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

in loving memory of Adam’s grandfather,
Murray Lerer / Moshe Yitzchak Ben Avraham Aryeh Z”L

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**Lecture 373: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(183) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (159)**

In the previous *shiur*, we saw the prophet Yirmeyahu's prophecy of consolation in chapter 32, delivered during the days of the siege of Jerusalem, to go and purchase a field in Anatot from his cousin Chanamel.

In this *shiur* we wish to examine the continuation of that prophecy, which is also a prophecy of consolation:

The word of the Lord came to Yirmeyahu the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the guard, saying: Thus says the Lord the Maker thereof, the Lord that formed it to establish it, the Lord is His name: Call to Me, and I will answer you, and will tell you great things, and hidden, which you know not.

For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Yehuda, which are broken down for mounds, and for ramparts; whereon they come to fight with the Chaldeans, even to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in My anger… Behold, I will bring it healing and cure, and I will cure them; and I will reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captivity of Yehuda and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned against Me, and whereby they have transgressed against Me…

Thus says the Lord: Yet again there shall be heard in this place, whereof you say: It is waste, without man and without beast, even in the cities of Yehuda, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that say: Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for His mercy endures forever, even of them that bring offerings of thanksgiving into the house of the Lord. For I will cause the captivity of the land to return as at the first, says the Lord.

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet again shall there be in this place, which is waste, without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, a habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down. In the cities of the hill-country, in the cities of the Lowland, and in the cities of the South, and in the land of Binyamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Yehuda, shall the flocks again pass under the hands of him that count them, says the Lord.

Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will perform that good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and concerning the house of Yehuda. In those days, and at that time, will I cause a shoot of righteousness to grow up to David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Yehuda be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby she shall be called, The Lord is our righteousness.

For thus says the Lord: There shall not be cut off to David a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; neither shall there be cut off to the priests the Levites a man before Me to offer burnt-offerings, and to burn meal-offerings, and to do sacrifice continually.

And the word of the Lord came to Yirmeyahu, saying: Thus says the Lord: If you can break My covenant with the day, and My covenant with the night, so that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, My ministers….

And the word of the Lord came to Yirmeyahu, saying: Consider you not what this people have spoken, saying: The two families which the Lord did choose, He has cast them off? and they contemn My people, that they should be no more a nation before them.

Thus says the Lord: If My covenant be not with day and night, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I also cast away the seed of Yaakov, and of David My servant, so that I will not take of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov; for I will cause their captivity to return, and will have compassion on them. (*Yirmeyahu* 33)

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, it is clear that this prophecy is a continuation of the previous prophecy, and that it was delivered before Yirmeyahu was released from the court of the guard, after the temporary cessation of the siege, about which we read in *Yirmeyahu* 34:11-12.

God says that it is He who brought about this calamity, and therefore He is telling these things to the prophet. God who brought about the destruction is capable of bringing about the redemption. After having brought calamity upon the kingdom of Yehuda, God calls upon the prophet to pray to Him. God in His anger did not show mercy to the people of Israel and concealed His face from the city of Jerusalem because of their wicked deeds. The same God will heal Jerusalem's wounds. Jerusalem will rejoice in praise and in glory. God's glory will be immeasurably greater before all the nations of the world, who will fear Israel because of the good that will be bestowed upon them. The magnitude of this good will attest before all peoples that God is the source of the good that He bestows upon his people. Yirmeyahu proclaims that from the state of absolute destruction and desolation in the land of Yehuda, a new more perfect building will be constructed in the future.

**From Destruction to Joy**

The prophet describes the sharp transition from complete and absolute destruction to the reality of salvation; a reality in which the people go up to the Temple with thanksgiving offerings in recognition of God's eternal good, which turned destruction into building and salvation, and caused the Israel's captivity to return as at first.

The connection between gratitude and joy is clear. On the one hand gratitude includes within it recognition of the good reality that has now been renewed, and the very bringing of an offering to the Temple expresses the fact that the people know to attribute the salvation to God and thus to direct their gratitude toward Him.

**From Desolation to a Multitude of Flocks**

 God continues to describe the immense change that will take place following the salvation. From a situation in which there are no people or animals in all of Jerusalem and in all of the cities of Yehuda, to a reality in which the land of Yehuda is entirely filled with flocks and the shepherds can tend to their sheep in peace, with no fears or concerns about their well-being.

Scripture lists all parts of the land of Yehuda, the cities of the hill-country, the cities of the Lowland, and the cities of the South. The geographical uniqueness of the territory of Yehuda is that beyond its location on the central massif, this territory extends to the sea in the west and to the desert in the east, and it includes cities in the hill country, the Lowland and the South, all of which are defined as belonging to the cities of Yehuda. In addition, Scripture mentions also the land of Binyamin, and the areas around Jerusalem.

