YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

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Sponsored by Adam and Nurit Lerer

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**Lecture 372: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(182) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (158)**

In the previous *shiur*, we dealt with prophecies of consolation in general and with chapter 32 which describes Yirmeyahu's purchase of the field from his cousin Chanamel in Anatot shortly before the destruction, and we discussed the meaning of announcing the redemption together with the destruction.

In this *shiur*, we will examine Yirmeyahu's prayer in the wake of the prophetic act of buying the field and God's response to Yirmeyahu.

**Yirmeyahu’s Prayer**

Now after I had delivered the deed of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriya, I prayed to the Lord, saying: Ah [*aha*] Lord God! behold, You have made the heaven and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for You; who shows mercy to thousands… who set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even to this day, and in Israel and among other men; and made You a name, as at this day; and brought forth Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt… and they came in, and possessed it; but they hearkened not to Your voice, neither walked in Your law; they have done nothing of all that You command them to do; therefore You have caused all this evil to befall them; behold the mounds, they are come to the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence; and what You have spoken is come to pass; and, behold, You see it. Yet You have said to me, O Lord God: Buy you the field for money, and call witnesses; whereas the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans. (*Yirmeyahu* 32:16-25)

It is interesting that after executing the purchase of the field, the prophet wishes to understand the meaning of God's command. The term "*aha*" is an expression of puzzlement.

The Radak explains (ad loc.):

Yirmeyahu thought that perhaps [God] was no longer angry with them owing to His great mercies, and that He remembered for them the earlier acts of love of their forefathers. Therefore he said: "who shows mercy to thousands." For if not so, why did He tell him to purchase the field, when the city was soon to be conquered. This is the essence of his prayer. (Radak, *Yirmeyahu* 32:17, s.v*. ata yadata*)

So too Mahari Kara describes the prophet's great bewilderment and how he did not at all understand why he had been commanded to purchase the field. He writes as follows:

Nothing that is done in heaven and on earth is hidden from you, for You made them with Your great power and your outstretched arm, and You know what is done in them. Since nothing is concealed from You and You see the future, there is no room for a man of flesh and blood to judge Your ways and tell You what to do. For had Chanamel said to me on his own: "Buy you my field that is in Anatot" (*Yirmeyahu* 32:7), I would have scolded him and said: Of what use is it to me, your field in Anatot? If I were given Anatot and all that lies within it for a dinar, I would not buy it, as long as I see that the Chaldeans are fighting over the city, and conquering it, and the land is desolate. But since this came through Your word, and You told me to purchase his field, there is no countering or changing Your words, for You see the future…

"Great in counsel, and mighty in work; whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men" (*Yirmeyahu* 32:19) – from what? From "who set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt" (v. 20) until "therefore You have caused all this evil to befall them" (v. 23). And if I ask: Why did He tell me to purchase his field that is in Anatot, it is not that I am arguing with you, as if to say: Since we will be exiled, what need is there to buy it? Nor am I questioning Your ways, as if to say: Why did God do to us all this evil. Rather I am like a person who is puzzled by what he sees before him and cannot see to what it will lead… Similarly, I ask about Chanamel my cousin who came at Your bidding and said to me that I should purchase his field that is in Anatot, as I am puzzled about this purchase and what will happen with it. For I see that "the mounds, they are come to the city to take it, and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans… Yet You have said to me, O Lord God: Buy you the field for money" (vv. 24-25). (*Yirmeyahu* 32:16-19)

According to the Radak, the prophet wonders whether perhaps God's telling him to purchase the field means that He relented owing to His great mercies and that He remembered the loving acts of Israel's forefathers. Thus, it is possible that God changed His attitude toward the harsh reality of destruction and exile about which the prophet prophesied in his earlier prophecies.

According to Mahari Kara, it is clear that nothing is hidden from God and that He sees the future and that mortals must not question His ways. Since there is here a Divine command, there is no room for argument, for God sees the future and all of God's judgments are true. Therefore the prophet does not argue or complain, but rather he expresses his puzzlement concerning what he sees before him while unable to see where it is all leading. Owing to man's limited understanding, he cannot reconcile the purchase of the field with the fact that the Chaldeans are building mounds around the city and it is about to be destroyed. Thus, he is faced with something totally incomprehensible.

The prophet points out the power of God, mentions the thirteen attributes of mercy, God's actions, and His providence across the generations. Despite His providence and the blessings that He bestowed, the people of Israel did not keep His Torah or observe His commandments. The direct consequence of their actions is the Babylonian siege around Jerusalem.

