, shall come to you, saying: Buy you my field that is in Anatot; for the right of redemption is yours to buy it. So Chanamel my uncle's son came to me in the court of the guard according to the word of the Lord, and said to me: Buy my field, I pray you, that is in Anatot, which is in the land of Binyamin; for the right of inheritance is yours, and the redemption is yours, buy it for yourself. Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. And I bought the field that was in Anatot of Chanamel my uncle's son, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the deed, and sealed it, and called witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the deed of the purchase, both that which was sealed, containing the terms and conditions, and that which was open; and I delivered the deed of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriya, the son of Machseya, in the presence of Chanamel my uncle['s son], and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the deed of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the guard. And I charged Baruch before them, saying: Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, this deed of the purchase, both that which is sealed, and this deed which is open, and put them in an earthen vessel; that they may continue many days.

For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land. (*Yirmeyahu* 32:1-15)

There is no doubt that this prophecy, at this time, in this place and with this content is absolutely amazing. Indeed, the prophet says (v. 8): "Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord." Various commentators reject the possibility that the prophet had any doubt about these prophetic words. As the Abravanel writes:

That which he says, "Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord," does not mean… that Yirmeyahu was at first in doubt about the prophecy, that he did not know whether this was a prophecy or not and now it became clear to him that it was the word of God, for the prophets had no doubts about their prophecies, and they would know that it was a prophecy by the strong feeling. (*Yirmeyahu* 32:8)

Rabbi Yosef Kara writes:

"Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord" – that is to say, I bought it with difficulty and a bitter heart, for the Chaldeans are fighting for the city… and this one said to me that I should buy his field? But because it came to me as the word of God, I could not refuse. (*Yirmeyahu* 32:8)

He explains that because he knew that this was the word of God, he therefore bought the field, but had he not been commanded by God to buy it, he would not have done so, for Anatot had apparently already been captured by the Chaldeans and the destruction of Jerusalem was quickly approaching.

Menachem Bula in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary to *Yirmeyahu* explains that Chanamel came with the intention of doing business, whereas Yirmeyahu knew that God's intention was different and that the purchase would serve as a symbol of the prophecy that "houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land" (v. 15).

Y. Hoffman[[1]](#footnote-1) tries to show that the prophet Yirmeyahu had been occupied for many years in trying to clarify the truth of his prophecy. For many years now his prophecies warned of total destruction of the county, and just before the destruction his cousin comes to sell him a field belonging to his ancestral estate. It is a delusion and a mirage. The people of Anatot themselves had already tried to harass him at an early stage of his prophecy when he cast a heavy shadow on Yoshiyahu's reforms. Since then decades have passed. Now when he is in the court of the guard, protected from personal threats, but aware of the destruction of his house that might occur at any moment, concern arises in his heart that perhaps it is not the word of God in his heart, but he himself is the speaker.

God's command to Yirmeyahu to purchase a field on the eve of the destruction seems to be an act of abuse on the part of God. But when Yirmeyahu sees his cousin, he regains his composure and immediately begins to take vigorous action to buy the field. The field is properly purchased in such a way that the manner of sale would guarantee its long-term validity. Baruch the son of Neriya is commanded by Yirmeyahu to take the deed of purchase, both that which was sealed and that which is open, and put them in an earthenware vessel "that they may continue many days." That is to say, the purchase should have long-term validity.

Now let us explain the details of the transaction and its meaning. When his cousin Chanamel comes to the court of the guard, he proposes to Yirmeyahu that he purchase the field, "for the right of redemption is yours to buy it." There is a *mitzva* to redeem a relative's field, as the Torah explains: "If your brother become poor, and sell some of his possession, then shall his kinsman that is next to him come, and shall redeem that which his brother has sold" (*Vayikra* 25:25). The relative is bound to redeem the field before it is sold to a stranger, so that the field remain in the family's possession.

