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 #73:**

**The Prophecies of Amos:**

**THE VISIONS -**

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

**PART 3: THE PRONOUNCEMENT**

In the previous two *shiurim*, we analyzed the text of the interaction between Amos and Amatzia at Beit-El. In the first of those *shiurim*, we focused on a broad view of the text. In the second, we addressed the issues of the seemingly synonymous *navi-chozeh* pairing as a way of explaining the root of Amatzia’s rebuke of Amos. In addition, we looked at the role of “eating bread” as a Biblical idiom in general and in the specific context of “court prophets.”

Subsequent to Amos’s justifying his mission and explaining the roots of his Divine agency, he delivers a short pronouncement at Beit-El. In this *shiur*,we will focus our attention on that pronouncement.

**THE TEXT (7:16-17)**

*Ve-ata shema devar Hashem*

Now therefore hear the word of *Hashem*:

The causal *ve-ata* appears over 250 times in *Tanakh*, with 55 appearances in the literary prophetic canon, but it only appears this one time in *Amos*. The meaning – “and now” – is always presented as the back half of a causal relationship and is usually found in the middle of a passage.[[1]](#footnote-1) In other words, “such-and-such has happened” or “God has done such-and-such for you,” *ve-ata* here is the appropriate response. (Even the two exceptions cited in the footnote relate to their respective previous passages, but those passages both conclude with a *parasha petucha*.)

Amos’s use of *ve-ata* here is a bit curious. We would expect it to follow a rebuke or detailing of the crimes of the kingdom (or judiciary or aristocracy). Instead, it follows Amos’s autobiographic sketch of his call to Divine agency.

Malbim suggests that the use of *ve-ata* here indicates that the prophetic pronouncement that follows was communicated to him just at that moment. This is an unlikely read of the word, as such a usage of *ata* is unattested. It does not mean, “Here’s some new information,” but rather, “as a result, here’s what comes next” (a Divine response or an expected human action).

Paul understands that *ve-ata* indicates a transition. Amos has concluded justifying his agency and now shifts (*ve-ata*) to the pronouncement.[[2]](#footnote-2) Hakham, on the other hand, interprets the use of *ve-ata* as causal: “Now that I’ve been tapped as a prophet, I have prophecy regarding you, Amatzia…”[[3]](#footnote-3) This seems to be the most likely meaning of *ve-ata*, as it fits the usual usage in *Tanakh*. Reconstructing the harsh dialogue, following our analysis of the entire passage as presented in the last two *shiurim*, thus plays out as follows:

Amatzia calls on Amos to go back to Yehuda, serve as a court prophet in the south, and cease delivering his pronouncements in the north, especially at the “royal sanctuary” of Beit-El.

Amos responds that he is not a vocational prophet, but rather a “regular citizen” who was called by God and sent by Him to deliver prophecy – *ve-ata*, “here’s the prophecy I was sent to deliver.”

What is unusual about this opening clause is that Amos punctuates his prophecy with the words “hear the word of Hashem” – but then, before actually stating the prophecy of impending doom, he recalls Amatzia’s call for Amos to cease prophesizing to Yisrael. We would have expected the line *shema devar Hashem* to **follow** his repeat of Amatzia’s attempt to throw him out, as follows:

*Ve-ata ata omer lo tinavei al Yisrael, ve-lo tatif al beit Yishak*

*Lakhen ko amar…*

In other words, the clause *shema devar Hashem* appears to be superfluous and somewhat clumsy.

We apparently must conclude that the line *ata omer…Yishak* is **part** of the words of Hashem. In other words, Amos is not speaking on his own behalf when he rebuffs Amatzia’s attempt to have him silenced. To wit: I am not a professional prophet; I was a citizen and God called me to prophesy against you. *Ve-ata* – and now, here is the prophecy that God has sent me to deliver: “You tell me (or Me) not to deliver prophecy against Yisrael and not to rebuke the house of Yishak. Therefore, this is what Hashem says…”

In other words, Amos’s paraphrase of Amatzia’s words are not his own personal response; they are prophetic and part of God’s response to the attempt to silence God’s words at Beit-El.

