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 memory of Yitzchak and Sheva Shayndel Schwartz z”l

יצחק בן חיים צבי שווארץ ז''ל

שבע שיינדל שווארץ בת דוד שטיין ז''ל

whose Yahrzeits fall on Shabbat the thirteenth of Shvat.

Dedicated by Avraham and Sarah Schwartz

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**Shiur #72:**

**The Prophecies of Amos:**

**THE VISIONS**

**AMOS AT BEIT-EL (7:10-17): CONFRONTATION**

**PART 2: THE *CHOZEH*, THE *NAVI,* AND THE *LECHEM***

In the previous *shiur*, we introduced and studied the first six verses of the interaction-dialogue between Amos and Amatzia, the priest at Beit-El. As we repeatedly pointed out, there were a few terms that required more attention. This *shiur* is devoted to those terms and how understanding them properly, in context, sheds light on some of the odder features of this interaction. In the next *shiur*, we will complete our study of this meeting, focusing on the last two verses, which comprise the pronouncement Amos declares regarding Yerovam, the altar at Beit-El, and the Northern Kingdom.

**THE TEXT**

Here is the interaction that we surveyed in last week’s *shiur* (For purposes of this *shiur*, we will present each verse in the transliterated original followed by English translation, rather than phrase-by-phrase as we customarily do.):

*Va-yishlach Amatzia Kohen Beit-El el Yerovam melekh Yisrael leimor*

*Kashar alekha Amos be-kerev Beit Yisrael*

*Lo tukhal ha-aretz le-hakhil et kol devarav*

Then Amatzia the priest of Beth-El sentto Yerovam king of Yisrael, saying:

Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Yisrael;

the land is not able to bear all his words.

As we noted last week, Amatzia presents the prophet’s words as being his own; at no point does he mention God as part of the message. This is despite the fact that Amos repeatedly invokes God’s Name throughout his oratory. The “conspiracy” noted here seems to point to an anticipated insurrection on the part of the people to oust Yerovam and his royal house. As noted before, this is not an unheard of phenomenon. Both Elisha and Achiya anointed kings who were not the “rightful heirs” to their respective thrones. Prophets are, from time to time, “kingmakers.”

*Ki kho amar Amos*

*Ba-cherev yamut Yerovam*

*ve-Yisrael galo yigleh me-al admato.*

For thus says Amos:

Yerovam shall die by the sword,

And Yisrael shall surely be led away captive put of his land.

This is the frightening message that Amos is declaring publicly at Beit-El.

*Va-yomer Amatzia el Amos*

*Chozeh! Lekh berach lekha el eretz Yehuda*

*Ve-ekhol sham lechem ve-sham tinavei*

Then Amatzia said to Amos:

Seer! Go, flee yourself away to the land of Yehuda,

and there eat bread, and prophesy there;

The priest speaks directly to Amos. Even though he referred to him by name in his message to the court, here he calls him *chozeh* – literally “visionary” or “seer.” What does this term mean?

This question becomes either clarified or intensified when we see that he tells Amos – seemingly in a derisive manner – *sham tinavei*, using the popular root for “prophecy” (from which *navi* derives). If we assume that the two words are synonymous and interchangeable – i.e. *chozeh=navi* – then the phrase is straightforward and the differentiation in terms used is intended for rhetorical variety. If, on the other hand, the two words are distinct in meaning, then our question becomes exponentially more complex. Why did the priest call him by the unusual sobriquet *chozeh* and then tell him to no longer *tinavei*? This interpretive fork widens with Amos’s answer (below) – in which he avers that he is neither a *navi* nor a *ben-navi*, avoiding *chozeh* altogether. This does not augur well for those who would read *chozeh* as equivalent in meaning to *navi*. For purposes of their dispute, it would have been more impactful for Amos to deny his prophetic vocation by responding to the word *chozeh* and say, *lo chozeh anokhi ve-lo ben chozeh*. That is, of course, not the case.

A brief but vital tangent is in place here. We have one specific and named character in *Tanakh* who is known by the term *chozeh*. That is GadHa-Chozeh, who operates as David’s “court prophet” as early as his time on the run from Shaul (*Shmuel* I 22:5) and is most well-known for his role in the census punishment that led to the identification of the site of the altar and the establishment of the *mekom ha-Mikdash* (*Shmuel* II 24; *Divrei Ha-Yamim* I 21). It is helpful to note that when he is first referenced in that story, the text uses seemingly redundant terms:

*…u-devar Hashem hayah el Gad ha-navi, chozeh David leimor…*

…and the word of *Hashem* was given to Gad the prophet (*ha-navi)*, the seer (*chozeh)* of David, saying. (*Shmuel* II 24:11)

Note that the term *navi* remains independent, but the *chozeh* belongs to David – *chozeh David*.

