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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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable z”l and

Ambassador Yehuda Avner z”l

By Debbi and David Sable

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**Shiur #58:**

**The Prophecies of Amos:**

**Rebuke of the Smug of Shomron**

**Part III**

In the two previous *shiurim*, we studied the first oracle in the 6th chapter of *Amos*. This oracle is made up of 7 verses – or, more accurately, the segment of the oracle which sets up the anticipated punishment is made up of a septad. We focused on the text and the use of unusual words (e.g. *hoi*, *sha’anan*, *menadim, marbek, mirzach*) and attempted to establish the identity of the equivocal referents of the speech.

In this *shiur*, we will take a broader look at the section, proposing a solution to its structure and, ultimately, its message.

***Hoi***

The introductory word, *hoi*, which we addressed in the first *shiur*, appears in numerous places in the prophetic canon (it is most popular in *Yeshayahu*). When used with the dirge-introduction meaning (as opposed to the mourning call; see [*shiur* #56](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-56-prophecies-amos-rebuke-%E2%80%9Csmug-shomron%E2%80%9D-part-i)), it follows a recognizable pattern. All of the verbs following the introductory word are participles with the definite article, and that in the plural. This is true throughout the central *hoi*-prophecy in *Yeshayahu* 5 and will help us identify the boundaries of the rebuke here.

Thus, *hoi* is followed by *ha-sha’ananim* (v1)*, ha-botechim* (v1)*, ha-menadim* (v4)*, ha-shokhevim* (v5)*, ha-shotim* (v6). A few other participles without the definite article, appear – *seruchim, okhelim.*

Compare with *Yeshayahu* 5:

*Hoi magi’ei bayit be-vayit…*(v8)

*Hoi mashkimei ba-boker…me-acharei* (v11)

*Hoi moshkhei ha-avon…*(v18)

*…ha-omrim* (v 19)

*Hoi ha-omrim la-ra tov…samim choshekh…samim mar le-matok* (v20)

I would like to suggest that the thinking behind this rhetorical strategy is to address an audience without directly speaking to them. In other words, it is as if *Amos* is standing there, speaking, as it were, to himself, musing how bad it will be for those who… but he makes sure to let the target audience “eavesdrop” on his words. This is not an unheard-of ploy and may be divinely inspired, as it seems to be the pedagogic strategy directed by the Torah in the case of the “rebellious son” of *Shemot* 12:26-27. Note that when he asks/challenges: “What is this worship to *you*”!(?), the father is told to declare (but not *elav* or *le-vinkha*) that it is “a Passover offering that God passed over our houses in Egypt when he afflicted Egypt and saved our houses.” We make this declaration as it were to no one in particular, but make sure that that son hears it clearly. In much the same way, the prophet is speaking as if to himself, observing unseemly things about his audience – but making such observations aloud and ensuring that they hear each one.

**The Structure**

It is almost an instinctive move for us to see a septad as fundamentally chiastic. Let’s see if this structural scheme bears out here. We will place the word *hoi* above the structure, as if a defining superscription for the entire rebuke.

*Hoi*

A: (1) …to them that are at ease in Zion,

And to them that are secure in the mountain of Samaria,

The notable men of the first of the nations,

To whom the house of Israel come!

B: (2) Pass unto Calneh, and see,

And from thence go to Chammat the great;

Then go down to Gat of the Philistines;

Are they better than these kingdoms?

Or is their border greater than your border?

C: (3) You that put far away the evil day,

And cause the seat of violence to come near;

X: (4) That lie upon beds of ivory,

And stretch themselves upon their couches,

And eat the lambs out of the flock,

And the calves out of the midst of the stall;

C1: (5) That thrum on the psaltery,

That devise for themselves instruments of music, like David;

B1: (6) That drink wine in bowls,

And anoint themselves with the chief ointments;

But they are not grieved for the hurt of Yosef.

A1: (7) Therefore now shall they go captive

at the head of them that go captive,

And the revelry of them that stretched themselves

shall pass away.

**Discussion**

In the “A” sections (vv. 1, 7), the inverted relationship is quite overt. Whereas in “A” (v. 1), the people of Shomron have their smug attitude bolstered by the heads of the nation coming to them, in “A1,” they will be the leaders – at the forefront of the exile. The relaxed contentment of those who “stretch out” (a nod to the “X” fulcrum of the chiasmus) will be replaced by the tumult and upset of displacement and loss of sovereignty.

In the “B” sections, in what appears to be a “parallel” (instead of an inversion), the “visits” to the neighboring kingdoms and seeing how much greater Shomron is than they are is offset by the rich wines and oils that the wealthy of Shomron are imbibing and anointing. We might suggest that the choice of those specific north(east)ern and south(west)ern towns is deliberate here. Much as wine is praised in *Tanakh*, it is sometimes used as a metaphor for punishment – and then it is called a “hot cup of punishment,” *kos ha-tar’elah…kos ha-mateh* (*Yeshaya* 51:22). Perhaps the unexpected invocation of Chammah hints to the “hot cup of wine.” A “Gat,” which is a wine-press, further associates with the wine imbibed by the Shomroni aristocracy. In some cases, a wine-press could be used to press olives – thus, the anointed oil is also included in this hint.