*Atah omer lo tinavei al Yisrael*

You say: Prophesy not against Yisrael,

*Ve-lo tatif al beit Yishak*

And do not preach against the house of Yishak;

Note that Amos uses *tinavei* in parallel with *tatif*.

The root *natof* means “drip,” as it is used in most of its infrequent appearances in *Tanakh* (there are 18 in total). For instance, in the opening lines of Devora’s song, poetically describing the cosmological reaction to God’s appearance at Sinai:

*Hashem, be-tzeitkha mi-Se’ir be-tza’adkha mi-sedeh Edom, eretz ra’asha, gam shamayim* ***natafu****, gam avim* ***natefu*** *mayim*.

*Hashem*, when You went forth from Seir, when You marched out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, the heavens also **dropped**, indeed, the clouds **dropped** water. (*Shoftim* 5:4)

This is paralleled in the psalmist’s depiction of the theophany at Sinai:

*Eretz ra’asha af shamayim* ***natefu*** *mipnei Elokim, zeh Sinai, mipnei Elokim, Elokei Yisrael*

The earth trembled, the heavens also **dropped** at the presence of God; even Sinai itself trembled at the presence of God, the God of Yisrael. (*Tehillim* 68:9)

This original meaning is then borrowed to describe, metaphorically, prophetic words of rebuke, which “drop down” from heaven. It is found in this sense twice in *Yechezkel* 21, both times in parallel with *hinavei*:

*Ben-Adam, sim panekha derekh Teimana ve-****hatef*** *el darom ve-****hinavei*** *el ya’ar ha-sadeh negev.* (*Yechezkel* 21:2)

*Ben-Adam, sim panekha el Yerushalayim ve-****hatef*** *el mikdashim ve-****hinavei*** *el admat Yisrael.* (ibid. v. 9)

This root is used with this meaning in two other places in *Tanakh* – five times in *Micha* (in just two verses, 2:6 and 2:11) and once in *Iyov* (29:22).

The only other time that Amos uses the root *natof* is at the restoration prophecy of consolation at the epilogue of the book. There it takes the original meaning of “dropping” and inheres great blessing and grace. Why does Amos, whose prophecies are filled with rebuke, choose to use this word so sparingly and only here?

Keep in mind that Amos is standing at Beit-El, looking, as it were, “up” to the priest who is officiating at the altar. The difference between their perspectives on the prophet’s words could not be more diametric, as outlined above and in the previous two *shiurim*. The application of *natof* to prophecy implies a directional orientation – the words are coming **down** like dew (if comforting) or like harsh rain or hail (if threatening). It is specifically here, where Amos’s role and agency is directly challenged, that he stresses that his words are coming “down,” i.e. from above.

The alignment of *hinavei* with “Yisrael” and *tatif* with “Beit Yishak” is deliberate and elegant. The classic and familiar word *navi* is associated with Yisrael, beginning from the promise of prophetic continuation of Moshe’s leadership in *Devarim* 18. On the other hand, the “put-down” implied by *tatif* specifically targets “Beit Yishak.” The one other mention of “Yishak” in Amos’s prophecies, delivered just before Amatzia’s angry reaction, made mention of *bamot Yishak* – the “high places” of Yishak (above, 7:9). As we discussed in analyzing this uncommon spelling in the prophecy of the *anakh*, this was a deliberate play on the name Yitzhak, turning it from a name of Divine favor and joy to a name of licentiousness and frivolity. For Amos’s words to “drop down” on the “high places,” it would have to be a word that emanates from on high – exactly the point of Amos’s response to Amatzia throughout.

*Lakhen ko amar Hashem*

Therefore thus says *Hashem*:

Above, I argued that the phrase *shema devar Hashem* seemed superfluous, considering this opening. Now that we have justified that phrase, what are we to make of *lakhen ko amar Hashem*? Amos is already delivering God’s words. Why add this introductory phrase?

