YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

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**BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE:**

**THE PROPHECIES OF HOSHEA AND AMOS**

**By Rav Yitzchak Etshalom**

**Shiur #64:**

**The Prophecies of Amos:**

**THE VISIONS -**

**VISION #1 (7:1-3): THE LOCUST PLAGUE**

**PART 1**

In the previous *shiur*, we discussed the prophetic mode of *mar’eh* – vision – and the various types of visions experienced by *nevi’im*. This serves as an introduction to the sequence of four (or five) visions that appear in the final third of the book of *Amos*.

In the next six *shiurim*, we will discuss and analyze the first three of these *mar’ot*, as they are presented consecutively at the beginning of chapter 7, making up roughly half of that chapter. Each vision will be discussed in two *shiurim*. In this first *shiur*, we will look at some of the nuances of the pattern (which repeats in at least some of the visions) and the rest of the first verse. In next week’s *shiur*, we will complete our analysis of the text of the first vision and then briefly look at some of the overarching issues raised there.

**VISION #1: *AMOS* 7:1-3**

**THE TEXT**

*Ko hirani Adonai (A-D-N-Y) Elokim (Y-H-V-H)*

Thus the Lord God showed me

This opening refrain is used to introduce three of the four visions – the first two as well as the fourth. The third vision is also introduced with *ko hirani*, but instead of the One **showing** the vision being *Hashem* (although that is surely the case), He is **in**the vision; hence the modified introduction, *ko hirani vehinei…*

The opening word *ko* is used regularly by Amos, including in his series of oracles against the nations in chapters 1-2 (***Ko*** *Amar Hashem, al shelosha pish’ei…*). Assuming a consistent audience, they should already be able to anticipate words of prophecy and a promise of punishment.

The repeated use of the pronominal suffix *hira****ni*** reminds us that the speaker is sharing an essentially private and intimate vision with his audience, on the presumption that he was shown this vision in order to share it – and its message – with his audience.

The use here – and in the second and fourth visions – of these two names of God is curious. This combination, using the letters *ADNY*, which literally means “my lord(s),” is the customary oral representation of the Ineffable Name. Since the first Name is written this way, the second, which is the Tetragrammaton, is pronounced *Elokim*. The effect is as if it were written *Y-H-V-H Elokim*, a combination that first appears in the “second” creation story (beginning in *Bereishit* 2:4).

This leaves us with several questions. Why does Amos use this combination, with the “unconventional” spelling, so frequently? He uses it 20 times in his short book, whereas none of the other prophets whose works are included in the collection known as *Trei Asar* use it more than once. Of the literary prophets, only Yechezkel uses it more frequently. (Yeshayahu uses it approximately 25 times, but that is over the span of 66 chapters.) Also, why does Amos use this combination so frequently in the context of the “visions”? He uses it eight times in the space of twelve verses – a frequency that requires our attention.

***AD-NY ELOKIM* – AN INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

The combination A-D-N-Y Y-H-V-H, with the Tetragrammaton being pointed and vocalized as “*Elokim*,” appears 293 times in *Tanakh*, with an unusual distribution. It only appears four times in *Chumash* (twice in *Bereishit* and twice in *Devarim*), once in *Yehoshua*, twice in *Shofetim*, seven times in *Shmuel*, and twice in *Melakhim*. Of these sixteen occurrences, only one (*Melakhim I* 2:26) is **not** in the context of prayer.

In *Bereishit*, Avra(ha)m twice beseeches God regarding the promise of progeny (15:2) and the promise of the Land (ibid. verse 8). In *Devarim*, Moshe records his prayer begging God to let him see the Land (3:24), and then he recounts how he petitioned God not to destroy the people in the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf (9:26). The occurrence in *Yehoshua* is likewise a petitionary prayer in the aftermath of the loss at Ha-Ai (7:7). The two instances in *Shofetim* are also in the context of prayer: The first is when Gid’on prays to God regarding his having seen the angel face to face, and is evidently afraid of dying as a result (6:22). The second is Shimshon’s prayer before he “brings the house down” and, in his death, kills thousands of Pelishtim (16:28). There are seven instances of this combination in *Shmuel*, all in one passage (*Shmuel II* 7): David’s prayer to God after being told that he would not be allowed to build the House for God. All seven occurrences are found in the twelve verses that make up this prayer, an extraordinarily high intensity of uses of this otherwise uncommon combination. This may help explain Amos’s frequent usage (see Proposal #4 below).

The combination is found two more times in *Melakhim*. The second fits the pattern we have seen so far; it is found in the middle of Shlomo’s very long inauguration prayer at the dedication of the *Beit* *HaMikdash* (*Melakhim I* 8:53). But the first mention in *Melakhim* deviates from our pattern and may hold a key to understanding – at least in part – Amos’s repeated use of the term in general and the focused use in the context of these visions in particular (see Proposal #4 below).

