

**THE BOOK OF YIRMIYAHU**  
**Rav David Sabato**

**Shiur #21: The Redemption of the Field of Chanamel – Chapter 32**

**Introduction**

Chapter 32 is devoted in its entirety to the dramatic story that takes place during Jerusalem's final days, at the time of the Babylonian siege of the city shortly before its destruction. While shut up in the court of the guard, Yirmiyahu is commanded by God to do something surprising, in stark contrast to the given situation – to purchase a field from his cousin. This purchase symbolizes the renewal and redemption that will follow the exile (1-15). The greater part of the chapter is comprised of a dialogue between Yirmiyahu, who objects to God's mode of governance at that time (16-25), and God, who responds with a lengthy speech (26-44). In this *shiur*, we will try to understand the meaning of Yirmiyahu's objection and the significance of God's response.

**The Introduction to the Story**

(1) The word that came to Yirmiyahu from the Lord in the tenth year of **Tzidkiyahu king of Yehuda**, which was the eighteenth year of **Nevuchadnetzar**. (2) At that time, the **king of Bavel's** army was besieging Jerusalem, and Yirmiyahu the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard, which was in the house of the king of Yehuda. (3) For **Tzidkiyahu king of Yehuda** had shut him up, saying: Why do you prophesy, and say: Thus says the Lord: Behold, I will give this city in the hands of **the king of Bavel**, and he shall take it; (4) and **Tzidkiyahu king of Yehuda** shall not escape out of the land of the Kasdim, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of **the king of Bavel**, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes; (5) and he shall lead **Tzidkiyahu** to Bavel, and there shall he be until I visit him, says the Lord; though you fight with the Kasdim, you shall not prosper.

Unlike the other prophecies in the collection, which lack a context of time and place and are presented without any background, the prophecy in chapter 32 is integrated into a story, the time and place of which are mentioned in the introduction.

The story opens with an exceptionally long introduction, which appears as sort of a parenthetical remark that extends for five verses. The word of God itself appears only in verse 6: "And Yirmiyahu said: The word of the Lord has come to me, saying." What is the role of this long introduction?

Verse 1 notes the time of the event from both an Israelite and a Babylonian perspective, and verse 2 clarifies the significance of this double notation of the time. This is the last year of Jerusalem and of its king Tzidkiyahu, who will shortly fall into the hands of the Babylonian king. Thus, we are now at the height of the Babylonian siege imposed by Nevuchadnetzar on Jerusalem. The lengthy preamble emphasizes the difficult situation in which the people are found: Jerusalem is under siege, and the destruction is palpable. In the continuation of the introduction, it becomes clear that Yirmiyahu himself is caught in a difficult situation because of his prophecies which are gradually being fulfilled. A quotation is brought from the prophecy for which Yirmiyahu was punished – a prophecy that speaks of Jerusalem's capture and emphasizes the Babylonian king's victory over the king of Yehuda.<sup>1</sup> At first glance, it appears that this prophecy is meant to illustrate the irrationality of the purchase of the field that will soon follow, and Yirmiyahu's prophecy about the destruction will be mentioned in his words to God later in the chapter.<sup>2</sup>

## The Story

(6) And Yirmiyahu said: **The word of the Lord** has come to me, saying: (7) Behold, Chanamel the son of Shallum your uncle shall come to you, saying: Buy my field that is in Anatot, for the right of redemption is yours to buy it. (8) 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 country 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**.

Yirmiyahu relates the story in the first person, unlike the rest of the stories in the book that are related about Yirmiyahu in the third person, and even unlike the introduction to the story ("The word that came to Yirmiyahu"). God reveals Himself to Yirmiyahu and predicts that Chanamel will appear before him and propose that Yirmiyahu should purchase his field in Anatot – Yirmiyahu's own village.