One possible explanation is that Amos’s words are made up of two segments. The first one, introduced with *ve-ata shema devar Hashem*, is God’s response to Amatzia’s attempts to silence His prophet. The second is the prophecy that had already been given to Amos and for which he was sent to Beit-El in the first place.

This is a bit difficult, however. Amos reported three visions and, in the case of two, his own attempts at intercession. These presentations were presumably made at Beit-El, before being stopped by the priest. He continues with a fourth vision (beginning of chapter 8), and it is commonly assumed that this takes place at the same setting of the first three – at Beit-El. In other words, the fourth vision (of the basket of figs) was the final intended prophecy for Beit-El – not the harsh five-fold curse in verse 17.

Holding on to the notion that Amos’s words are to be understood as segmented into two – essentially verse 16 on the one hand and then verse 17 – we might propose that they are both Divine responses to Amatzia. The first is a strong-arm rebuff of Amatzia’s attempts to silence God’s prophet. The second is the concomitant punishment which will **now** befall Amatzia and, presumably, his sovereign due to their attempts to silence Amos. (Whether this curse is aimed at the king or his priest – or both – depends on how we read the pronominal suffixes in this curse; more on that below).

In what may be an ironic twist, it is possible that this harsh pronouncement was originally intended for the king only. This is implied in the denouement of the curse – that Yisrael will be exiled. Perhaps since the priest tried to prevent the prophet from announcing God’s words to the king, these words now *also* apply to his minion at Beit-El.

As pointed out above, this curse has five prongs to it. This is a rhetorical pattern that Amos has used several times, although how we identify the instances depends, in great measure, on how we reckon literary segments. For instance, Paul, who considers the vision at the beginning of chapter 9 to be part of the “vision-series,” reckons five visions; he also counts the list of Divine kindnesses bestowed on Yisrael listed in chapter 2 in such a way that he finds five there (we found seven). As such, he feels that the number five is a favorite rhetorical strategy of Amos.[[4]](#footnote-4) In our reckoning, we will concede the five instances of punishment listed in chapter 4 (6-11), each of which concludes with *ve-lo shavtem adai* (“and still you have not returned to Me”). There is also the list of five cosmic wonders in chapter 4 (v. 13), as well as the curse of Amatzia and/or Yerovam in our verse.

*Ishtekha ba-ir tizneh*

Your wife will act the harlot in the city,

R. Eliezer of Beaugency understands that this means that his (whose? Amatzia’s? Yerovam’s?) wife will **voluntarily** go out into the city and commit harlotry/adultery. The excess here is that, as he points out, a person violating a marital bond will typically do so discreetly, whereas, to heighten the shame, she will do so publicly.

Paul suggests that this is directed exclusively at Amatzia and that it is his wife who will act the harlot, heightening the shame (as it will be public knowledge), as the (real) *Kohanim* were banned from marrying a *zona* (*Vayikra* 21:7).[[5]](#footnote-5)

Both of these commentators, one medieval and the other modern, assume that the act of *tizneh* is voluntary and brazen. This does not, however, fit the context. The rest of the curse is about an enemy conquering the land, killing their children, dividing up the land, and exiling the people.

Hakham meets this challenge partway when by interpreting the events as the women being taken as captives and forced into harlotry, being placed in a brothel. He references the prophecy at 4:3, which may be read this way (but not necessarily; see our discussion there).[[6]](#footnote-6) The difficulty in Hakham’s interpretation is the *tizneh* is never used in a sense of forced labor/harlotry. For instance, when Yoel expresses a similar image, he states: ***ve-natnu*** *ha-yeled ba-zonah ve-et ha-yalda makhru ba-yayin va-yishtu*(*Yoel* 4:3) – i.e. forcing the child into harlotry (pederasty). Alternatively, in the curses in *Devarim,* we find, *ishah te’ares ve-ish acher yishgalenah* (read: *yishkavenah*), which literally translates, “you will betroth a woman and another man will sexually take her” (*Devarim* 28:30). As such, it seems that the “whoring wife” in this verse is seen as doing so of her own volition.

