YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Understanding the haftarot**

**By Harav Yaakov Medan**

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

In loving memory of my parents
Shmuel Binyamin (Samuel) and Esther Rivka (Elizabeth) Lowinger *z"l*
- Benzion Lowinger

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Dedicated in memory of Tsirele bat Moche Eliezer whose yahrzeit is 11 Kislev, by Family Rueff

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**PARASHAT VAYETZE**

**Mount Moria vs. Beit El**

My people waver – whether to turn back to Me, although Israel is summoned upward, they will not praise Him together. How can I relinquish you, Efrayim; hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Adma and treat you like Tzevoyim? My heart has turned upon Me; My compassion has been kindled. No, I will not unleash My burning wrath, I will not turn again to destroy Efrayim – for I am God, I am not a man; within you, My holiness dwells; I will not enter the city with hatred. They will follow after the Lord; He will roar like a lion. When He roars, His children will rush forth from the west. They will be like a frightened bird coming out of Egypt, like a dove leaving the land of Assyria. I will bring them to settle safely in their homes. So declares the Lord. Efrayim besieges Me with lies, the House of Israel with deception, but Yehuda still walks with God and remains faithful to the Holy One. Efrayim shepherds the wind; he chases the east winds. Day and night he increases lies and ruin; he makes pacts with Assyria and to Egypt bears oil. But also with Yehuda the Lord has a dispute: He will visit upon Yaakov as he deserves, as befits his deeds – He will repay him. In the womb he grasped his brother by the heel, and with all his strength he struggled with God. He struggled with an angel and prevailed; he cried and pleaded with him; in Beit El He found him, and there He spoke to us. But the Lord, God of Hosts, the Lord is His name. Now you, too, return to your God, uphold compassion and justice, and long for your God forever more. Still the merchant possesses false scales; he loves to exploit. Efrayim exclaims, "I have become wealthy; I have found fortune from my own labors; in all the fruits of my toil they will find neither sin nor iniquity." I am the Lord your God from the time you were in the land of Egypt; once more I will settle you safely in tents as in days of old. I have spoken by way of the prophets; I endowed them with many visions, and through images I communicated with the prophets. As Gilad is rampant with iniquity, so too they are empty and vain; in Gilgal they sacrifice oxen, and their altars too will become like rocks piled high in furrows of the fields.

Yaakov fled to the lands of Aram, and Yisrael labored to acquire a bride; for a bride he kept sheep. With a prophet the Lord brought Israel up out of Egypt, and with a prophet He kept watch over us. Efrayim has provoked bitter anger; the guilt from the blood he shed will remain, and the Lord will turn his scorn back upon him. So it was: when Efrayim spoke, they trembled in fear; he was esteemed in Israel, but when found guilty of worshipping Baal, he was as dead. Now their sinning goes on and on; they cast graven images from their silver, mold idols as they understood, each entirely the craft of men; of them they say, "Men who offer sacrifices must kiss calves." So they will dissolve like morning mist, like dew at daybreak that swiftly fades. They will scatter like chaff from the threshing floor, like smoke from the window. I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God other than Me; no one can save you except for Me. I knew you, cared for you in the desert, in the parched, bereft land.

But when they grazed, they became sated and satisfied; their hearts became haughty – then they forgot Me. Therefore l will be as a lion to them; as a leopard I will watch, lurking on the path. I will fall upon them like a bear who mourns her whelps and tear apart their sealed hearts; there I will consume them like a lion; wild beasts will shred them to pieces. You have brought ruin upon yourself, Israel, for your help is to be found in Me. I am your King, then who will save you in all your cities, and what of your judges of whom you said, "Appoint me a king and officers"? In My rage I gave you a king, and in My wrath I will take him away. The sinfulness of Efrayim is tied together; his sins are stored away. Pangs of birth will overcome him, but he is not a wise son, for when the moment of birth comes, he will break and not survive. I will rescue them from Sheol; I will redeem them from the clutches of death. I shall be your plague, O Death; I will be your destruction, O Sheol; any qualms will be concealed from My eyes. For though he will flourish wildly among the reeds, an east wind will come; a gust from the Lord will rise from the wilderness. His fountain will dry up; his spring will parch; his enemy will plunder all of his treasures. Shomron will be held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God; she will fall by the sword, her young smashed to pieces, her women with child ripped apart. O Israel, return, go back to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled in your own sinfulness. Take words of remorse with you and return to the Lord; say to Him, "Forgive all of our sins; accept our goodness – instead of calves we offer You our words of prayer. Assyria will not save us; no more will we ride upon horses; never again will we say, 'You are our god' to the work of our hands, for only in You will the orphan find mercy." I will mend their rebellion with gracious love, for I have turned My anger away from them. I will be as dew to Israel; he will bloom like a lily and set down roots as deep as the trees of Lebanon. His branches will spread wide; his splendor will be as the olive tree, and his fragrance as the trees of Lebanon. They who return will dwell beneath his shade; they will revive once again as grain and flower like vines; their acclaim will linger as the scent of the wine of Lebanon. Efrayim will say, "What need do I have of these idols?" And I will answer him; I will look after him. I will be as a cypress tree, lush and leafy; you will find in Me your source of fruit. He who is wise will fathom these words; the insightful will grasp them, for the ways of the Lord are just, and the righteous will walk in them, but sinners will stumble over them. (*Hoshea* 11:7-14:10)