**The Kingdom of Justice and the City of Justice**

The Prophet is told that at the time of the salvation, God will cause a shoot of righteousness to grow up to David, and that he will execute justice and righteousness in the land. Yehuda and Jerusalem will dwell in safety, and God will call the city, the Lord is our righteousness.

What we have here seems to be an announcement of a future kingdom of justice and righteousness. It should be remembered that the inner content of kingdom is justice. It is justice that establishes kingdom in Israel, and justice is also its objective, as the Rambam formulates the matter in *Hilkhot Melakhim.* It is the Messianic king's mission "to break the arm of the wicked and to fill the world with righteousness."

It is possible that the prophet makes this declaration in light of the sad reality of the last kings of the house of David. In contrast to David, who "executed justice and righteousness to all his people" (II *Shemuel* 8:15; I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 18:14), and in contrast to Yoshiyahu, who did "justice and righteousness; then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know Me? says the Lord" (*Yirmeyahu* 22:15-16), the last Davidic kings did not execute justice and righteousness.

Regarding Yehoyakim it is stated: "But your eyes and your heart are not but for your covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it" (*Yirmeyahu* 22:17), and about Tzidkiyahu it is stated: "And to the house of the king of Yehuda: Hear you the word of the Lord; O house of David, thus says the Lord: Execute justice in the morning, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest My fury go forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings" (*Yirmeyahu* 21:12).

And similarly later in the book of *Yirmeyahu*:

Thus said the Lord: Go down to the house of the king of Yehuda, and speak there this word, and say: Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Yehuda, that sits upon the throne of David, you, and your servants, and your people that enter in by these gates. Thus says the Lord: Execute you justice and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor; and do no wrong, do no violence, to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. For if you do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if you will not hear these words, I swear by Myself, says the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation" (*Yirmeyahu* 22:1-5).

This prophecy does not have a precise date, but it is reasonable to assume that it was delivered to one of the last kings of Yehuda.

It is possible that the king is called a "shoot of righteousness" in this prophecy because he will in fact impose righteousness in the land, and his kingdom will be a kingdom of justice as opposed to that of Tzidkiyahu, whose name includes the element of justice [*tzedek*], but he did not act accordingly.

The Prophet goes on to say that all of the kingdom of Yehuda will be immediately delivered from its enemies and that Jerusalem will dwell in safety. A promise of safety is made to Jerusalem, the future name of which will be "the Lord is our righteousness."

The connection between the city of Jerusalem and justice is well known. It is found already in the name of the first kings of the city, Malkitzedek in the days of Avraham and Adonitzedek in the days of Yehoshua, on the assumption that the element of "tzedek" in their names is a designation for the king of Jerusalem.[[1]](#footnote-1) This also follows from the fact that according to the first prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, that destruction will come because of the absence of justice in various branches of government:

Hear this, I pray you, you heads of the house of Yaakov, and rulers of the house of Israel, that abhor justice, and pervert all equity; that build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money; yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say: Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us? Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. (*Mikha* 3:9-12).

So too the prophet Yeshayahu, when he describes the state of the kingdom and of the city in the days of Chizkiyahu, describes the sad state of the government and of the city in all that is related to justice:

How is the faithful city become a harlot! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver is become dross, your wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards; they judge not the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come to them.

Therefore says the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: Ah, I will ease Me of My adversaries, and avenge Me of My enemies. And I will turn My hand upon you, and purge away your dross as with lye, and will take away all your alloy. And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counsellors as at the beginning; afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and they that return of her with righteousness. (*Yeshayahu* 1:21-27)

This prophecy closely parallels the prophecy of Yirmeyahu in which he says: "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will raise to David a righteous shoot, and he shall reign as king and prosper, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Yehuda shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord is our righteousness." (*Yirmeyahu* 23:5-6)

The prophet speaks about a righteous king who will rule over Israel and Yehuda as one. In the days of this king and through his merit Yehuda will be delivered from the kingdom of Babylonia. Israel will dwell in safety and the name of the future king will be "The Lord is our righteousness." The simple understanding is that God will call him our righteousness. This is the way it was understood by Rabbi Saadya Gaon as he is cited by the Ibn Ezra (ad loc.). The Abravanel explains that God is our righteousness – He will impose righteousness among His people by way of His king. On the face of it, both the wording and the content of the name, "The Lord is our righteousness," brings to mind the name of King Tzidkiyahu. It seems that the prophet expounded the name of King Tzidkiyahu in reference to the future king who will indeed execute justice. It is also possible to explain the name "The Lord is our righteousness [*tzedek*]," in the sense of "salvation," as we find in the book of *Yeshayah* that the word *tzedek* is used in that sense: "My *tzedek* is near, My salavation [*yeshu'a*] is gone forth" (*Yeshayahu* 51:5).

The interesting thing in the parallel that we have drawn between the two chapters in the cook of *Yirmeyahu* is that both of them contain the phrase "the Lord is our righteousness," only that in one place this refers to a king who will rule in Jerusalem, while in the other place it refers to the city of Jerusalem itself.

