

Behar: Jeremiah 32:6-27



At an extraordinary, desperate moment for Jeremiah, Judah, Jerusalem, and Zedekiah, Jeremiah performed an astonishing, public act of redemption- and then questions God about its justice.

The Haftarah occurs during the devastating Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. In keeping with his prophetic role¹, Jeremiah prophesied the imminent conquest and destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, and the exile of King Zedekiah if he continued to battle Babylon. Zedekiah imprisoned Jeremiah, accusing him of treason. Jeremiah's cousin Hanamel comes to the prison courtyard to ask Jeremiah to redeem, pay for, and take title to Hanamel's ancestral field, already or soon-to-be worthless. This redemption roughly accords with the law in the Parashah (Lev. 25:25). Understanding this seemingly pointless act as God's will, Jeremiah undertakes a halachically precise purchase and ensures that the sale documents will be preserved for years to come. He then publicly proclaims, in God's name, that properties will, one day, be bought and sold in Judah.

After fulfilling Hanamel's divinely sanctioned request, Jeremiah then challenges God in prayer. Surely, the omniscient and omnipotent Creator rightfully granted His land to His people after the Exodus. And surely the Judge of all humanity is justly bringing the Bablyonians to destroy the Land to punish His people for defiling it for generations with their sins- just as Jeremiah has proclaimed for decades in His name. What then is God's purpose in having him redeem land amidst destruction? How is that divine justice?

The Haftarah concludes with the beginning of God's answer. As Creator of all life, God can indeed perform wondrous deeds. In subsequent verses, God completes His reply. God is indeed justly punishing Judah for generations of sin and rejecting prophetic reproof. The inverse of the same covenant, however, requires God to use His power to redeem His people, return them from exile to dwell permanently and securely in the same Land He is now destroying to buy fields there, restore their hearts to the covenant, and rejoice in them. Jeremiah's redemption of an individual's worthless land showed the people the certainty of these divine promises and transformed him, at their darkest hour, from a prophet of destruction into a prophet of redemption and hope.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 32:6-7: God tells Jeremiah that his cousin, Hanamel, will visit him in jail to request that Jeremiah fulfill his duty to redeem Hanamel's field in their nearby hometown, Anathoth.

Jeremiah 32:7	ירמיהו ל"ב:ז
Hanamel, son of your uncle, Shallum, will come to you, saying, "Buy my field in Anathoth for yourself, for the redemption right to buy [it] is yours."	הִנֵּה חֲנַמְאֵל בֶּן־שָׁלֹם דָּדִי בָא אֵלַי לֵאמֹר קְנֵה לִּי אֶת־שְׂדֵי אֲשֶׁר בְּעֲנָתוֹת כִּי לִּי מִשְׁפָּט הַגְּאֻלָּה לְקָנוֹת:

Verses 32:8-12: Recognizing God's hand in Hanamel's arrival, Jeremiah weighs out silver to buy the field. Before witnesses and others gathered at the jail courtyard, Jeremiah precisely fulfills all the transactional requirements and entrusts the sale documents to his scribe, Baruch ben Neriah.

Jeremiah 32:12	ירמיהו ל"ב:י"ב
I gave the deed to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah in the presence of my kinsman Hanamel, of the witnesses who were named in the deed, and all the Judeans who were sitting in the prison compound.	וְאָתָּן אֶת־הַסֵּפֶר הַמְקֻנָּה אֶל־בָּרוּךְ בֶּן־נְרִיָּה בֶּן־מַחֲסֵיָּה לְעִינָי חֲנַמְאֵל דָּדִי וְלְעִינֵי הָעֵדִים הַכֹּתְבִים בְּסֵפֶר הַמְקֻנָּה לְעִינֵי כָּל־הַיְהוּדִים הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּחֹצֵר הַמִּטְרָה

¹ [Haftarah Helper for Parashat Pinchas](#) details Jeremiah's prophetic mission, including his duty to confront Judah's leaders and endure their fearsome attacks against him.

Verses 32:13-15: Jeremiah charges Baruch to bury the documents in an earthenware jar to preserve them. Jeremiah proclaims God's astounding message: One day, land will once again be bought and sold in Judah.

Jeremiah 32:15	ירמיהו ל"ב:ט"ו
For thus said the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: "Houses and fields and vineyards shall be bought again in this land."	כִּי כֹה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד יִקְנוּ בָתַּיִם וְשָׂדוֹת וְיִקְרְמוּם בְּאַרְצָה הַזֹּאת: {פ}

Verses 32:16-25: Jeremiah challenges God in prayer. As all-powerful Creator and Redeemer and as Judge of every person, how can God promise to redeem a people who sinned against Him for generations in the Land He gave them which He is presently and justly destroying? Buying land now is illogical and unjust!

Jeremiah 32:25	ירמיהו ל"ב:כ"ה
You, Lord God, said to me, "Buy the land for money and call in witnesses"- when the city [of Jerusalem] is already in the Chaldeans' hands?!	וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֵלַי אֲדֹנָי ה' קְנֵה-לָךְ הַשָּׂדֶה בְּכֶסֶף וְהַעַד עֲדָיִם וְהַעִיר נִתְּנָה בְיַד הַכַּשְׂדִּים: {ס}

Verses 32:26-27: God begins His reply: As Creator of all living beings, He can do anything.

Jeremiah 32:27	ירמיהו ל"ב:כ"ז
Behold, I am the Lord, God of all flesh. Is there anything too wondrous for Me?	הִנֵּה אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵי כָּל-בָּשָׂר הַמְמַנִּי יִפְלֵא כָּל-דְּבָר:

Connection

The Talmud records that the Men of the Great Assembly wrote the Amidah. Its first blessing praises "the great, mighty, and awesome God." The Talmud states that God's "awesomeness" consists not of protecting the Temple from destruction- a view attributed to Jeremiah based on the Haftarah- but of protecting the Jewish people in exile.

Yoma 69b	יומא סט ע"ב
R. Yehoshua b. Levi said: Why is their name, "The Men of the Great Assembly"? Because they returned [God's] crown to its former [glory]. How so? Moses came and said (Deut. 10:17), "The great, the mighty, and the awesome God." Jeremiah came and said, "[Babylonians] cackle in His sanctuary- where is His awesomeness?" So he did not say "awesome" in (Jer. 32:18), "O great and mighty God- the Lord of hosts is his name!" Daniel came and said, "Gentiles enslave His children- where is His might?" So he did not say "mighty in (Dan. 9:4), "The great and awesome God." [The Men of the Great Assembly] came and said: "On the contrary! His mightiness is that He conquers His inclination, having patience toward the wicked. And His awesomeness is that, were it not for [God]'s awe, how could one people [the Jews] survive among the nations?"	אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: למה נקרא שמו אנשי כנסת הגדולה — שהחזירו עטרה ליושנה. אתא משה, אמר: "הקל הגדול הגבור והנורא". אתא ירמיה ואמר: גוים מקרקרין בהיכלו, אינה נוראותיו? לא אמר "נורא". אתא דניאל אמר: גוים משמעבדים בבניו, אינה גבורותיו? לא אמר "גבור". אתו אינהו ואמרו: אדרבה, זו היא (גבורת) גבורתו: שכובש את יצרו — שנותן ארץ אפים לרשעים. ואלו הן נוראותיו — שאמלא מוראו של הקדוש ברוך הוא היאך אומה אחת יכולה להתקיים בין האומות?

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