YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE:**

**THE PROPHECIES OF HOSHEA AND AMOS**

**By Rav Yitzchak Etshalom**

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In loving memory of Rabbi Dr. Barrett (Chaim Dov) Broyde zt”l

הוֹלֵךְ תָּמִים וּפֹעֵל צֶדֶק וְדֹבֵר אֱמֶת בִּלְבָבוֹ

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**Shiur #28:**

**The Prophecies of Amos: "The Hearken Sequence"**

In [last week's *shiur*](https://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-27-prophecies-amos-hearken-sequence), we completed our analysis of the introductory section to the "Hearken" oracles, which we dubbed "the inevitability of prophecy,” which served two purposes (at least). First of all, following the pattern from the first oracle-sequence in the book, it likely put the audience on edge, anticipating a threatening rebuke to follow. Secondly, it served to justify Amos's mission and role — a justification which will take on a different hue in the brief biographic note of Chapter 7.

Over the next few *shiurim* we will analyze the first of the *shimu* ("hearken") oracles, which occupies the remainder of Chapter 3. Indeed, the division of chapters in the *Tanakh* is neither inherent in the text nor of Jewish provenance. Nonetheless, in the case of this sequence, the division is an accurate one, and we will defend it further on.

In this *shiur*, we will analyze line-by-line the opening two verses of the oracle which comprise a *parasha petucha* – an "open paragraph,” Masoretically distinguished from what follows with a full line break, with verse 11 beginning on a new line (as represented below). For purposes of context, we will begin by presenting the entire segment, the rest of which will be studied in the next few *shiurim*.

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THE TEXT: 3:9-15

**Proclaim (*hashmiu)* it upon the palaces in Ashdod, and upon the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say: "Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Shomeron, and behold the great confusions therein, and the oppressions in the midst thereof.****" For they know not to do right, says the Lord, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.**

Therefore thus says the Lord God: An adversary, even round about the land! And he shall bring down your strength from you, and your palaces shall be spoiled. Thus says the Lord: As the shepherd rescues out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel that dwell in Shomeron escape with the corner of a couch, and the leg of a bed. Hear you (*shimu)*, and testify against the house of Yaakov, says the Lord God, the God of hosts. For in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him, I will also punish the altars of Beit El, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. And I will smite the winter-house with the summer-house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, says the Lord.

SECTION A: INDICTMENT (vv. 9-10)

As seen from the Masoretic division (and noted above), there is a *parasha petucha* after v. 10, indicating a significant break. Contextually, these two verses comprise an indictment of Shomeron and the rest of the chapter is the threatened punishment that awaits them.

THE TEXT:

9a:

*Hashmiu*

Proclaim it

*al armenot be-Ashdod ve-al armenot be-eretz Mitzrayim*

upon the palaces of Ashdod and upon the palaces of the Land of Egypt

Note that in reproducing the transliteration/ translation, I set off the first word *hashmiu* on a separate line. This has much to do with one of the common mechanisms of parallelism known as "gapping".

PARALLELISM AND "GAPPING"

As noted in earlier *shiurim*, a staple of biblical poetry is *tikbolet —* parallelism. Prophetic presentations are poetic; hence we can usually discern *tikbolet* in their oracular declarations.

When we have a "synonymous parallel" — i.e. when the two parts of the verse essentially say the same thing — there is often an element missing from one of the hemistichs which is assumed from the other.

For example, in *Tehillim* 92:2, we find:

*Tov le-hodot la-Shem ul-zamer le-shimkha elyon.*

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing to Your exalted name.

This phrase is divided along its hemistichs as follows:

*Tov le-hodot la-Shem ul-zamer le-shimkha elyon*

Here, *le-hodot* is parallel in sense to *ul-zamer* and *la-Shem* is parallel to *le-shimkha elyon.*

Note, however, that the adjective which defines the entire verse — *tov —* has no parallel in the second half. The reason for this is rooted in the essential *schema* of biblical poetry; it is not built on rhyming schemes, rather on meter. In order to preserve the symmetry of the two halves (eight counts each), the word *tov* (or its synonym) has to be dropped from the second half. That is acceptable, as the word is forward gapped and assumed in the second half. It is as if the verse read:

*Tov le-hodot la-Shem, ve-na'im* (pleasant :: good) *le-zamer le-shimkha elyon*.