The story is told against the backdrop of a recognized legal practice in those days – "the law of redemption," which is connected to land ownership. Such a practice is not mentioned in the Torah. But a close parallel found in the book of Ruth (4:3-7) clarifies its meaning:

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<sup>1</sup> Tzidkiyahu is mentioned five times over the course of the introduction, once in each verse. Nevuchadnetzar/the king of Bavel is mentioned four times, and he stands in opposition to Tzidkiyahu in almost every verse.

<sup>2</sup> This prophecy is mentioned with minor variations later in the book (34:1-7), but no mention is made there of the fact that Yirmeyahu was incarcerated because of his prophecy. Yirmeyahu's incarceration is described at greater length later in the book (chap. 37). There it says that it was the princes who imprisoned Yirmeyahu in the house of Yehonatan, and that in the wake of his appeal to Tzidkiyahu that he not be returned there, Tzidkiyahu reduced his punishment and shut him in the court of the guard until the destruction.

(3) And he said to the kinsman: Naomi, who is come back out of the country of Moav, is selling a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelekh's. (4) And I thought to advise you of it, saying: Buy it in the presence of the inhabitants, and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know, for there is none to redeem it besides you, and I am after you. And he said: I will redeem it... (7) Now this was the custom in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning exchanging, to confirm all manner of transactions; a man pulled off his shoe and gave it to his neighbor: and this was the manner of attesting in Israel.

Boaz's words to the kinsman imply that when a person was forced to sell his ancestral property because of economic hardship, the responsibility lay on a relative to purchase the property for himself, apparently in order to keep it in the family. In this case, there was a kinsman more closely related to Naomi than Boaz, and therefore the initial responsibility fell upon him; when he waived it, the responsibility shifted to Boaz.

The Ramban expands upon this in his commentary to *Vayikra* 25:

It seems to me that the verse means that the custom in former time in Israel was that when a person had to sell his field, the person first in line to inherit him would come and purchase it. This was called "redemption," as it is stated (*Yirmiyahu* 32:7): "Buy my field that is in Anatot; for the right of redemption is yours to buy it." And so it is explicit in the matter of Boaz (*Ruth* 4). And it seems to me that they would give him the right of first refusal, the way our Rabbis instituted the law of first refusal, and they would buy [that right] from the closest kinsman, by way of a kerchief, as did Boaz (*Ruth* 4:8).

Another connection between our chapter and *Vayikra* 25 is found in the Torah's wording there: "Either his uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him" (v. 48). In our chapter *Yirmiyahu*, is approached by Chanamel, his cousin.<sup>3</sup>

After the prophecy is fulfilled, *Yirmiyahu* says: "And I knew that this was the word of the Lord." This statement is puzzling: Does this mean that until now he did not know that this was the word of the Lord? The Radak explains: "'That this was the word of the Lord' – I knew that it was from God that I should purchase it, for if it was not from Him, why did He tell me that Chanamel would come to me to sell his field? Some explain that Chanamel came to *Yirmiyahu* at God's command." According to the Radak, "the word of the Lord" refers to the will of God that stems from His words, and it refers to the next verse which relates to the purchase of the field. Alternatively, he knew that Chanamel came at God's command (as there was no logic in his

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<sup>3</sup> V. 8 reads: "So Chanamel my uncle's son came to me," whereas v. 7 states: "Behold, Chanamel the son of Shallum your uncle." Apparently, the words "your uncle" relate to Shallum, and not to Chanamel.

coming). Perhaps Yirmiyahu himself was not convinced about his prophecy? More about this later.

### **The Purchase of the Field**

(9) And I bought the field from Chanamel my uncle's son that was in Anatot, and weighed him the money, seventeen shekels of silver. (10) And I subscribed the deed, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed the money in the balances. (11) So I took the deed of the purchase, both that which was sealed, containing the terms and conditions, and which was open; (12) and I gave the deed of the purchase to Barukh the son of Neriya, the son of Machseya, in the sight of Chanamel my uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the deed of the purchase, before all the men of Yehuda that sat in the court of the guard. (13) And I charged Barukh before them, saying: (14) Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these documents, this deed of the purchase, both that which is sealed and this open deed, and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may last for many days.

