**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 by the Wise and Etshalom families
in memory of Rabbi Aaron M. Wise,
whose yahrzeit is 21 Tamuz. Yehi zikhro barukh.
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***Shiur* #92:**

**The Prophecies of Amos:**

**DAY OF DOOM**

**THE FIFTH VISION (9:1-6)**

**PART 5:**

**THE MOUNTAIN AND THE SEA (verse 3)**

In last week’s *shiur*, we took a focused view on verse 2, which took us to the depths of She’ol and to the heights of the heavens. In each case, God’s hand would reach out and bring those attempting to escape His wrath – ostensibly taking them back to face Him in judgment. We noted that two period figures, one contemporary to Amos and one two whose stories were less than a hundred years old, figured in these images. Yonah, who sought refuge from God in the depths and Eliyahu who tried to flee his mission and was ultimately “taken” up to God, served as models of these poetic, picturesque (and evidently hyperbolic) extreme models of attempts to flee from God’s word.

As we pointed out in *shiur* #90, verse 3 is neatly matched in chiasmic form with verse 2, beginning where verse 2 left off – trying to flee God by going “up.” It then concludes where verse 2 began – running away and trying to hide from the Almighty down below, at the bottom of the sea.

We will now examine verse 3 in greater detail, noting its nuances, which, when seen carefully, move towards completion of the image begun in verse 2.

In a limited sense, this vision within a vision is complete at verse 3. We might imagine the schematic of the entire vision as follows:

Verse 1 🡨 🡪verse 6

Verses 1-4 v5🡨 🡪v6

 Verses 2🡨🡪4

vv2-3🡨🡪v4

 v2 🡨🡪v3

The diagram shows the six verses of the entire vision together (line 1). The vision is clearly broken up into the judgment/punishment (verses 1-4) and the cosmic hymn (verse 5-6). The judgment/punishment is further broken down into the terrifying image of God atop the altar and His command to shake the building (verse 1) and the sentence of death being carried out against all who would flee (verses 2-4). This last section is further segmented between verses 2-3, which present the unlikely and impossible flights to She’ol and heaven, to the top of Carmel and the bottom of the sea, and verse 4, which is a real-world and imminent threat against the people – the soon-to-be-realized Assyrian conquest and captivity. Verses 2 and 3 are further broken down, as they speak to each other in parallel, as we discussed two *shiurim* back.

We will now continue with our study as we analyze the text of verse 3.

THE TEXT

***Ve-im*** *yeichavu be-rosh ha-Karmel*

And though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel,

As I pointed out in earlier *shiurim*, the mention of Carmel seems to allude to the career of Eliyahu, the only person we ever hear about “ascending to heaven” (*Melakhim* II 2:1, 11), as described in the previous verse. Eliyahu’s most publicly impressive moment was his stand against the prophets of Ba’al atop Mount Carmel, as described in detail in 1 *Melakhim* chapter 18.

“CARMEL” IN *TANAKH*

*Karmel* has two distinct meanings in *Tanakh*. First of all, it means “fresh garden[[1]](#footnote-1)” or “place of produce,” as in *Yeshayahu*:

*Ha-lo od me’at mize’ar ve-shav Levanon* ***la-karmel******ve-hakarmel*** *le-ya’ar yeichashev*

Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into **a fruitful field**, and **the fruitful field** shall be regarded as a forest? (*Yeshayahu* 29:17)

See also *Yeshayahu* 10:18 and 2 *Melakhim* 19:23 (=*Yeshayahu* 37:24) for the genitive *karmilo.*[[2]](#footnote-2)

By way of metonymy, fresh garden-growth or fresh produce is also called *karmel*, as in the wording of the prohibition of new grains in *Vayikra*:

*Ve-lechem ve-kali* ***ve-kharmel*** *lo tokhelu ad etzem ha-yom ha-zeh…*

And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or **fresh** until this very day. (*Vayikra* 23:14; see also ibid 2:14 and 2 *Melakhim* 4:42)