Another well-known example of forward gapping is in Yehoshua's call to the sun and moon:

*Shemesh be-Givon dom ve-yare’ach be-emek Ayalon.*

Let the sun stand still in Givon and the moon in the valley of Ayalon.

The command *"dom"* (stand still) isn't represented in the second half, but it is assumed; to wit: Let the sun stand still in Givon and let the moon (stand still) in the valley of Ayalon.

Parenthetically, this phenomenon exists over multiple verses. For instance, *Tehillim* 24 includes the lines:

3. Who will go up to the mountain of the Lord and who will stand in His holy place? (question)

4. He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not sworn in vain nor taken an oath deceitfully. (answer)

5. (?) shall receive a blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation (question? answer? declaration?)

6. This is the generation of those who seek Him, those who search for your face, Yaakov (?)

Dr. Yechiel Bin-Nun explains the last two verses and places them neatly within the broader scheme of the poetry by identifying a case of multi-verse forward gapping. He reads the question "who" as being assumed in v. 5. In other words, read these four verses as follows:

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| --- | --- |
|  | 3. **Who** will go up to the mountain of the Lord and who will stand in His holy place? (question) |
| 4. He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not sworn in vain nor taken an oath deceitfully. (answer)  |
| 5. [Who] shall receive a blessing from the Lord and [who shall receive] righteousness from the God of his salvation? (question)  |
|  | 6. The generation of those who seek Him, those who search for your face, Yaakov (answer) |

By reading forward gapping across two verses, Bin-Nun resolves the lack of clarity in the call-and-response of verses 5 and 6 as well as clarifying the structure of this middle section of the psalm.

BACK TO OUR TEXT

Following the above discussion, the word *hashmiu* is now read as part of each hemistich of 9a:

*Hashmiu al armenot be-Ashdod*

Proclaim it upon the palaces of Ashdod

*Ve-[hashmiu] al armenot be-eretz Mitzrayim*

and [proclaim it] upon the palaces of the land of Egypt

Before moving to the second half of the verse, we immediately notice what seems like an incongruous pairing: Ashdod (one of the chief Philistine cities) and Egypt. Throughout *Tanakh*, Egypt is often — nearly always — presented as the great foreign power to the south and, when paired with another power, the current Mesopotamian empire (Assyrian, Babylonia) is usually the one mentioned. For instance, Yeshayahu prophesizes:

And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great shofar shall be blown; and they shall come that were lost in the land of Assyria, and they that were dispersed in the land of Egypt; and they shall worship the Lord at the holy mountain in Jerusalem. (27:13)

Or:

In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians shall worship with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; for that the Lord of Hosts has blessed him, saying: “Blessed be Egypt My people and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.” (19:23-25)

Indeed, this pairing is so customary that the Septuagint renders our phrase as:

Proclaim it upon the palaces of Assyria

[ς](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CF%82) and upon the palaces of the land of Egypt.

This is, however, an unlikely candidate for a proper "correction." First of all, Assyria is going through a turbulent period during Amos’s career and is not a player on the world stage — although, soon afterwards, they rise again and conquer Shomeron. The best evidence of this is that Ashur does not appear in Amos’s opening set of oracles against the nations.

Secondly, following the text-criticism principle of *lectio difficilior potior* (Latin – "the more difficult reading is the stronger”), when manuscripts conflict, we usually prefer the **less likely** reading (why would a scribe deliberately or inadvertently change an expected reading to an unusual one?). Thus, Ashdod is the preferred reading, as our Masoretic text has it.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Amos is summoning the princes of Philistia and Egypt, of the reigning nations to the south. For what purpose is he summoning them?

…and say: "Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Shomeron, and behold the great confusions therein, and the oppressions in the midst thereof."