Later in the story, Scripture emphasizes and details the manner of the transaction (9-14). These verses provide one of the most detailed descriptions of the methods of acquisition in the Bible, and they are a source for the laws governing acquisitions in the Oral Law.<sup>4</sup> Yirmiyahu first lists the stages of the transaction: Payment of money, while specifying the precise sum, writing, sealing, witnessing, and weighing the money. It would seem that the purpose of this specification is to emphasize the legal validity of the transaction; this is not merely a symbolic act.<sup>5</sup> This also illustrates the absurdity in the absolutely serious and legal act of transaction, with attention paid to each and every detail, against the background of the chaotic situation surrounding them. From here we also learn a number of laws governing transactions and deeds.

At the end, Yirmiyahu hands the book<sup>6</sup> over to Barukh, his loyal scribe, and commands him in the presence of all those around him<sup>7</sup> to keep the book

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Kiddushin* 26a, where the valid modes of acquisition of landed property are derived from our prophecy. In *Bava Batra* 60b, the laws of deeds are derived from our passage.

<sup>5</sup> The act of acquisition of landed property is noted in several places in the Bible with respect to transactions that are important for the future – the acquisition of the Makhpela cave, of Shechem, of the threshing floor of Aravna, and of Shomron. In all these cases, there is also a precise specification of the payment.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding this point as well, there is a wealth of technical terms: "deed of purchase," "that which was sealed, containing the terms and conditions, and which was open." "The deed of purchase" was the deed recording the details of the purchase of the field; it served as legal proof of the transaction. This deed was divided into two parts: the sealed portion was rolled and sealed with a seal that could not be forged and was opened only in exceptional cases in the presence of the court. In contrast, the second part remained open and was used for routine matters.

<sup>7</sup> The words "in the presence of" are repeated four times in this section, and it seems that they are meant to emphasize the public and ceremonial aspects of the event.

in an earthen vessel, as was done in the ancient world to preserve documents.<sup>8</sup>

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

### Yirmiyahu's Prayer

(16) Now when I had delivered the deed of the purchase to Barukh the son of Neriya, I prayed to the Lord, saying: (17) Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the heaven and the earth **by Your great power and stretched out arm**, and there is nothing too hard for You. (18) You show loyal love to thousands, and recompense the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them; O great and mighty God! The Lord of hosts is His name. (19) Great in counsel, and mighty in performance; Your eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings. (20) Who has set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, to this day, and in Israel, and among mankind; and have made You a name, as at this day; (21) and have brought Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, **and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm**, and with great terror; (22) and have given them this land, which You did swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey. (23) And they came in, and possessed it, but they obeyed not Your voice, neither followed Your Torah; they have done nothing of all that You did command them to do; therefore You have caused all this evil to come upon them. (24) Behold, the siege works are come to the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Kasdim 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. (25) And You have said to me, O Lord God: Buy the field for money and take witnesses; though the city is given into the hand of the Kasdim.

At the beginning of the story, Yirmiyahu acted as a prophet – a messenger of God who fulfills His word without hesitation. But after the fulfillment of the words of the prophecy in the presence of all the people, Yirmiyahu turns to God as a person with a turbulent prayer, expressing his puzzlement about God's ways of governance.<sup>9</sup> But Yirmiyahu's objection is not sufficiently clear. Ostensibly, his objection is based on the contrast between the present situation and the prophetic command that he received, which is presented at the end of his words as sort of absurd: "Behold, the siege works are come to the city to take it, **and the city is given into the hand of the Kasdim...** And You have said to me, O Lord God: Buy the field for money and take witnesses, **though the city is given into the hand of the**

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<sup>8</sup> A clear example of this was uncovered in the previous generation. The Qumran scrolls were stored in earthen jugs in caves and were preserved for more than two thousand years.

<sup>9</sup> The tension between Yirmeyahu the prophet and Yirmeyahu the man who prays runs through the entire book. We expanded upon this in our *shiur* on the personality of Yirmeyahu.