*Chazal* in the *Sifra* expound the words "if your brother become poor" as teaching that the person is selling the field because he has become poor. It would appear that this was Chanamel's economic situation, and he turns to Yirmeyahu as one who will inherit the field after his death that he should redeem the field in his lifetime since he himself has become impoverished.

Yirmeyahu weighs the money, writes a deed and signs it. Usually a deed is validated by the signature of witnesses. It is possible that Yirmeyahu signs the deed even though he is not obligated to do so in order to inform future generations that he is not only a prophet of destruction, but also a prophet of consolation. The weighing is verified by the witnesses and the seller.

Scripture refers to two parts of the deed, the part that is sealed and the part that is open. It was customary to write a deed of sale twice on the same bill. On the upper part of the bill they would write the main part of the document. This they would roll up and fasten with several ties, this being the sealed part. The lower part of the bill was a copy of the upper part, which they would roll up but not tie, and this was the open part. In most circumstances they would read the open part, but if there was concern about forgery or for some reason they wished to verify the details of the transaction, they could open also the sealed part of the deed.

In the sealed part they would write the *mitzva* and the relevant laws which included what is written in the Torah regarding the *mitzva* to redeem the field of a relative and the laws according to which this *mitzva* is fulfilled (the prohibition to commit fraud, calculating the value of the field according to the years left to the Jubilee, and others). The text of the open part apparently included also the essentials of the deal, but in brief.

The deed was delivered by the prophet Yirmeyahu to Baruch the son of Neriya in the presence of Chanamel, the signing witnesses, and all the Jews that were sitting in the court of the guard. It seems that beyond the halakhic matter that the witnesses should see the transfer of the deed from Yirmeyahu to Baruch the son of Neriya, Scripture wishes to emphasize that the words of consolation and the meaning of the transaction were made public and became known to all who were present.

The Radak explains:

Until the return of the exiles when the prophecy that "houses… shall yet again be bought" would be fulfilled, and to serve as a sign for the return of the exiles, God commanded him to buy the field as a consolation for Israel, that they should not think that their hope will be gone if they are exiled. (*Yirmeyahu* 32:12)

It is important that this prophecy of consolation, the deed with its two parts, the sealed part and the open part, be saved in an earthenware vessel, as was the customary practice at the time, so that they serve as witnesses when Yirmeyahu's prophecy will be fulfilled.

This act emphasizes that the redemption that will come is not accidental but planned by God from the outset, and the prophet is signed on it. All this comes also to instill hope in the hearts of those who see the handing over of the documents and its preservation.

The spiritual significance of this whole event, precisely when the destruction is about to occur, is to announce the future redemption, for after the destruction the Jews will return to this land, rebuild it, redeem it, and once again purchase houses, fields and vineyards. The impending destruction is temporary.

The prophet says this alongside all of his prophecies about the destruction and the exile. The fact that these things are said specifically by Yirmeyahu the prophet of destruction and so close to the destruction, the recording of these words in a deed that is partly sealed and partly open, the transaction that is conducted in such a precise manner – the weighing of the money, the writing, the witnesses, the delivery of the deed, its long-term preservation – all these things bestow upon the act the perspective of eternity. We have here an event that signifies to later generations that in the end the land will be redeemed. Even during the period of destruction itself we must consider the entire picture and see and believe in the rebuilding that will come in its wake.

It is possible that the prophecy that was delivered at the beginning of the chapter, at the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem after the tenth of Tevet in the tenth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign, about a year and a half before the destruction, is what led to Yirmeyahu's imprisonment in the court of the guard so that he not weaken the morale of the soldiers with this prophecy.

The prophetic act involving the sale of the field was performed only in the presence of Chanamel, the witnesses, and those present in the court of the guard, all in all a small group of people, but the act bore significance for future generations, this being the reason that the deed was preserved "that they may continue many days."

In the next *shiur* we will continue with Yirmeyahu's prophecy in chapter 32.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. In his article, "*Va-eida Ki Devar Hashem Hu*," *Beit Mikra* 42, 1997, pp. 198-210. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)