He is summoning them to come and testify about the sins of the northern kingdom of Shomeron. We would assume that this is not meant as a literal invitation to the enemies and that they are never summoned; it is a rhetorical device by which Amos shames his audience into realizing how widespread and overt their corruption has become. That he is not "really" summoning them, just as he doesn't speak to the various nations in the oracles of the first two chapters, is borne out by the location of his mission — he is in Shomeron — and by the fact that they would have no reason to respond to his invitation. It also stands to reason that he would not, in reality, wish to invite the enemies to see the social and moral decay of their Samarian foes; since it is ultimately their repentance and consequent salvation that he wishes to catalyze, he wouldn't be likely to do something to enable the enemy.

THE TEXT: 9B

The second part of the verse serves as a bridge between the opening parallel, outlined above; and the closing parallel, which is of a different type.

Before moving ahead, it is instructive to look at the rhetorical flairs used by Amos to drive the point home to his Samarian audience. He states:

*Ve-imru:*

And say:

But to whom are these words addressed? In other words, who is supposed to say to the Philistine and Egyptian neighbors that they should come and attest to the social rot that has infested Samarian society? It seems that Amos is challenging his audience to call them. As argued above in our analysis of the first phrase in this verse, this call is not to be taken literally; Amos does not expect (nor likely wish) his Samaritan audience to reach out to their neighboring enemies to come and testify about their society; it is a brilliant and ironic twist used to make his audience face up to their own failings.

*He'asefu al harei Shomeron*

**Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Shomeron**

Does he mean for them to come to Shomeron itself? That doesn't seem to be the thrust of the text; rather, he seems to be urging them to invite the residents of the palaces in Ashdod and Egypt to assemble on the mountains **surrounding** Shomeron, to gather around the city from a distance and witness the goings-on inside. This is similar to the usage of *harei Shomeron* in *Yirmeyahu* 31:4, meaning "the mountains surrounding Shomeron." Note that the Septuagint reads "mountain of Shomeron" (instead of "mountain**s**"), likely influenced by the use of *har Shomeron* later on in *Amos* (4:1, 6:1). Note that besides the aforementioned *harei Shomeron* in *Yirmeyahu* and the original naming of the mountain by Omri (I *Melakhim* 16:24), Amos is the only book in which "the mountain(s) of Shomeron" are mentioned — and at that, thrice (twice as *Har Shomeron*, and in our case *Harei Shomeron*).

This leads us to the third clause in the verse.

THE TEXT: 9C

Here again we have a parallelism, but this is a different type than the one found in the first half. It is *tikbolet mashlima,* synthetic parallelism, in which the second half of the parallelism completes (*mashlima)* the parallelism by explaining the first half. Note that once again, forward gapping is used to assume the verb *reu* (see) in the second half:

*U-reu*

And see (attest to)

*Mehumot rabot va-ashukim*

Great confusions and oppressed (people)

*be-tokhah be-kirbah*

in her midst in her midst[[2]](#footnote-2)

We understand that the nations are being "summoned" to stand around on the mountains surrounding Shomeron to testify to the great confusions happening in the midst of the city — and those *mehumot* are the result of the oppression practiced there, presumably by the elite against the lower classes.

The word used here for "confusion" — *mehuma —* appears numerous times in *Tanakh*, always in the context of military defeat. For instance, God promises that when He brings us into the Land:

*Vehamam mehuma gedola ad hishamedam*.

He will cause them great tumult until they are destroyed. (*Devarim* 7:23)

When Yonatan's surprise attack sets the Philistine camp into confusion (*I Shemuel* 14), the text records *“Ve-hinei hayeta cherev ish be-rei’eihu mehuma gedola meod,” “*Behold, every man's sword was used against his fellow, a very great tumult” (ibid. v. 20) — i.e. the Philistines are killing each other due to the great confusion in the camp.