**Kasdim."** The absurdity is highlighted by the doubling of the clause "the city is given into the hand of the Kasdim" at the beginning and at the end, as this reality frontally contradicts the Divine command!<sup>10</sup> But if this is the meaning of his words, it is not clear what role is played by the long introduction in Yirmiyahu's prayer in verses 16-23.<sup>11</sup>

In order to understand Yirmiyahu's argument, we must examine his prayer from the beginning. Yirmiyahu briefly reviews the history of God's relationship with His world, from the creation to the destruction of Jerusalem, while focusing on two foundational events: the creation and the exodus. Yirmiyahu opens by emphasizing God's unlimited capability when He created the world, and from this he learns: "There is nothing too hard for You."<sup>12</sup> Afterwards, he moves on to the moral action through which God's power is revealed – in his account of Divine reward and punishment and providence. The foundational event in this context is the story of the exodus from Egypt. Yirmiyahu even creates a parallel between the two events through a similar expression:

You have **made** the heaven and the earth **by Your great power and stretched out arm**

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<sup>10</sup> This is the way that Rashi explains the words of Yirmeyahu at the beginning of his prayer: "'There is nothing too hard' – It cannot be denied and You know that we will be exiled; why then did You tell me to buy a field?" And at the end: "'Though the city is given' – Why then do I need a field?" According to Rashi, the words "there is nothing too hard" refer to God's knowledge of the future. However, from the continuation it is evident that there is no need for hidden knowledge to see that the city is given into the hands of the Kasdim and that the people of Israel will be exiled. The Radak offers a similar explanation: "'Ah, You have made the heaven and the earth,' and since You have made them, it is impossible that You should not know something that will happen in them, whether in heaven or on earth, and if the city will be given to the Kasdim, You know it." However the Radak continues to explain the rest of the prayer and its connection to Yirmeyahu's argument: "And Yirmeyahu thought that perhaps God relented of His anger in His great mercy and He remembered for them the merits of the fathers. Therefore he said: 'You show loyal love to thousands,' for if not so why did He say that he should purchase a field, when the city is close to being captured. This is the essence of his prayer." R. Yosef Kara proposes another explanation of the continuation of Yirmeyahu's prayer: According to him, the second part of the prayer denies the moral argument against God and justifies the sentence handed out to Jerusalem – for all of His judgments are true from the day of their exodus from Egypt. According to R. Yosef Kara, Yirmeyahu's whole argument is one of wonderment, since he does not understand the purpose of the commandment that appears meaningless to him: "And if I reply: Why did You tell me to purchase the field in Anatot? I am not objecting to Your words, saying: Since we will go into exile, why do I need to buy it; and I am not challenging Your morals, saying: Why did God do this evil to us? Rather I speak like a person who wonders about something that he sees before him and doesn't understand what lies behind it..."

<sup>11</sup> This great difficulty led several scholars to speculate that the historical detailing is a later layer that was added to the words of Yirmeyahu. See the commentary of J. Hoffman in the *Mikra Le-Yisrael* series.

<sup>12</sup> According to most commentators, this means that nothing is hidden from Him, as in *Devarim* 17:8: "If there arise a matter too hard for you in judgment." But it is possible that we are not dealing here with the cognitive plane, but rather the practical plane, and that this means that there is nothing beyond God's capability. See *Bereishit* 18:14: "Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return to you, at this season, and Sara shall have a son." This explanation also fits in with the context: "You have made... by Your great power and stretched out arm..." It should be noted that the word "make" (*asah*) appears five times in Yirmeyahu's prayer.

You have brought Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, **and with a strong hand, and with a outstretched arm**

Yirmiyahu then moves on to Israel's entry into the land and describes the deeds of the people who did not obey the voice of God or follow His Torah. He closes with a description of the present situation, which is a direct result of the people's actions.