Regarding the “C” passages: In our earlier discussion, we determined (based, partially, on the use of the plural participle *ha-menadim*) that the subjects of v. 3 are the Jews of Samaria themselves. How would they “put off” the day of evil? Possibly (and most likely) by feigning not to recognize the signs (and prophecies) that indicated the coming days of reckoning; this could have been the function of the instruments and singing, imagining themselves to be like David, whose period of musical composition seems to have coincided (no surprise here) with the period of tranquility after the kingdom was secured and his enemies were “put to rest” around him (*Shmuel II* 7:1). Unlike David’s reality, where the music and musicianship reflected a truly pacific period, here, the “seat of violence” was nearing and encroaching, but its ugly roar was drowned out by the faux psaltery.

The “X” fulcrum speaks to the heart of this rebuke. Amos lays out four descriptions of the hedonism of the wealthy, presented in two clear couplets.

In the first, he caustically describes the fancy couches that they lie upon – alluding to the foreign trade (ivory) that has brought them this wealth (connecting again to “B” and the neighboring countries) and to the smug arrogance that has overtaken the aristocracy, “stretched out” on their beds. The second couplet relates to the gourmandizing of these self-satisfied hedonists, taking from the fattest of the flock and the choicest of the herd. These four clauses serve as the centerpiece of the rebuke, as it is the most egregious and obvious image of the smug self-aggrandizement that has infected the Northern Kingdom and which will ultimately be their undoing.

**The Interconnected Web**

Although our first (as noted, instinctive) proposal was to see these seven verses as a chiasmus, there are other, more intricate and less obvious structural considerations that may speak to Amos’s deeper message here. We have sketched a few of these connections in the discussion above; we will address them more formally and comprehensively at this point.

Keep in mind what Amos represents and his anthemic introduction to his prophecies:

*Va-yomar:*

*Hashem mi-Tziyon yishag u-miYerushalayim yitein kolo*

*Ve-avlu ne’ot ha-ro’im ve-yavesh rosh haKarmel*

And he would say:

The Lord roars from Tziyyon and from Yerushalayim sends forth His voice,

And the pastures of the shepherds will wither

And the top of the Carmel will become sere

Amos is an agent of God, but he represents the Judean kingdom, from which the Samarian monarchy separated nearly two centuries earlier. All those years earlier, the Northern Kingdom was envisioned, empowered, and mandated as a “temporary” corrective to the sins of the Davidic line (i.e. Shlomo’s foreign wives, engagement with idolatry):

(30) And Achiya laid hold of the new garment that was on him and rent it in twelve pieces. (31) And he said to Yerovam: “Take ten pieces; for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Shlomo and will give ten tribes to you. (32) But he shall have one tribe, for My servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel. (33) Because that they have forsaken Me and have worshipped Ashtoret the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon; and they have not walked in My ways, to do that which is right in My eyes, and to keep My statutes and My ordinances, as did David his father. (34) However, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand; but I will make him prince all the days of his life, for David My servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept My commandments and My statutes. (35) But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto you, even ten tribes. (36) And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David My servant may have a lamp always before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen for Myself to put My name there. (37) And I will take you, and you shalt reign over all that your soul desires and shall be king over Israel. (38) And it shall be, if you will hearken unto all that I command you and will walk in My ways and do that which is right in My eyes, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as David My servant did, that I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto you. (39) And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever.(*Va-aneh et zera David,* ***akh lo khol ha-yamim.***)

(*Melakhim* *I* 11:30-39)

With Yerovam’s establishment of the two sanctuaries at Beit-El and Dan, a more permanent sense of independence had set in. By the time Achav institutionalized Baal-worship, the die was cast and Shomron was, from the perspective of the Jerusalem center, a closely related but foreign state. From the viewpoint of the prophet, however, it was a renegade Jewish monarchy, which had veered sharply off course not only by dint of its engagement in *avoda zara*, but in its very separation and divorce from the Jerusalem center. Amos is not only there to rebuke the Shomroni aristocracy regarding their abuse of the justice system, their oppression of the poor and disenfranchised – but also about their very sense of independence and disassociation from the *Mikdash* in Yerushalayim.

As such, Amos uses several *Mikdash*-referents here to bring the message home.

First of all, he refers to the assemblage as *sha’ananim be****Tziyon***, a sardonic allusion to their sense of “being at home.” In that same verse, he makes mention of “*Bnei Yisrael* coming to them” – almost a mocking caricature of a pilgrimage festival. In the third verse, when complaining about their allowing/enabling violence, he uses the unexpected verb *va-tagishun*, a word associated with offerings (e.g. *Vayikra* 2:8, 8:14, 21:21, 21:23). The fourth verse identifies *karim* and *eglei marbek*, both choice animals ideally used for offerings (see *Devarim* 32:14; *Shmuel I* 15:9).

Perhaps the most overt slap comes in verse 5, where they are accused of having the temerity to compare themselves to David, playing on their instruments – a clear rebuke to their separation from the *Mikdash* and the Davidic line.

Finally, in verse 6, the use of *mizrekei yayin*, as well as the mention of *reishit shemanim*, as pointed out in the previous *shiur*, is clearly pointed to the worship in the *Mikdash*.

In sum, the kingdom that has voluntarily exiled itself from its true home and that has generated weak imitations of life there will now be forcefully exiled from their adopted center – and this is the situation in which they will truly find themselves at the head, *be-rosh golim*.

In next week’s *shiur*, we will analyze the next four verses, which comprise God’s oath in response to the observations made in this *hoi-*dirge.