The sword and famine have overwhelmed the city of Jerusalem, and the fact is that it is about to fall into the hands of the Chaldeans. But nevertheless, and despite the prophecies of destruction that preceded this, Yirmeyahu is still surprised that God commands him to buy Chanamel's field, and to bring witnesses who will be able to attest to the transaction.

This is the prayer offered by the prophet Yirmeyahu. On the one hand, the prophet mentions fundamental principles of the Torah: God as Creator of the world, as showing kindness to those who love Him (and not to those who hate Him), as extending His providence over every creature in accordance with its rank; God as having performed miracles in Egypt, through the giving of the Torah, and Israel's entry into the Promised Land. On the other hand, decades of prophecies of destruction and exile, and in the end, on the very eve of the destruction, a command to redeem the field of Chanamel in Anatot, that is held now by the Chaldeans.

**God’s Answer to Yirmeyahu**

Then came the word of the Lord to Yirmeyahu, saying: Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is there anything too hard for Me? Therefore thus says the Lord: Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nevuchadnetzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it; and the Chaldeans, that fight against this city, shall come and set this city on fire, and burn it, with the houses, upon whose roofs they have offered to Baal, and poured out drink-offerings to other gods, to provoke Me. For the children of Israel and the children of Yehuda have only done that which was evil in My sight from their youth; for the children of Israel have only provoked Me with the work of their hands, says the Lord. For this city has been to Me a provocation of My anger and of My fury from the day that they built it to this day…

And now therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning this city, about which you say: It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: Behold, I will gather them out of all the countries, to which I have driven them in My anger, and in My fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever; for the good of them, and of their children after them; and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land in truth with My whole heart and with My whole soul.

For thus says the Lord: Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them. And fields shall be bought in this land, of which you say: It is desolate, without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans. Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe the deeds, and seal them, and call witnesses, in the land of Binyamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Yehuda, and in the cities of the hill-country, and in the cities of the lowland, and in the cities of the South; for I will cause their captivity to return, says the Lord. (*Yirmeyahu* 32:36-44)

God's answer to Yirmeyahu can be divided into two parts. In the first part He describes the deeds of the people of Israel, their sins in all areas of life over the course of time. These actions clearly justify all the harsh prophecies that Yirmeyahu delivered from the beginning of his prophetic career to this day. In the second part, God describes the future salvation of the people of Israel.

Let us now take a closer look at the contents of God's answer.

God informs the prophet that indeed nothing is concealed from Him and that everything is revealed and known to Him. Since God knows all, even if some act appears puzzling and incomprehensible to man, it is directed by God and it takes place as it should take place, since everything is revealed to Him, this, of course, including past, present and future.

God then goes on to relate to the actions of the Chaldeans who will burn down the city of Jerusalem and its houses, those very houses on whose roofs the people of Jerusalem offered their sacrifices to their idols, the Baal and other gods.

What we have here is punishment "measure for measure." As punishment for burning of sacrifices to their idols, their houses will be burned. They had provoked God with the work of their hands from their youth. That is to say, they experienced the harsh reality that is described here from their youth. They grew up on it and it was part of their education.

The Radak (ad loc.) explains God's wrath as connected to the *bamot* that Shelomo built for idols, as described in I *Melakhim* 11:4-8, and the idol worship of Shelomo's wives. Some *Rishonim* see the beginning of the fall of the city already in the days of Shelomo. They cite *Midrash Vayikra Rabba*:

Rabbi Yudin said: All those seven years that Shelomo built the Temple, he did not drink wine. Once he built it, and married Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh, that very night he drank wine. There were two excessive rejoicings, one a celebration for the building of the Temple, and one a celebration for the daughter of Pharaoh. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Which should I accept, of these or of these? At that very time, it arose in His mind to destroy Jerusalem. This is what is stated: "For this city has been to Me a provocation of My anger and of My fury [from the day that they built it even to this day]" (*Yirmeyahu* 32:31). Rabbi Hillel bar Heleni said: [This may be likened] to one who passes through a filthy area and turns his nose away. Rabbi Chunya said: That night the daughter of Pharaoh danced eighty kinds of dances, and Shelomo slept until the fourth hour, and the keys to the Temple were under his head. This is what we have learned regarding the daily offering brought in the morning, which was offered at the fourth hour. His mother went in and rebuked him. Some say that Yerovam ben Nevat went in and rebuked him. (*Vayikra Rabba* 14, 5)

 The Midrash describes how King Shelomo married Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh on the day of the consecration of the Temple, and there were two dance circles, and God, as it were, did not know which one to accept, since there was a blurring between the two. The Midrash cites our verse to prove that it was at that time that God first thought to destroy Jerusalem. The Midrash likens Jerusalem to a filthy place, where passers-by turn their noses away.