Second, “Carmel” is a toponym of two places in Israel. One of them is the name of a settlement in the southeastern sector of the Chevron hills – *khirbet Karmel*. When Shaul defeats Amalek, he comes back north to Carmel in order to set up a commemorative structure to mark the victory (1 *Shmuel* 15:12). This location also plays a critical role in several of the “wanderings of David” narratives. Most famously, one of David’s antagonists, Naval, lives in Ma’on (to the south of Carmel), but his business holdings are in Carmel (see 1 *Shmuel* chapter 25). From this story, it is evident that the area was fertile, good for grazing, and rich in produce (see 1 *Shmuel* 25:18). Hence, the name *karmel*. Parenthetically, this village was so exclusively “Carmel” that it takes the definite article – *ha-karmel* (as in 1 *Shmuel* 15:12).

There is another Carmel in Israel that, certainly in our modern era of redemption, has become **the** Carmel, around which the modern and beautiful city of Haifa revolves. The neighborhoods on the northern slope of the mountain are known as “Hadar Ha-Carmel” after *Yeshayahu* 35:2. There is a mountain range that stretches for approximately 24 miles from near Jenin northwest to Haifa, bisecting the coastal plain and the Yizra’el valley. Although the entire range is referred to as “Carmel,” the mountain at the north-western end is commonly called “Ha-Carmel.” This mountain, which is not impressively high (the peak is at 1791 feet above sea level), plays a vital role in one story cycle in *Tanakh*. In addition, it is used poetically by the *nevi’im* in conjunction with the Bashan,[[3]](#footnote-3) Levanon,[[4]](#footnote-4) and Tavor.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This mountain was so well-known and storied during the era of the charismatic prophets (Eliyahu and Elisha) and then their literary successors (Amos and his contemporaries) that they referred to it as “Ha-Carmel”[[6]](#footnote-6) – evidently replacing the southern village as **the**Carmel. It may have become more famous – earning **the** definite article – due to its association with Eliyahu Ha-Navi.[[7]](#footnote-7) There is such an integral association of the Giladite prophet with this location that one of the Arabic names for the mountain is “Jabal Mar Elias.”

HAR HA-CARMEL, ELIIYAHU, AND ELISHA

Eliyahu performed his most impressive and persuasive act as a **charismatic** leader on Mount Carmel (1 *Melakhim* 18). Note that **there is no prophecy** in that scene. Rather, Eliyahu stands up to Achav and his court prophets and successfully prays – first for fire, then for rain (!). Beyond this, it is possible, even likely, that the mountain on which Eliyahu was standing when he interacted with Achazia’s three delegations (the first two of whom were doomed by Eliyahu’s *fire*) was Mount Carmel.

As recorded in the first chapter of 2 *Melakhim*, when Achazia son of Achav falls sick, he sends a delegation to his mother’s god, *ba’al zevul*, to ask the oracle at that shrine, in the Pelishti city of Ekron, if he would recover. (Parenthetically, *ba’al zevul* literally means “master of the high place.” *Tanakh*, as it often does,[[8]](#footnote-8) ridicules the pagan god and its cult by changing its name to *ba’al zevuv* – literally, “lord of the flies.”)

When the delegation left Shomron for Ekron, they would have traveled through Wadi Ara (*Nachal Kishon*) to get to the coast road (*Derekh Eretz Pelishtim*, the Roman *via maris*) and then gone south on the coast to Ekron in Philisita. That route would have brought them right under Mount Carmel.