In *Melakhim I* 2, Shlomo, after David’s passing, puts his house “in order” and purges the members of David’s court who, in David’s final days, joined Adoniyahu’s aborted coup. Although Adoniyahu himself is killed for this crime, along with Yoav (for the blood of Avner and Amasa), Evyatar, David’s *Kohen*, is spared and allowed to retire to his hometown of Anatot:

*Ki nasata et-aron* ***Ad-nai Elokim*** *lifnei David avi*

For your carried the ark of ***Ad-nai Elokim*** before David my father

I will suggest below why this use may be helpful in deciphering Amos’s uses of the combination.

Among the literary prophets, Yeshayahu and Amos use this combination twenty-two times each, Yirmiyahu eleven times. Besides one occurrence each in *Mikha*, *Ovadia*, and *Tzefania*, it isn’t used at all – with the grand exception of *Yechezkel*. For reasons that belong to a series on *Yechezkel*, he uses it 217 times (!), both in describing visions he has seen as well as in the many prayers he offers to God.

**AMOS’S USE OF *AD-NY ELOKIM*: FOUR PROPOSALS**

I will propose four approaches to understanding Amos’s use of this Divine Name-combination, both within the larger scope of his prophetic style as well as within these visions. These proposals, while distinct, are interrelated to a certain extent, such that all three may play a combined role in Amos’s rhetorical choices.

**PROPOSAL #1: THE PRAYERFUL MODE**

Since Amos is apparently the first prophet to formally use *Ad-ny Elokim* after Shlomo, and all of the usages until that point (with the one exception of Shlomo’s words to Evyatar) were in the context of prayer, it stands to reason that Amos is similarly invoking these two Names to establish a prayer-oriented context. This, indeed, proves to be correct, as Amos’s response to each of the visions is to offer a prayer beseeching God not to “activate” the vision. Note also that all of the prayers offered using this Name-sequence were either of dire national concern (e.g. Moshe’s plea after the sin of the Golden Calf) or of personal survival (e.g. Gid’on after “seeing” God). In the same vein, Amos shares visions that he has been shown that imply a devastating destruction of the populace – and he prays that the Divine decree be averted.

**PROPOSAL #2: ESTABLISHING THE SOURCE OF HIS VISIONS**

If, as posited above, Amos is the first to share a “vision” with his audience (and, perhaps, the first prophet to experience a “vision,” be it a “snapshot” or a “movie”), he has to persuade his audience that this vision is truly what God is showing him and not his own dream/fantasy imagery. When he brought God’s word to the people, he prefaced it with the “messenger formula” – *ko amar Hashem* and its variants. Here, however, he cannot say *ko amar*, since God did not **begin** the vision experience with words, but with an image.

By first invoking AD-NY, literally “My Lord,” he states that this image is not of his own making, but what his “lord” has shown him. This, of necessity, is followed by the Tetragrammaton, to perfectly and unambiguously identify Who that “lord” is. This then becomes the model of the pattern, such that not only is AD-NY Y-H-V-H the One who shows Amos his visions, He is also the “Divine actor” in those visions (e.g. the third vision, 7:7-9).

**PROPOSAL #3: PRESENTING HIS BONA FIDES – IN LIGHT OF HIS BACKGROUND**

As mentioned in the previous *shiur*, the four (or five) visions are interrupted by an eight-verse narrative about Amos’s adversarial confrontation with Amatzia, the priest at Beit-El. In the course of that interaction, Amatzia tells Amos to leave:

Also Amatzia said to Amos: “O you seer, go, flee away to the land of Yehuda, and eat bread there[[1]](#footnote-1) and prophesy there; but prophesy not again any more at Beit El, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house.” Then Amos answered and said to Amatzia: “I am not a prophet, nor am I a prophet's son [=student];[[2]](#footnote-2) but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore-trees;[[3]](#footnote-3) and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me: Go, prophesy unto My people Yisrael.” (7:12-15)

Since Amos, per his own mini-auto-biography, is neither a “professional prophet” nor a member of the “prophetic guild,” he needs to establish his credentials as one who has visions. (This may be why he uses *ko amar* and its variants so regularly – something we don’t find with, for example, Yeshayahu, who seems to be a “professional prophet.”) Amos does so by stating that the vision was given by “my Lord” and then, again to clarify, uses Y-H-V-H. As pointed out above, this reason is not completely divorced from the first, as both of them point to his need to establish his position as “seer.”