Gad is also noted as one of the three authors of the chronicles of David’s life:

*Ve-divrei David Ha-Melekh ha-rishonim ve-ha’acharonim hinam ketuvim al divrei Shemuel ha-Ro’eh ve-al divrei Natan ha-Navi ve-al divrei Gad ha-Chozeh.*

Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the words of Shmuel the seer (*ro’eh)*, and in the words of Natan the prophet (*navi)*, and in the words of Gad the seer (*chozeh)*; (*Divrei Ha-Yamim* I 29:29)

Other than the references to Gad, *chozeh* as a generic title is used disparagingly. When Yechezkel describes the false prophets (chiefly in chapters 12-13), he consistently returns to the word *chozim* and juxtaposes them with *kosmim* (wizards) several times. Indeed, the most famous *kosem* in *Tanakh* (Bilam) refers to himself as one who *machazeh Shadai yechezeh* (“sees the visions of Shadai) – but never calls himself a *navi*.

The evidence here points to an essential difference between a *chozeh* and a *navi*. The *chozeh* is a court prophet, who works in the employ of the king and serves as his royal oracle. Gad is first introduced this way; his first “visionary act” is to direct David where to move in his wanderings, and his most famous prophetic task is to lead David in response to God’s anger over the ill-conceived census and to identify the location of the altar. The court *chozim* referenced by Yechezkel would present prognostications favorable to the king. This is not to say that the members of such a group are never called *nevi’im* (see, for instance, *Melakhim* I 22:6), but overall the terms have an underlying difference.

Whereas a *chozeh* works for the king, the *navi* works for God; he brings God’s word to the court, the leaders, and the people. (Some have suggested that the root of *navi* is *havei,* bringer, i.e. of the Word.)

All of which means that Amatzia assumes that Amos works in the employ of the king, presumably of Yehuda. He has been sent to Beit-El, goes the thinking, in order to stir up the local populace against their king and to potentially restore sovereignty of the north to the House of David.

**EAT BREAD THERE**

Why does Amatzia add *ve-ekhol sham lechem*? He tells Amos to return to his home territory, deliver his messages there, and to eat bread there. What does this mean?

Dr. Nili Samet, in an insightful article (see “For Further Study”), addresses the theme of “eating bread” in the context of the royal house and points to several examples in *Tanakh* where this idiom is used to mean that someone will be a member of the royal house – or, more directly, supported and somewhat “in employ” of the king. For instance, David invites Mephiboshet (Meriv-Baal) to “eat at my table.” Shlomo’s table is described at the beginning of *Sefer* *Melakhim* (chapter 5) with great splendor. In what Samet identifies as an ironic denouement of *Sefer Melakhim*, the final verse describes the exiled Judean king, Yekhonia, as being brought out of captivity by Evil-Merodakh and eating at his table – in other words, the complete confirmation of the status of exile.

Samet draws a whole host of comparisons between our story and the episode involving the “*Ish Ha-Elokim*” in *Melakhim* I 13, which we briefly referenced in the last *shiur*. In both of those vignettes, the motif of “eating bread” is raised; indeed, it is central to the plot-twists in the latter passage. After the “man of God” declares the Divine pronouncement about the destiny of the altar at Beit-El and the priests who officiate there, Yerovam ben Nevat, who is himself officiating there, calls for him to be seized, but his hand is paralyzed. When the prophet heals his hand:

The king said unto the man of God: “Come home with me and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward.” And the man of God said to the king: “If you give me half of your house, I will not go in there with you, **neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place**. For it so was charged me by the word of *Hashem*, saying: You shall eat no bread, nor drink water, neither return by the way that you came.”

We then learn of another prophet in the town of Beit-El who heard of this strange interaction, and he rode out to greet the *Ish Ha-Elokim*:

…and found him sitting under a terebinth; and he said to him: “Are you the man of God that came from Yehuda?” And he said: “I am.” Then he said unto him: “Come home with me **and eat bread**.” And he said: “I may not return with you, nor go in with you; **neither will I eat bread nor drink water** with you in this place. For it was said to me by the word of *Hashem*: You shall eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn back to go by the way that you came.” And he [the local prophet] said to him [the man of God from Yehuda]: “I also am a prophet as are you; and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying: Bring him back with you into your house, **that he may eat bread and drink water**.” He lied to him. So he went back with him, **and did eat bread in his house and drank water**. And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of *Hashem* came to the prophet that brought him back. And he cried unto the man of God that came from Yehuda, saying: “Thus says *Hashem*: Since you have rebelled against the word of *Hashem* and have not kept the commandment which *Hashem* your God commanded you, but came back, **and have eaten bread and drunk water** in the place of which He said to you: **Eat no bread, and drink no water**; your carcass shall not come unto the sepulcher of your fathers.” And it came to pass, **after he had eaten bread and after he had drunk**, that he saddled for him the ass, namely, for the prophet whom he had brought back. And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way and slew him; and his carcass was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it; the lion also stood by the carcass.