You will eat, eat and be sated, and you will praise the name of the Lord, your God, who has done wonders for you, for My nation will never be ashamed. You will know that I am among Israel, and I am the Lord, your God; there is no other. My nation will never be ashamed. (*Yoel* 2:26-27)

In the above passages, I artificially divided the *haftara* into paragraphs to show the difference between the Sephardi and Ashkenazi rites. The Sephardim read only the first two paragraphs (from "My people waver" to "bereft land"), whereas the Ashkenazim read only the second and third paragraphs (from "Yaakov fled" to "stumble over them"), with some adding the last two verses (taken from the book of *Yoel*) in order to end the *haftara* on an optimistic note. "But sinners will stumble over them" is the end of the book of *Hoshea*, so they attached an ending to the *haftara* from a different prophet.

**I. Hoshea Son of Be’eri and His Time**

The language of the prophet Hoshea – both the words themselves and their combination into sentences – is exceedingly difficult. This may be related to the fact, according to *Chazal*, that he came from the tribe of Reuven. *Chazal* (*Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 24) identified Be’eri, the father of Hoshea (*Hoshea* 1:1), with Be’era, prince of the tribe of Reuven, who was exiled with his entire tribe about a generation before the destruction of all of Shomron:

His son Be’era, who was exiled by King Tilegat Pilne'eser of Assyria, was the leader of the Reubenites. (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 5:6)

When we come to the *haftara* for *Shabbat Shuva*, we will deal at length with the deeper meaning of the assertion that Hoshea was from the tribe of Reuven. Here, I will mention only that the tribe of Reuven, a tribe of shepherds, journeyed far to the east in search of pastures for their flocks, and split into factions; each lived in its own isolated place, at a great distance from the rest of the people of Israel, a situation that led to alienation between them (see *Shoftim* 5:15-16). There is room to suggest that the members of the tribe spoke a slightly different language, whose syntax was different from the normal Hebrew syntax, and that this is the reason for the difficulty in understanding the words of the prophet Hoshea.

Hoshea's style is similar in many ways to that of Yirmiyahu. Yirmiyahu was the prophet of destruction of the kingdom of Yehuda and Jerusalem, and Hoshea was the prophet of destruction of the kingdom of Shomron. It is important to emphasize that these prophets were appointed to their respective positions not to *announce* the destruction, but to warn the people about it and try to *prevent* it. This was their primary task, each in his own place – Hoshea in the kingdom of Shomron and Yirmiyahu in Jerusalem.

The prophecy of our *haftara* is found at the end of the book of Hoshea. We can assume, both because of its place in the book and because of its content, that it was delivered in the days of the last king of Shomron, Hoshea son of Ela, in whose days Shomron was destroyed by Sargon, king of Assyria.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**II. The Connection Between the *Parasha* and the *Haftara* – The Primacy of Jerusalem Over Beit El**

The connection between the *parasha* and the *haftara* is clearer according to the Sephardi rite, so we will begin with it:

But also with Yehuda the Lord has a dispute: He will visit upon Yaakov as he deserves, as befits his deeds – He will repay him. In the womb he grasped his brother by the heel, and with all his strength he struggled with God. He struggled with an angel and prevailed; he cried and pleaded with him; in Beit El He found him, and there He spoke to us. (*Hoshea* 12:3-5)