It may be argued that the Messianic king will judge his people with righteousness until righteousness lodges in Jerusalem. But it may also be proposed that Scripture alludes to the fitting relationship between the kingdom of the house of David and the city of Jerusalem, both of which are supposed to realize the establishment of justice and righteousness in Eretz Israel and in the world. The rule of God being justice and righteousness is connected to the fact that He chose Jerusalem as the place where He rests His name, where He appears and reveals Himself, also through righteousness. Therefore, it is not by chance that there is a close connection between the Temple and justice. Three courts of twenty-three judges sit in Jerusalem; one at the entrance to the Temple Mount, one at the entrance to the Temple courtyard and one of the Sanhedrin in the Chamber of Hewn Stone.

- The juxtaposition of the Sanhedrin to the altar which is expounded by *Chazal*, both in *Parashat Mishpatim* and in *Parashat Shofetim*. What this means is that any court of twenty-three judges in Eretz Israel can judge capital cases, provided that the Sanhedrin is convening in its proper place. If the Sanhedrin is not in its place, the other courts cannot hear capital cases.

- Regarding the priests, it is written: "Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness; and let Your pious ones shout for joy" (*Tehilim* 132:9). The priests' garments of righteousness are connected to the fact that they achieve atonement through their service. "The priests eat and the owners [of the offerings] achieve atonement" (*Pesachim* 59b).

For these reasons, the connection between God and Jerusalem and the Temple, and the connection between the kingdom of Israel and Jerusalem and the Temple seem to be essential. Therefore both the king of Yehuda who rules in Jerusalem and the city of Jerusalem itself are called "The Lord is our righteousness."

**The Kingdom of the House of David and the Priesthood are Eternal**

Following the description of the connection between the Davidic king and the city of Jerusalem, both of which are called "The Lord is our righteousness," God informs the prophet that both the kingdom of the house of David and the priesthood will last forever. God had already promised David, in response to the latter's request to build a house for God: "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before you; your throne shall be established forever" (II *Shemuel* 7:16). And regarding the house of Aharon it is stated: "It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the Lord to you and to your seed with you" (*Bemidbar* 18:19)*.* Here the prophet declares that those who serve in the Temple will be the seed of Aharon and Levites of the tribe of Levi, just as the prophet Yechezkel prophesies: "But the priests the Levites, the sons of Tzadok, that kept the charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat and the blood, says the Lord God" (*Yechezkel* 44:15).

What is stated here is that the redemption mentioned in these chapters will not be temporary, but everlasting, and that the promises given in the Torah and in the words of the prophets many years before the destruction of the Temple will last forever.

Nevertheless, the people of little faith in Yirmeyahu's generation believe that the destruction that they see and experience before their very eyes is clear proof that God's covenant with the people of Israel and with the kingdom and with the priesthood have been annulled. In contrast, the prophet proclaims the opposite, that just as God made a covenant with creation itself which is eternal, so too He made a covenant with the seed of Yaakov from which arose the kingdom of David which will last forever.

With this we conclude out study of the prophecies of consolation in the book of *Yirmeyahu.* First of all, it is exhilarating to see that alongside the prophet's exceedingly harsh prophecies, in which he describes the killing, the destruction of the house of God and of the entire kingdom of Yehuda, and the exile, at almost the very same time he foresees the redemption, the ingathering of the exiles, the renewed settlement of Eretz Israel, the renewal of the covenant with God, the restoration of the kingdom of the house of David and of the priesthood of Aharon, and the promise that they will exist forever.

Second, some of the prophecies of salvation and consolation are told to the prophet at the very same time that the destruction is actually taking place before his eyes. These two things illustrate how God controls both sides – He builds and destroys, exiles and redeems, inflicts terrible punishment and offers great consolation. He is the source of all these opposites, the direct cause of His attitude at any given time being the conduct of the people and their king. This is the deep meaning of the promise made to the prophet: "To root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to overthrow; to build, and to plan" (*Yirmeyahu* 1:10).

The renewal of the covenant means that the Israel's connection to God is an eternal connection. The connection itself does not depend on anything because there is an eternal love and an eternal covenant the existence of which is similar to the eternal laws of nature. Therefore, despite the terrible punishment and the harsh calamity, God will have mercy on His people, return them to His land, and rebuild His kingdom while restoring the kingdom of the house of David and the priesthood of the sons of Tzadok.

These prophecies illustrate the fact that the history of Israel must be viewed through the eyes of eternity and not just the moment when a particular event is taking place. Over the very path that the Chaldeans led Israel into exile in Babylonia, the people of Israel will return to the Promised Land. The land will once again give its fruit, while gathering in all of its children, and the covenant between God and the people of Israel will be fully restored.

In the next *shiur*, we will examine *Yirmeyahu* 4.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Just as Pharaoh king of Egypt was the title of the Egyptian king and Avimelekh king of the Pelishtim was the title of the king of the Pelishtim during certain periods.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)