Similarly, when God attacks the Philistines while they are holding on to the Holy Ark (*I Shemuel* 5), the result is described as a great *mehuma* (v. 9). This is followed with the details of the plague, just as the *mehuma* in the Philistine camp in Chapter 14 is explicated as one man's sword used against his fellow. In other words, a *mehuma* is an **unspecified** tumult, and the verse will often clarify the nature of the unrest.

Our verse follows this pattern. After presenting the view (“see the great tumult in her midst"), the second hemistich clarifies the specific type of unrest – "[see] the oppressions in her midst" — hence, *tikbolet mashlima.*

We have finally arrived at the first critical point-of-information in this oracle. We have heard Amos's justification for *nevua,* what we called "the inevitability of prophecy,” as well as his call to the Shomeron elite to invite their neighbors to testify. Now we see where this is all leading. Amos is again, as he did in the first set of oracles, pointing to the oppression of the poor in the Israelite society.

The word *ashuk* is used here to describe the various oppressive acts suffered by the downtrodden. Even though the form of the word suggests that it be read as a passive verbal form, "those who are oppressed,” it is clear from *Kohelet* 4:1 that it ought to be read as "acts of oppression."

*Ashak* first appears in *Vayikra* 5, listed with theft, bails and other debts. From the context, it seems to be either ill-gotten gains or else money owed another. Based on context here and in *Vayikra* 19:13, which orders *“Lo ta’ashok et rei’akha*,” most commentators understand the prohibition to be one of holding back owed moneys, e.g. not paying wages in a timely fashion.[[3]](#footnote-3) This fits with the picture drawn in Amos's first oracle, of a society which abuses the poor and in which the disadvantaged get no relief from the justice system; rather, the governing bodies enable the system or even benefit from it.

Verse 10 completes the indictment of the city.

THE TEXT

*Ve-lo yade’u la-asot nekhocha*

And they do not know how to act uprightly

*Ne'um Hashem*

Says the Lord

*Ha-otzerim chamas va-shod be-armenoteihem*

Those who amass violence (?) and theft in their palaces.

The opening clause of this verse seems to simultaneously operate as a backhanded defense of the people and a great indictment of their behavior. On the one hand, if they no longer know how to behave uprightly, their culpability must surely be diminished. On the other hand, that might imply even greater guilt. To have slipped to a level of unethical depravity at which doing the right thing is no longer on the people's radar surely must carry its own weight of sin, above (or perhaps "below") and beyond the criminal acts of violence. How is the audience intended to hear this line? That may very well depend on the ears of the listener; one who is attuned to *Musar* will hear the deeper crime; one waiting to hear some relief from the prophet will likely latch on to the "lenient” reading.

The invocation of God's name mid-verse seems to signal an end to one rhetorical section; perhaps even signal a pause coming (at the end of the verse). This may give the people a chance to reflect on what Amos has said and perhaps build up some expectation (terror?) about what is to come next.

The final clause uses *chamas* as it is used in many places in *Tanakh —* not describing violence per se (as it is meant in its first appearance in *Bereishit* 6), rather, as the resultant illicit or immoral gains from said violence. This is how it is used famously in *Yona* 3:8: “Let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the *chamas* that is in their hands.” The parallel *shod*, literally meaning "plunder" militates in favor of this reading.

Note that the words *shod* and *otzerim* work alliteratively with Ashdod and Mitzrayim, respectively, arguing again for the MT's read of Ashdod in v. 9 (as opposed to Ashur as in LXX).

In next week's *shiur*, we will begin to analyze the punishment to be meted out to Shomeron for this oppression, all of which is being attested to (as it were) by her Philistine and Egyptian neighbors.

**For Further Study:**

Yechiel Bin-Nun, *Eretz Ha-Moriya; Pirkei Mikra Ve-lashon* [Heb.], *Tevunot* (Alon Shevut: 2005), pp. 117-140.

1. See the end of this lecture for another argument in favor of the received reading of Ashdod [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Be-kirbah* is synonymous with *be-tokhah*; "in her midst" is the most accurate translation for each. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Shadal's proposal for the meaning of the root in *Vayikra* 19:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)