In the words of the prophets, the designation "Yaakov" usually refers to the descendants of Yaakov, the people of Israel. But it seems that here the reference is to Yaakov the patriarch, the individual. The prophet reminds him of his sin: he grasped his brother Esav by the heel in the womb, and later cheated him by taking his birthright (and perhaps his daring to wrestle with God's angel can also be seen as a sin). In any case, the prophet is referring to events of Yaakov's life that are recorded in the *parashot* surrounding our *parasha*, in *Parashat Toldot* and *Parashat Vayishlach*. He sheds some light on the struggle between Yaakov and the angel, and tells us about the angel's plea that Yaakov should release him even without the angel giving him the name "Yisrael." He promises Yaakov that God will grant him this designation in Beit El, as indeed happened:

After Yaakov had returned from Padan Aram God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, "Your name is Yaakov; no longer shall you be called Yaakov; Yisrael shall be your name." Thus He named him Yisrael… Yaakov set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and on it he offered a libation and poured oil. And Yaakov named the place where God had spoken to him Beit El. (*Bereishit* 35:9-15)

As we know from the Torah, Yaakov refused the angel's request and demanded that the angel bless him and grant him a new name already at the ford of Yabok. The blessing and new name from God in Beit El were a repetition.

It seems that the prophet discusses this earlier event as part of his opposition to Beit El and the calf that was erected there (Dan had already been destroyed at the time of this prophecy; only the calf in Beit El remained), and as part of his call to return to Jerusalem, to the Temple that stood in the place God had chosen. He judges Yaakov's action of calling on the name of God in Beit El as a sin, which began already from the time that "he grasped his brother by the heel."

The prophet's approach brings us back to a question that arises from our *parasha*: Why did Yaakov set up a pillar and pour oil on it in Beit El, both before he left the land and after he returned to it, and not on Mount Moria, the place that had become sanctified at the time of the *Akeida*? *Chazal* (*Chullin* 91b) and Rashi answer that Yaakov's Beit El was indeed in the place of Mount Moria. Rashi writes:

And he lighted upon the place – Scripture does not mention which place, but by writing "the place," it refers to the place mentioned already in another passage, viz., Mount Moria, of which it is stated (*Bereishit* 22:4): "And he saw the place afar off."…

The land whereon you lie – The Holy One, blessed be He, rolled together the entire Land of Israel under him, thus intimating to him that it would be easily conquered by his descendants…

They also said (*Pesachim* 88a) "Yaakov gave the name Beit El to Jerusalem"… From where did they learn to say this? I say that Mount Moria was forcibly removed from its locality and came here [to Luz]… the site of the Temple came towards him as far as Beit El.

Rabbi Elazar said in the name of Rabbi Yose son of Zimra: This ladder stood in Be'er Sheva and [the middle of]) its slope reached opposite the Temple. For Be'er Sheva is situated in the south of Yehuda, Jerusalem in the north of it on the boundary between Yehuda and Binyamin, and Beit El in the north of Binyamin's territory, on the border between the land of Binyamin and that of the children of Yosef. It follows, therefore, that a ladder whose foot is in Be'er Sheva and whose top is in Beit El has the middle of its slope reaching opposite Jerusalem. (Rashi, *Bereishit* 28:11-17; based on *Midrash Rabba*)

According to this *midrash*, God actually appeared to Yaakov on Mount Moria, whether because Beit El is Mount Moria itself, or because the entire country was rolled together under Yaakov, or because the ladder whose foot was in Be'er Sheva also towered over Mount Moria. However, according to the plain sense of Scripture, God revealed himself to Yaakov in another place, while for future generations, He chose Mount Moria and not Beit El. Yarovam son of Nevat, who erected the calf in Beit El, knew how to exploit the incident involving Yaakov in Beit El to uproot the great attraction of Jerusalem and transfer it to Beit El. This is what Hoshea is struggling with in our *haftara*, in which he describes the quarrel that God has with Yaakov over this issue.

\*

The Ashkenazim, on the other hand, begin the *haftara* with the verses describing what happened as a result of the quarrel between Yaakov and Esav, which are directly related to our *parasha*:

Yaakov fled to the lands of Aram, and Yisrael labored to acquire a bride; for a bride he kept sheep. (*Hoshea* 12:13)

Here, the prophet goes back to Yaakov's first stay in Beit El, when he left Be'er Sheva as he fled from his brother Esav. This verse is a continuation of the prophet's criticism of Yaakov, who began to build a temple at Beit El with the stone that he set as a pillar and the oath that he took to erect a temple there. It seems to me that the prophet is saying the establishment of the temple in Beit El was Yaakov's last stop in the land of his ancestors, and after laying the foundation for that temple, Yaakov was exiled to slavery in the lands of Aram. The prophet continues to needle Yaakov for the fact that all his arduous work was only for a woman, and for her he kept other people's sheep day and night. This, according to Hoshea, will also be the fate of Shomron, which continues to maintain the temple of Beit El instead of returning to Jerusalem: it will be exiled to the north and subjugated to hard, shameful, and purposeless slavery, at the hands of the Assyrian kingdom.