Yirmiyahu's objection, then, does not refer to the contrast between the real situation and the utopian prophecy. This is a theological objection that focuses on a contradiction in God's ways, for the prophecy of consolation contradicts the entire course of Yirmiyahu's prophecies from the beginning of his path as a prophet until the present. According to the principles of reward and punishment established by God, calamity must now befall the people; why then does he speak of redemption and consolation? The focus of the prayer is not found in the practical unreasonableness, but rather in the theological aspect of the deed, and this is an objection against God's ways of governance. An additional proof can be brought from the expression with which the prophecy opens: "Ah Lord God." This expression appears several times in the book of Yirmiyahu, always in the context of an objection raised against the ways of God's governance.

This explanation solves two problems that we raised earlier. First, it is possible that because of this Yirmiyahu said: "Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord." At first, Yirmiyahu was in doubt because God's word contradicted all of the previous prophecies that he received; only after Chanamel arrived did Yirmiyahu understand that this was truly the word of the Lord. In light of this, we can also understand the lengthy introduction that cites Yirmiyahu's prophecy concerning the destruction – it teaches us that Yirmiyahu's prophecy of destruction stands in opposition to his prophecy of consolation and redemption.

### **God's Response to Yirmiyahu**

God's lengthy response to Yirmiyahu extends over verses 26-44:

(26) Then came the word of the Lord to Yirmiyahu, saying:

(27) Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is there anything too hard for Me?

(28) **Therefore, thus says the Lord:** Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Kasdim, and into the hand of Nevukhadnetzar king of Bavel, and he shall take it. (29) And the Kasdim, who fight against this city, shall come and set fire to this city, and burn it together with the houses upon whose roofs they have offered incense to the Ba'al and poured out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke Me to anger. (30) For the children of Israel and the children of Yehuda have done only evil before Me, from their youth; for the children of Israel have only provoked Me to anger with the work of their hands, says the Lord. (31) For this has been to Me as a provocation of My anger and of My fury

from the day that they built it and to this day, that I should remove it from before My face, (32) because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Yehuda, which they have done to provoke Me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Yehuda, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (33) And they have turned their back to Me, and not their face; though I taught them, teaching them from morning till night, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction. (34) But they set their abominations in the house, which is called by My name, to defile it. (35) And they built the high places of the Ba'al, which are in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molekh, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My heart that they should do this abomination, to cause Yehuda to sin.

**(36) And now therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel,** concerning this city, of which you say: It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Bavel by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: (37) Behold, I will gather them out of all countries into 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. (38) And they shall be My people, and I will be their God: (39) And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for their good, and that of their children after them. (40) And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing good to them; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not turn aside from Me. (41) And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will truly plant them in this land, with My whole heart and with My whole soul. (42) For thus says the Lord: Just 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. (43) 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 Kasdim. (44) Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe deeds, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Binyamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Yehuda, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the coastal plain, and in the cities of the Negev; for I will cause their captivity to return, says the Lord.

God's words to Yirmiyahu are arranged in two parts that parallel Yirmiyahu's prayer in their content and style. The first part (26-35) opens with the words: "Therefore thus says the Lord," and the second part (36-44) opens with: "And now therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel." In the first part, God continues with a description of the future from the historical point in the present at which Yirmiyahu ended his account – the image of the Kasdim laying siege on Jerusalem. But rather than focusing on a description of the future redemption in response to Yirmiyahu, as might have been expected, He describes in verses 28-35 the punishment for the sins of the people, emphasizing the significance and severity of their transgressions. Only after detailing the sin and the punishment does God move on in the second part to the future consolation and redemption in response to the words of Yirmiyahu.

Thus, our question regarding the historical review in the words of Yirmiyahu is valid also for the review in God's words. What is the purpose of this review and how does it answer Yirmiyahu's objection?<sup>13</sup>

It seems that the key to understanding God's response lies in its opening words (26).<sup>14</sup> This opening corresponds to the opening words of Yirmiyahu: "Behold, You have **made** the heaven and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm, **and there is nothing too hard for You.**" However, the meaning of this expression is different here: While Yirmiyahu emphasized God's ability and described Him as Maker of heaven and earth, God's words highlight His relationship with His creatures: "Behold, I am the Lord, **the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for Me?**" The focus here is on the creation of man, not the creation of the world.