I would like to suggest that, given the context of an enemy invasion, the wife in question (again, whose wife? Perhaps everyone’s?) will be so desperate for food that she will turn to whoring. She will do so in the city, publicly, as she will be so far gone in her tragic circumstances that she will just focus on finding sustenance for herself and her family.[[7]](#footnote-7) See *Devarim* 28:54-55 for similarly disturbing images of abject poverty and hunger and the radical steps people are likely to take to alleviate these horrific conditions.

This interpretation also fits the form of the verse. This is not a simple curse of five horrible things. It is a sequence, concluding (as these sequences often do) with exile. First, there will be such dire hunger that women (including wives of previously notable people) will offer their sexual favors for food. This suggests a siege – something that the people in Shomeron were all too familiar with from their own history (see, e.g., *Melakhim II* 6:25 ff.). This is followed by an incursion in which the young people (fighters?) will be slaughtered, after which the land of the vanquished will be divided up by the victors. This progresses to the exile of the leaders, who have seen their own wives, children, and land taken from them. Now they will be led away from Israel to die “on impure land.” The curse concludes with and a complete exile of the people.

*U-vanekha u-venotekha ba-cherev yipolu*

And your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword,

Admittedly, the mention of daughters here seems to belie the proposal above that these are soldiers. There are two possibilities here. It is possible that the enemy referenced here is excessively brutal (and operating against their own long-range interests to boot), and they massacre everyone. But if that is the case, then why stop at the children? Why exile the leaders instead of killing them? We would expect the leaders to be killed first.

The other possibility – which is, I believe, more likely here – is that even in Biblical times, young women would join young men at war when every person was needed. This is evidenced – again in *Yoel* – when he describes, *yeitzei chatan mei-chedro ve-kalla mi-chuppata*, “let the bridegroom go out from his room and the bride from her wedding canopy” (*Yoel* 2:16). Even though contextually this seems to be about joining the community in prayer during times of plague, *Chazal* read it as a call to conscription (*Sota* 8:7).

*Ve-admatekha ba-chevel techulak*

And your land will be divided by the surveyor’s rope;

The image of the conquering enemy dividing the spoils of the vanquished is fairly common in *Tanakh* (see, inter ali*a,* *Yoel* 4:3).

*Ve-ata al adamah temei’a tamut*

And you yourself will die in an impure land,

Is this “impure land” implying that all lands outside of *Eretz Yisrael* are impure? Or does it reflect specifically on dying in the land of the enemy? Prima facie, we would assume the former, per *Yechezkel* 36:20. Yet, from the perspective of Israelite sovereignty and a recognition that conquest and exile represent an essential breach in the covenant, one might argue that it is specifically dying in the captor’s land as an eternal exile that constitutes the impurity.

*Ve-Yisrael galo yigleh mei-al admato*

And Yisrael will surely be led away captive out of his land*.*

This is where all Biblical downward spirals end – in *Vayikra* 26, *Devarim* 28, and throughout prophetic literature. The end of the relationship that the Torah confirms and that Jewish history consistently reaffirms is shattered with exile.

In next week’s *shiur*, we will begin our study of the fourth vision, which comprises the first three verses of chapter 8. Once we have concluded that study, we will devote one *shiur* to an overview of the four visions, and we will reconsider the place of the interaction between Amos and Amatzia between the third and fourth vision.

1. Notable exceptions are *Devarim* 4:1, 10:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Mikra Le-Yisrael*, p. 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Da’at Mikra*, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See *Mikra leYisrael*, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. p. 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Da’at Mikra*, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See, of interest, the comment of R. Eliezer of Beaugency on *Yoel* 4:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)