**PROPOSAL #4: CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE – THE “BEIT-EL” STANDOFF**

When stepping back from the specific passages and taking the panoramic view of the “visions-sequence,” the interruption of the narrative at Beit-El seems odd. We will comment on this point when we discuss that passage. However, seen in this light, where Amos is challenging the Northern Kingdom at one of its sanctified locations – a *Mikdash Melekh* – means that his interactions are not only unpleasant for his audience to hear. In addition, and perhaps more to the point, he is speaking confrontationally with one of Yerovam’s chief “officers.”

**TANGENTIAL DISCUSSION: THE “RELIGION” OF THE NORTH**

One brief tangent here will be helpful. We generally presuppose that the “unified kingdom” through Shlomo’s reign was of a unified religious orientation and common theological base. The split, common wisdom holds, was a political move generated by the northern population and leadership and their desire to have the heavy taxes laid upon them by Jerusalem lightened. When Rechovam refused to do so (following the advice of the “boys with whom he grew up” and eschewing the sage counsel of the elders; see *Melakhim I* 12:13-14), the city of Shekhem and the rest of Ephraim and Menasheh (and the other non-Judean tribes) declared independence: “To your tents, Yisrael!”

However, even a cursory read through the post-conquest period of settlement and early days of the monarchy reflect a different picture. From the first war that Shaul fights, which was the first time that a cross-tribal army fought together since Yehoshua’s days, the army itself is divided between Yehuda, with 30,000 soldiers, and Yisrael, with 300,000 (*Shmuel I* 11:8). When David becomes king, he is first “crowned” in Chevron by his own tribe of Yehuda (*Shmuel II* 2:4); only afterwards do the northern tribes come to Chevron, ask him to be their king, and anoint him (ibid. 5:1-3). It is only after this full acceptance by all the tribes that he establishes his permanent capitol in Yerushalayim. When David returns from his exile due to his son Avshalom’s rebellion, there is a competition between Yehuda and Yisrael as to who has “bragging rights” over the king (ibid. 19:41-44). Throughout this period of theoretical unity, there is a consistent and recognizable divide between north and south.

It is tempting and not completely inaccurate to compare the situation with the confederation of the United States from the early 19th century until the latter half of the 20th century – a division made manifest in dialect, culture, religious sentiments, mores, and much more. (Some would argue that these divisions still obtain.)

Perhaps most telling is a narrative from the period a few decades after Amos’s career. In *Melakhim II* 17, we learn of the population transfer engineered by the Assyrians, moving the indigenous Israelite population of the Shomron (Amos’s audience) throughout the captured lands of the empire, while bringing in other foreigners from Kuta, Sefarvayim, and other parts of Asia. When the new population is attacked by lions as a punishment by God for their idolatrous practices, they send a message to the empire asking for help. The government finds *Kohanim* among the captive population and sends them back to Shomron to teach the new emigres the “law of the God of the Land” (*mishpat Elokei ha-Aretz*). Why didn’t they just have some *Kohanim* brought from Yehuda? Assyria certainly had the political clout and power to make this move if they wanted to. The suggestion has been made that Israelite religion – at least by this time, after two centuries of separation from Yerushalayim – was distinct from Judahite practice, and the locals wanted to learn the “local” customs and practices.

These distinctions may be reflected in dozens of differences noted in Tannaitic literature between Yehuda (the south) and Galil (the north), as well as some of the “deviant” practices of the Samaritan community today (which are “deviant” relative to the rabbinic practice with which we are familiar).

Faced with a northern priest, with the northern calendar (see *Melakhim I* 12:32) and northern practices, Amos wants to establish that these visions are from **his** Lord – that is, Y-H-V-H, the One who roars from Yerushalayim (1:2) – and that these represent His response to the north’s wayward behavior. In addition, he uses the Name-combination used by David seven times (!) in the context of his prayer regarding the building of the *Mikdash*, as well as used once by Shlomo when referencing the Ark – again stressing the centrality of Yerushalayim and the proper worship of God, specifically at this off-site “Royal Sanctuary.”

**SUMMARY**

We have entertained four explanations for the frequent use of *Ado-nai Elokim* by Amos, specifically in the context of the visions. First of all, Amos intertwines prayers for *Am Yisrael*’s survival into his recounting of the visions; he therefore invokes a Name-combination used by Avraham, Moshe, Yehoshua, and other national/tribal leaders at such times. Second, it is possible that he used this combination because he may have been the first prophet to report a vision and had to establish his credentials. Alternatively, he may have needed to counter the supposition that only trained, “professional” prophets have visions; by his own admission, he was neither of those. Finally, the use of the “Lordship Name” followed by the Tetragrammaton may have been occasioned by the context of the “religious confrontation” at Beit-El.