\*

Here we must return to the historical background of the prophecy. We are working on the assumption that the prophecy in our *haftara* was delivered during the reign of the last king of Shomron, Hoshea son of Ela. *Chazal* teach us that in his day, the guards set up by Yarovam son of Nevat to prevent the residents of Shomron and the Galilee from going to Jerusalem – when he wanted to turn the calves into a religious center in place of the Temple – were cancelled:

Ulla said [regarding the source of the celebration of the 15th of Av]: It is the day on which Hoshea son of Ela removed the guards which Yarovam son of Nevat had placed on the roads to prevent Israel from going [up to Jerusalem] on pilgrimage, and he proclaimed: Let them go up to whichever shrine they desire. (*Ta'anit* 30b; *Bava Batra* 121b)[[2]](#footnote-2)

In my understanding, the source of this statement lies in the verses that describe the day of Passover on which Chizkiyahu made a covenant with the people to return to God. People from the northern tribes participated in the making of this covenant in Jerusalem, and it took place in the third year of Hoshea son of Ela:

So they issued a proclamation to spread the word throughout Israel from Be’er Sheva to Dan to come and celebrate Passover before the Lord, God of Israel, in Jerusalem, for they had rarely kept it as prescribed. The couriers set out all over Israel and Yehuda with letters from the king and his officials proclaiming the royal decree: "Israelites, come back to the Lord, God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisrael, and He will come back to the remnant of you who escaped from the hands of the kings of Assyria. Do not be like your fathers and brothers who broke faith with the Lord, God of their ancestors – He gave them up to desolation as you can see. Now – do not stiffen your necks like your fathers; yield to the Lord and come to His Sanctuary, which He has sanctified forever. Serve the Lord your God, and His fierce wrath will turn away from you. If you come back to the Lord, your brothers' and children's captors will show them mercy, and they will come back to this land, for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and He will not turn His face away from you if you come back to Him." As the couriers passed from city to city in the land of Efrayim and Menashe and up to Zevulun, they were ridiculed and mocked. Yet some people from Asher, Menashe, and Zevulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 30:5-11)

(I am not convinced by the praise heaped upon Hoshea son of Ela for cancelling the guards. I get the impression that his kingdom was so poor and so reckless that he was unable to maintain the guards, and this was the reason for their cancellation.)

These verses show there were members of the tribes that comprised the kingdom of Israel who came to Jerusalem and the Temple, though many of the tribes of the kingdom of Israel mocked the covenant made in Jerusalem and continued to prefer the calf in Beit El. It is possible that that they are the target of our *haftara*, which emphasizes the sin of the calf found in Beit El and sees its roots, as stated, already in Yaakov, who chose Beit El instead of Mount Moria as a place to establish the house of God.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Later, the prophet speaks mockingly of the calf:

When Efrayim spoke, they trembled in fear; he was esteemed in Israel, but when found guilty of worshipping Baal, he was as dead. Now their sinning goes on and on; they cast graven images from their silver, mold idols as they understood, each entirely the craft of men; of them they say, "Men who offer sacrifices must kiss calves." (*Hoshea* 13:1-2)

He is referring here to even worse days in the kingdom of Efrayim – the days of Achav, when the people worshipped the Canaanite *Baalim*, and the days of Pekach son of Remalyahu, in whose days the people also worshipped the *Baalim*. Now things are better, and the people "only" worship the calf, offering thanks thereby to God who brought them out of Egypt.[[4]](#footnote-4) The worshippers of Baal sacrificed humans, and especially children, to a Canaanite deity, and now converted the slaughter of humans into kisses and unreserved love for the calves.[[5]](#footnote-5)

\*

The decisive point in the prophecy, as I understand it, is the following parallelism:[[6]](#footnote-6)

Yaakov fled to the lands of Aram, and Yisrael labored to acquire a bride; for a bride he kept sheep.

With a prophet the Lord brought Israel up out of Egypt, and with a prophet He kept watch over us.