There is also a difference in the description of the sin. What is striking in God's words is the emphasis placed on the inherent evil implanted in man and in Israel. This is what it says in verse 30 with respect to the people: "For the children of Israel and the children of Yehuda have done only evil before Me, **from their youth.**" And in verse 31 with respect to the city: "For this has been to Me as a provocation of My anger and of My fury **from the day that they built it** and to this day, that I should remove it from before My face." In the continuation, He describes the repeated stubbornness of the people: "And they have turned their back to Me, and not their face; though I taught them, teaching them from morning till night, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction." In accord with this, at the heart of the second part stands the vision of a single heart: "And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me forever."<sup>15</sup> In the wake of this change of heart, there will be an everlasting covenant: "And I will make an **everlasting covenant** with them, that I will not turn away from doing good to them; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not turn aside from Me."<sup>16</sup> This then is the meaning of the opening words: "I am the Lord, the God of all flesh." For in the current reality, Yirmiyahu is certainly correct: there is no way to guarantee the arrival of the redemption when the people are not worthy of it, and they must be recompensed in accordance with their ways and the fruit of their doings. But

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<sup>13</sup> Here too several scholars have suggested that this is a direct continuation of the words put into Yirmeyahu's mouth in his prayer, this based on the assumption that this was originally a single passage that was divided into two on literary grounds. See the commentary of Hoffman, mentioned above. Needless to say, this explanation testifies primarily to the great difficulty in our chapter, but offers no solution whatsoever.

<sup>14</sup> I heard this idea from my revered father and teacher, R. Dr. Mordechai Sabato.

<sup>15</sup> The heart is mentioned four times in God's response to Yirmeyahu: The first time in connection with the contradiction between the people's sins and God's command: "Which I did not command them, nor did it come into my **heart** that they should do this." The second and third time in the description of the change in the people's heart, which is meant to equate it with God's path: "And I will give them one **heart**... that they may fear Me forever... but I will put My fear in their **hearts**, that they shall not turn aside from Me." And the fourth time once again in relation to God's heart, but here in a positive context – perfect planting in the land: "And I will truly plant them in this land, with My whole **heart**, and with My whole soul."

<sup>16</sup> The phrase, "one way," in God's response corresponds to what Yirmeyahu said in his objection concerning God's veering from the principles of recompense: "Your eyes are open upon all **the ways** of the sons of men; to give every one according to **his ways**, and according to the fruit of his doings."

God is not only the Maker of heaven and earth, but also the God of all flesh, and therefore it is also within His power to turn the hearts of His people toward Him and to thereby ensure the redemption.

From this perspective, there is a strong connection between our prophecy and the prophecy concerning the "new covenant" in the previous chapter. In both places, we are dealing with the renewal of a covenant ("I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Yehuda"; "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them"); with a future change in the heart of the people ("And I will give them one heart"; "I will write it in their hearts"), and with a change in God's governance. But in chapter 31, Yirmiyahu himself presents the change that will take place: "In those days they shall say no more: The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Here, in contrast, Yirmiyahu represents through his words the present governance: "And recompenses the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them... to give every one, according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings,"<sup>17</sup> and God in His response presents the future governance: "And I will give them one heart... that they may fear Me... I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not turn aside from Me."

It seems then that our prophecy preceded the prophecy concerning the new covenant and served as the foundation of its novelty. In the court of the guard, Yirmiyahu raised an objection against the prophecy of consolation and against God's ways from the conventional perspective. After receiving God's response and learning of the future mode of Divine governance, he described it in greater detail in the prophecy concerning the new covenant in chapter 31. This fundamental principle, according to which redemption is not contingent upon repentance, appears also, as may be recalled, in the prophecy concerning Rachel and Ephraim, and it is the fundamental principle that runs through the unit of Yirmiyahu's prophecies of consolation.