The Midrash then describes how that very night Shelomo drank wine and slept until the fourth hour and the keys to the Temple were under his head, when at that time the daily offering brought in the morning should have been offered.

The starting point of the Midrash, and later of the *Rishonim,* is that the very idea of destroying the Temple and the city traces back to the days of Shelomo. This is because *Chazal* viewed his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh as seriously flawed.

*Chazal* in *Bava Batra* state that Yirmeyahu authored his book. According to v. 31, Yirmeyahu traced the roots of the destruction to the beginning of the First Temple period in the days of Shelomo. In the verse in which God explains the reasons for the impending destruction, he notes the fact that the root of the sin and the punishment begins in Jerusalem with the building of the Temple during the reign of Shelomo.

Scripture emphasizes several times that the tendency of the actions of the people of the kingdom of Yehuda was to provoke God and turn away from Him; placing their abominations in the Temple and defiling the building upon which the name of God rested. It is possible that Scripture here alludes to the actions of Achaz (II *Melakhim* 15), who built in the Temple an altar to the gods of Damascus; of Menashe, who erected an *ashera* in the house of God (II *Melakhim* 21:7); and of Amon.

Scripture mentions here the worship of Molekh which involved the burning of children in the valley of Ben Hinom. It is possible that the verse uses here the term *ha'avara*, passing, in accordance with the opinion that the worship of Molekh involved passing the children between two fires, rather than burning them. It should, however, be remembered that the very mention of Molekh relates to the fact that the Torah sees its worship as an exceedingly severe transgression, as is described in *Vayikra* 20:1-5.

God then moves on to words of consolation and redemption. Yirmeyahu prophesies that after the destruction, the exiles will be gathered in and returned to Eretz Israel, and God will settle them in peace and security. This will be the fulfillment of the Torah's promise in *Vayikra* (26:5): "And you shall dwell in your land in safety."

Over the course of the salvation, the Torah's promises will be fulfilled (*Devarim* 5:21), and everyone will serve God with one heart, keep His commandments and fear Him. This fear will remain with them and they will not depart from Him.

Scripture uses the phrases "forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them," and "everlasting covenant." An everlasting covenant means a covenant that will last forever and not be violated.

Scripture notes that God will do these things with all His heart and all His soul, and that He will rejoice over them to do them good and to truly plant them in the land and deepen their hold on it.

God points out that just as He brought all the evil and the punishments upon the people in the wake of their evil deeds, so will He bring them all the good. God is the source of both punishment and blessing, destruction and redemption.

At the end of His answer, God relates to the field that was purchased and emphasizes that the people of the kingdom of Yehuda and Jerusalem relate to the absolute desolation of the land in the wake of the infiltration of the Chaldeans. The answer concludes with the idea that Yirmeyahu's purchase of Chanamel's field in Anatot is just a foretaste of what will happen in the land after its destruction at the hands of the Chaldeans.

Yirmeyahu's action will serve as a model for what will happen in the future. Fields will be purchased, deeds will be drawn up, witnesses will attest to the transactions, everything with legal precision. After the Chaldeans leave the land, the fields will return to their original owners and all of the dealings will be legally binding.

God promises that the fields will be returned to their original owners in the land of Binyamin, in the places about Jerusalem, in the cities of Yehuda, and in the cities of the hill-country, the lowland and the south.

In this chapter, God reveals Himself in all His strength and all His mercy. It offers a detailed account of the causes of the destruction, among which stand out the idol worship on the roofs of the houses, in the house of God, and in the *bamot* of Baal in the valley of Ben Hinom.

As a result of these sins, great destruction will come upon the kingdom of Yehuda, Jerusalem and the Temple. But despite all the sins and punishments, God Himself will bring salvation. The people of Israel will return to their land and the various exiles will be gathered in. They will once again worship God in fear that will not cease, and an everlasting covenant will be made with them that will never again be broken.

In the next *shiur*, we will continue with Yirmeyahu's prophecy of consolation in chapter 33.

(Translated by David Strauss)