The prophet compares Yaakov, who fled to the place of his exile (and from there went down to Egypt, as mentioned in the passage recited when bringing one’s first-fruits to the Temple – *Devarim* 26:5), to Moshe, through whom God took Israel out of Egypt and who, together with the prophets who came after him, worked to ensure that Israel would remain faithful to their God. Yaakov chose Beit El prior to his exile, but God, through His prophets, changed this choice and chose Jerusalem. That is to say: conservatism and yearnings for the days of our ancestors are not necessarily correct. The will of God acting in history is dynamic and may change, and He will bring His new will to the ears of the people through his prophets, from Moshe to the last of the prophets. That is why one must leave Beit El and go to Jerusalem following the great religious revolution initiated by Chizkiyahu.

The prophet also emphasizes this point in additional verses:

I am the Lord your God from the time you were in the land of Egypt; once more I will settle you safely in tents as in days of old. I have spoken by way of the prophets; I endowed them with many visions, and through images I communicated with the prophets. (*Hoshea* 12:10-11)

We discussed at length the connection between the *parasha* and the *haftara*, and now we will briefly touch upon a few additional points in the *haftara*.

**III. A Father’s Love for His Son**

How can I relinquish you, Efrayim; hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Adma and treat you like Tzevoyim? My heart has turned upon Me; My compassion has been kindled. No, I will not unleash My burning wrath, I will not turn again to destroy Efrayim – for I am God, I am not a man; within you, My holiness dwells; I will not enter the city with hatred. (*Hoshea* 11:8-9)

This is one of the warmest and most heart-wrenching expressions, in all the books of prophecy, of God's love for the people of Israel – and here, for Efrayim, that is to say, the ten tribes that separated themselves from Jerusalem. God is not portrayed here as a king and commander, but with the bold image, "in the language of man," of a father who is unable to punish his son and exact an appropriate measure of justice on him because His heart has “turned upon” Him.

I mentioned above the similar styles of the two prophets of destruction – Hoshea in Beit El and Shomron, and Yirmiyahu generations later in Jerusalem, just before the destruction. Yirmiyahu, in a prophecy about the return of the ten tribes in the days of Yoshiyahu, adopted a similar style towards Efrayim:

This is what the Lord said: A sound is heard in Rama: wailing, bitter weeping. It is Rachel, weeping for her children. She refuses to be consoled for her children, for they are gone. (*Yirmiyahu* 31:14)

Is Efrayim not a precious son to me, a delightful child? Whenever I speak of him I remember him all the more. Therefore I long for him inwardly. I will show him great compassion, declares the Lord. (*Yirmiyahu* 31:19)

Both Hoshea and Yirmiyahu mention Efrayim, who was the chief tribe of the ten tribes that separated from Yehuda. The turning of the heart and the inward longing are reminiscent of Yaakov's weeping and longing for his son Yosef, Efrayim's father, as well as the weeping of Rachel, Yosef's mother.

Why were such human expressions of God's pain not mentioned in connection with the destruction of the kingdom of Yehuda?

Perhaps because Yehuda's exile and destruction, despite all the hardships involved, left a chance to return to their land after seventy years, as Yirmiyahu foretold (*Yirmiyahu* 29:10). Yehuda went into exile as a nation and as a community, primarily in the days of Yehoyakhin, and remained as a nation to a certain degree even outside its land, with the knowledge of when they would return. The kingdom of Shomron, on the other hand, was exiled to many different cities and districts. Their consciousness as the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, with the attendant commitment to the Torah of God who brought them out of Egypt, was low, and they were not told when they would return. They became, as Yechezkel prophesied (37), "dry bones" scattered over an entire valley. Exile was seen as a complete cancellation of their existence as a people. The pain expressed by the prophet in our *haftara* over their expected destruction is unbearable, and it reminds us of Yaakov's thoughts when he thought he had lost Yosef – "Yosef has been torn limb from limb."

**IV. “Day and Night He Increases Lies and Ruin; He Makes Pacts with Assyria”**

In his harsh rebuke against worship of the calves and against idolatry, the prophet mentions two other iniquities:

Efrayim besieges Me with lies, the House of Israel with deception…

Day and night he increases lies and ruin; he makes pacts with Assyria and to Egypt bears oil. (*Hoshea* 12:1-2)

Still the merchant possesses false scales; he loves to exploit. Efrayim exclaims, "I have become wealthy; I have found fortune from my own labors; in all the fruits of my toil they will find neither sin nor iniquity." (Ibid. 8)

Lying, exploitation, and injustice are included among the sins that led to the destruction of the Temple. It seems that after Hoshea son of Ela conspired against Pekach son of Remalyahu and killed him, the tribes of Israel went for a long time without a kingdom or authority. Hoshea son of Ela came to power years later, not immediately after the end of the reign of Pekach son of Remalyahu. These days are described by the prophet Hoshea son of Be'eri as "the days of the Giva" (9:9; 10:9), like the sin involving the concubine in the Giva; this connection attests on the one hand to boundless lawlessness, and on the other hand, to an internal battle, where everyone sees only their own individual motives.