This long and most unusual narrative continues to come back to the command not to eat bread nor drink water **there, in that place**. Evidently the “prophet” who corralled the man from Yehuda to join him and eat and drink in his house was a false prophet; he reported that God had instructed him to feed this visitor, which was patently untrue.

Samet proposes that this story, as well as ours, is about far more than where someone eats. It is about the nature of prophecy: Is it a vocation, which someone chooses to engage in and may be hired to do so for others? Or is it a Divine calling, against the will of the individual? In other words, who is the dispatcher of the prophet? The human overlord who seeks “Divine approval” for his own plans? Or God Himself, Who sends His prophets to chastise, to rebuke, to correct and to console?

As our interaction unfolds, we will see how these two perceptions of the role of a prophet come to a head.

*u-Veit-El lo tosif od le-hinavei*

*ki mikdash melekh hu*

*u-veit mamlakha hu*

but prophesy not again any more at Beit-El,

for it is the king's sanctuary,

and it is a royal house.

Based on our proposal above, Amatzia might have been expected to use a different verb. He might have said *u-Veit-El to tosif od la-chazot*. However, using the root *chazoh* in the verbal form takes on a different meaning – and all understand that no one, not even the greatest of “seers,” can willfully see that which his Master has not shown him. In our case, that would completely miss the point. Amatzia is not accusing Amos of sharing unfriendly visions at Beit-El. He is rebuking the southern intruder for bringing his own (Jerusalem-sanctioned) messages there. As such, *la-chazot* would make no sense.

*Va-ya’an Amos va-yomer el Amatzia*

*Lo navi anokhi ve-lo ven navi anokhi*

*Ki voker anokhi*

*U-voleis shikmim*

Then Amos answered and said to Amatzia:

I am not a prophet, nor am I a prophet's son;

for I am a herdsman

and a dresser of sycamore-trees;

What does Amos mean with this oft-quoted[[1]](#footnote-1) (but usually out of context) phrase? Based on our earlier analysis, Amos responds to Amatzia that he completely misunderstands who Amos is. Whereas the Beit-El priest thinks that Amos is a court prophet of the south, come to rile up the locals and foment a rebellion – a “professional *chozeh*” – Amos avers that he is not a *navi* nor a *ben-navi*.

When he responds that he is not a *navi*, it is clear that he means that this vocation is not one he chose for himself. *Ben-navi* is a different story. We meet the *benei ha-nevi’im* in several contexts in *Tanakh*, chiefly in the company of Shmuel (see *Shmuel* I 19) and in the Eliyahu-Elisha circles (see especially *Melakhim* II 2 and 4). They are a guild of students who, at least in Elisha’s times, had adopted a life of penury in their quest to “study” prophecy. Based on the description in *Shmuel* I 19, it seems that they had guided meditation-type experiences in which they became more sensitized to receiving prophetic inspiration. Amos is claiming that he not only is not a *navi* by vocation, but he was never in the *navi*-school; he never studied for it.

He is, rather, a “regular” person, with two jobs that can easily be balanced (see the previous *shiur*) but which occupy him fully. Having a mission to speak to God’s people was never his choice. (Indeed, it seems that all of the *nevi’im* that we lionize are people who never wanted the job!)

He is not a professional *navi* who “belongs” to a court; he represents one thing and one thing only – God’s word to His people. He is not about to return to Yehuda and eat bread there, for although he comes *from* there, he is not *supported* there. He is not in the employ of the southern king. It is possible that Amatzia was not even aware of any other type of prophet, and Amos’s words bring home the point of the type of agent that he truly is.

*ve-yikacheini Hashem me-acharei ha-tzon*

*va-yomer elai Hashem*

*lekh hinavei el ami Yisrael*

and *Hashem* took me from behind the flock,

and *Hashem* said to me:

Go, prophesy unto My people Israel.

With this short phrase, Amos makes it clear that he was “plucked” from a hard-working but serene and pastoral life and thrown directly into the crucible of conflict with kings, priests, and judges. This was not of his own volition, nor his desire – which makes his agency all the more real, as we see throughout *Tanakh*, beginning with Moshe Rabbenu, the “father of the prophets.”

**For Further Study:**

Zevit, Ziony: "A Misunderstanding at Bethel." *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (1975), pp. 783-790.

Samet, Nili: “Between ‘Eat Bread There’ and ‘Do Not Eat Bread’: The Motif of Eating Bread In Two Stories in the Prophets and Its Relationship to the Perception of Prophecy in the Bible,” in *Masekhet: Say To Wisdom: You Are My Sister*, vol. 2 (2004), pp. 167-181. Accessible on the web at <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/tanach/rishonim/beyn-2.htm>

1. See, *inter alia,*  BT *Berakhot* 34b, *Eruvin* 63a, *Yevamot* 121b. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)