In light of this explanation, we can now explain the role of the redemption of the field in this prophecy. It turns out that this is not only a symbol of the people's return to their land; a deeper idea lies here as well. As stated, the law of redeeming landed property is based on the section dealing with the Jubilee year in *Vayikra* 25. In this chapter, we learn that even a person who becomes impoverished, sells his land, and even sells himself as a slave will return to his ancestral land and family in the Jubilee year. This does not depend upon him. From this perspective, the redemption of a field is also a metaphor for redemption that is inherent in nature; there is no absolute sale. The fundamental principle underlying the Jubilee year is: "The land shall not be sold forever; for the land is Mine" (*Vayikra* 25:23). Here the principle moves from the individual plane to the national plane. A similar idea is found in *Midrash Tanchuma* (ed. Buber, *Behar*, no. 6):

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<sup>17</sup> Two motifs from the corresponding verses in chapter 31 appear here: The relationship between fathers and children with respect to reward and punishment, and the comparison of sin and punishment to fruit: they have eaten sour grapes, according to the fruit of their doings.

"If your brother become poor, and has sold away some of his possession, then shall his near kinsman come" (*Vayikra* 25:25). Who is "his near kinsman"? It is I, as it is stated: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: The children of Israel and the children of Yehuda were oppressed together... Their redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is His name" (*Yirmiyahu* 50:33-34).

### **After the Calamity: the Difference Between the Flood and the Destruction of Jerusalem**

The meaning of God's answer becomes clear in light of the striking parallel between it and the covenant made with Noach after the flood.<sup>18</sup> These two catastrophic events left a deep and indelible impression among the survivors, who found it difficult to recover and rebuild their world in the wake of their deep existential anxiety.<sup>19</sup> On both occasions, there was a change in the mode of Divine governance following an understanding about the evil inherent in mankind. God says after the flood: "For the impulse of man's heart is evil **from his youth,**" and therefore there is no reason to destroy again "everything living as I have done." These words reflect a certain coming to terms with reality. Here too, God describes the severity of the sin with similar wording: "They have done only evil before Me, **from their youth.**" He underscores the deep rootedness of sin in Israel. The expression "all flesh" with which God's words open and which, as stated, express the novelty in what He is saying, appears seven times in the course of the story of the flood. It appears first in the description how "all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth"; then with respect to the punishment: "The end of all flesh is come before Me"; and finally with respect to the covenant: "And I will establish My covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood." The expression, "everlasting covenant," which appears here in the words of God: "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them," appears for the first time in connection with the covenant of the rainbow after the flood.<sup>20</sup> But despite the great similarity, there is a profound difference in the way the situation is handled in the two cases. As opposed to the acceptance of human evil after the flood, the purpose of emphasizing the inherent nature of the sins of the people is not to justify the heavy punishment meted out to the people (as opposed to the mention of the people's sins in the words of Yirmiyahu), but rather to clarify the necessary change in nature. There is no acceptance of the situation or lowering of expectations while changing God's mode of governance, but rather a desire to change it fundamentally, by changing man's heart and internalizing the word of God within him, which will lead to a change in the mode of Divine governance and the establishment of an everlasting covenant. This covenant is based not on mercy, as was the

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<sup>18</sup> A similar parallel was discussed in the previous *shiur* in connection with the new covenant.

<sup>19</sup> An explicit parallel between the two events and between the promises that followed them is found in *Yeshayahu* 54:9: "For this is as the waters of Noach to Me: as I have sworn that the waters of Noach should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be furious with you, nor rebuke you."

<sup>20</sup> Another connection to the covenant with Noach is found in the previous prophecy in the comparison between the covenant with Israel and the eternal ordinances governing heaven and earth (31:34-35).

covenant made with Noach, but on justice, founded on the expectation of the repair of man's heart.

(Translated by David Strauss)