The prophet compares the deception with which the people relate to their covenant with God to the deception with which the rich relate to their less fortunate brothers.

The second sin mentioned in these verses is the alliance with So, king of Egypt, as well as the alliance with the kings of Assyria. These two alliances stood in opposition, as Egypt and Assyria were hostile to each other and competed for hegemony throughout the region. On the eve of its destruction, the kingdom of Israel engaged in diplomatic acrobatics and suffered from a lack of political uniformity regarding the question of which of the two powers (both of which were absolutely negative in the eyes of the prophet) to turn to, and this sin also brought Shomron down, never to rise again:

But when the king of Assyria discovered that Hoshea had betrayed him by sending envoys to So, king of Egypt, and by failing to pay his annual tribute to the king of Assyria, he had him seized and thrown into prison. (II *Melakhim* 17:4)

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Two questions can be raised concerning this assumption:

a. The opening verse of the book states: "This is the word of the Lord which came to Hoshea son of Be’eri in the days of Uziya, Yotam, Achaz, and Yechizkiya, kings of Yehuda, and in the days of Yarovam son of Yoash, king of Israel." There is no mention here that Hoshea son of Be'eri prophesied in the days of Hoshea son of Ela, the last king of Israel, or in the days of the kings that preceded him.

My answer to this is that the destruction of Shomron took place at the beginning of the days of Chizkiyahu king of Yehuda, and as stated above, the prophet Hoshea prophesied in his days. The days of Yarovam son of Yoash correspond only to the first part of the days of Uziya, and later, during the reigns of Uziya, Yotam, Achaz, and Chizkiyahu, the kings in Shomron were Zekharya, Pekachya, Pekach, and Hoshea son of Ela. It seems that the fact that they are not listed in the heading of the prophecy is connected to the words of Hoshea: "They have crowned kings without My sanction, appointed princes without My say" (*Hoshea* 8:4) – the prophet does not recognize their kingship because most of them murdered their predecessors and took control of the kingdom by force.

b. *Chazal* (*Bereishit Rabba Vayeshev* 84) said about Reuven, who repented for his sin with Bilha: "You opened with repentance, and [as a reward] I swear that your grandson will stand and open with repentance. Who is this? Hoshea, as it is stated: 'O Israel, return, go back to the Lord, your God.'" This seems to imply that the prophecy of "O Israel, return" in our *haftara* was Hoshea's first prophecy. But my opinion is that this is Hoshea's final prophecy, and that it was delivered in the days of Hoshea son of Ela. (I will address this issue in greater detail when we come to the *haftara* for *Shabbat Shuva*, and the verses of "Return, O Israel.") [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The *baraita* in *Seder Olam* 22 connects this to the fact that he is the only king of Israel about whom it is stated: "He did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord, though not to the extent of the kings of Israel who preceded him" (II *Melakhim* 17:2). The Jerusalem Talmud (*Ta'anit* 4:7) asks why the destruction came specifically during his reign, and offers an answer, which we will not discuss here. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I would like to clarify my position on this sensitive point: As stated above, *Chazal* in their *midrashim* made every effort to connect Yaakov's Beit El to Mount Moria. Even if we see Beit El as a place separate from Jerusalem, it may be assumed that Yaakov was not familiar with Mount Moria and that he did not have a tradition from his ancestors regarding its location; therefore, establishing a house of God in Beit El would have seemed to him the right thing to do.

[In my book, *Ki Karov Eilekha* (Israel 2014, p. 228), I wrote that the city of Beit El, which had previously been called Luz, was located in the area of Shilo, and there indeed the *Mishkan* stood for hundreds of years. At a later point, God chose Jerusalem and Mount Moria, as I have explained.] [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See *Kuzari*, IV, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Rashi’s commentary on *Hoshea* 13:2 for an alternate reading to that in the translation presented above. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I learned this point from my revered teacher, Rav Yoel Bin Nun. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)