*Ve-hinei yotzer govai*

and, behold, He formed locusts

The opening word *ve-hinei* – “behold” – is regularly used in *Tanakh* to report visions and dreams, both when the seer is talking (e.g. *Bereishit* 37:7, 9) as well as when the text is reporting the vision (e.g. *Bereishit* 28:12-13). This is also found in the prophetic canon in the words of the seer (*Yechezkel* 2:9 among many others).

God is depicted as *yotzer govai*, forming locusts. The image is terrifying. A locust plague is a frightening phenomenon; the rapidity with which the swarm can devour a crop is both awesome and devastating. Consider that *arbeh*, the eighth of the ten plagues (as we reckon them) in Egypt, was really the final attack on the Egyptian agronomic infrastructure. When Yoel depicts a foreign army coming to swarm all over the land and utterly destroy it, he uses a locust plague as a metaphor.[[4]](#footnote-4) As bad as such a plague is, the image of God Himself forming the locusts is tantamount to not only arming the enemy, but loading their weapons! To imagine God taking such aim at His own people is heartbreaking and speaks to more than an abandonment of His people and His protection of them.

The word *govai* is not the usual one used for locusts; we are accustomed to *arbeh* (in *Shemot* 10) and *gazam, yelek*, and *chasil* in *Yoel* 1. *Govai* does appear once elsewhere in *Tanakh*:

*Mi-nezarayikh ka-arbeh ve-tafserayikh ke-****gov govai***

Your guards are like locusts, your officials like swarms of locusts that settle in the walls on a cold day (*Nachum* 3:17, per NLT)

The *pasuk* in *Amos* continues:

*Be-techilat alot ha-lakesh*

in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth;

*Alot* – the “shooting up” of a stalk – is used elsewhere in *Tanakh* to denote beginning of growth; see, *inter alia*, *Yeshayahu* 5:6.

The *lekesh* (a *hapax legomenon*, but clearly related to the *malkosh*,late-season rains) refers to the late-season growth.[[5]](#footnote-5) If the locusts attack at the beginning of that growth, then both the ripe stalks, ready to be harvested, as well as the late-plantings that are just coming into their own, will be lost – leading to a complete famine for the year.

*Ve-hinei lekesh achar gizei ha-melekh*

and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings.

This last clause is somewhat challenging, and the *Rishonim* are divided on how to read it.

Rashi writes: “The *lekesh* would grow after *gizei ha-melekh* – after they harvested the king’s produce. Before it would grow on the stalk, they would cut it as straw to feed the animals.” In other words, they would first cut the king’s produce before it was ripe to help it grow better (and they would feed these early cuttings to the animals) – and that was when the locusts will come. R. Joseph Kara reads this line in the same way.

Ibn Ezra, in his second commentary, has a different interpretation of *gizei ha-melekh*, according to which it refers to the time when the king’s **flocks** would be sheared. Malbim picks up on this explanation and clarifies that the sheep-shearing festival (*chag ha-geiz)* takes place in the middle of the summer, at which point only the later growths of grain (*lekesh*) would still be in the ground.

R. Eliezer of Beaugency understands that *gizei ha-melekh* refers to “cutting” in the sense of harvest – like Rashi – but it does not mean an “early cutting” for the benefit of the crop. Rather, they would cut the king’s produce first – and, at that point, the locusts will appear, destroying the crops of all the citizens.

R. Joseph ibn Kaspi has an ingenious take on the “king” here. First, he interprets, somewhat innovatively, that the referent here is to the cuttings that are prepared for the king’s horses. This is similar to the straw noted by Rashi, but according to Rashi, the straw was cut to benefit the later cuttings. According to ibn Kaspi, it was for the horses of the king. He then proposes that the locusts here are a metaphor (similar to how many interpret the locust plague in *Yoel*) for the king of Assyria, who will come and devour everything. The “king” here doubles back as part of the parable as well as the abject lesson.

In next week’s *shiur*, we will look at the rest of the first vision, first completing our study of the text and then taking a broader look at the entire vision.

1. We will address the significance of this directive when we fully examine this passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We will address the meaning of *ben-navi* and the role of the *bnei hanevi’im* when we get to this passage in our study [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Amos’s description of his livelihood(s) does not seem consistent with the introductory line of the book (1:1). This will also be taken up in our study of the second half of chapter 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. According to the approach that the depiction in *Yoel* chapter 1 is a metaphor. There is a significant school of thought that this plague was a real locust plague [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On the Gezer calendar, which is dated to the 10th century BCE and lists the various agricultural seasons by name, the two months of the end of winter are called *yarchu lakesh*, the months of late planting. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)