Achaziah’s first delegation encounters Eliyahu (we are not told where) and he delivers a stern message of rebuke to the king:

…“Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of *ba'al-zevuv*, the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus says the LORD: You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die.” (2 *Melakhim* 1:3-4)

Achaziah, predictably angry, sends a delegation of fifty soldiers to seize Eliyahu and bring him to Shomeron:

Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty men with his fifty. He went up to Eliyah, who was sitting on the top of **the** mountain, and said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.’" (ibid. v. 9)

The mention of *rosh hahar* indicates that this is a mountain with which we are contextually familiar. The only other mountain that we’ve heard about in the Eliyahu narratives since that powerful scene on Carmel was *Chorev* (1 *Melakhim* 19), and that is a most unlikely candidate here, considering the geography. It seems reasonable that Eliyahu was still atop Mount Carmel, or had returned there (see 2 *Melakhim* 1:3) in order to make his stand against the idolatrous cult practiced by the Israelite king.

Achaziah ends up sending three delegations, the first two of which are devoured by a heavenly fire that Eliyahu summons to kill them. The third is spared when its members overtly acknowledge Eliyahu’s being a true “man of God.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Note how much this story parallels the earlier one at Carmel. Not only is Eliyahu fighting the court gods of the Phoenician-influenced monarchy, but his powerful moment involves bringing a heavenly fire down to devour the “sacrifice.” In the first story, it was a bull; in the second, it was two platoons of fifty soldiers each, representing the sinning monarch. Note also that Ovadiahu, a secret loyalist to Hashem in Achav’s court, had spared one hundred prophets from Izevel’s sword – in two groups of fifty, each group in a cave (1 *Melakhim* 18:4). Now, Eliyahu miraculously slays two groups of fifty soldiers. Although left unmentioned, it seems that this powerful scene takes place at Mount Carmel as well.

After Eliyahu is taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, his disciple and Divinely-appointed successor Elisha interacts with the local students and then heals the waters of Yericho, demonstrating that indeed, as per his last request of his teacher, Eliyahu’s “spirit” was bestowed upon him. As Elisha retraces his steps from Yarden to Yericho towards Beit-El (effectively reversing his trip to the scene of his teacher’s departure), we read about an unfortunate incident with forty-two reckless lads, their ill-advised insult of the prophet, and their demise at the hands of two bears.[[10]](#footnote-10) The next verse is enigmatic:

From there he went to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Shomron. (2 *Melakhim* 2:25).

Why did Elisha go to Carmel, on the other side of the Land, only to return to the capital city of Shomron? Why did he traverse the entire width of the Land, following a northwestern direction, only to turn right around and return to the southeast?

We could consider that he went to Carmel for inspiration, as that is where his recently departed master had had his greatest moment(s). But a look at the next set of Elisha narratives indicates that after he returned there, he remained on Har Ha-Carmel for some duration.

When the Shunamite woman, whom Elisha had blessed and released from barrenness, comes to summon him to rescue her son who had died, she directs her lad and her donkey towards Mount Carmel, where she finds him (2 *Melakhim* 4:24-25). This is admittedly the last time we explicitly hear of Elisha on Carmel, but his presence there, far from the political and geographic center of the nation he is sent to chastise, is unusual. He evidently found it to be a place of appropriate inspiration before beginning his core mission. Note that until that point, his only interaction with royalty was when the unusual coalition of the kings of Yehuda, Yisrael, and Edom **came to him** for guidance in their war against Moav (2 *Melakhim* 3:11-19). After we see him on Carmel at the end of chapter 4, we next find him in Shomron (in the story of Naaman, 2 *Melakhim* 5), and he remains in the center of the country from that point on.

Abravanel (ad loc.) suggests that Elisha went to Carmel because that was (also) a place where miracles took place and he was intensifying, so to speak, the spirit of Eliyahu that was upon him.

Thus, Carmel was a noted place in the times of the charismatic prophets, driven by Eliyahu’s valorous stand against the prophets of Ba’al there.

CARMEL AND AMOS

Amos, in his anthemic opening (1:2), describes God’s voice, roaring from Tziyyon, as withering the top of the Carmel – *ve-yavesh rosh ha-Karmel*. The Carmel, thus called (as above) because of its lush, arable land, will be “burnt up” by God’s word, in an apt evocation of Eliyahu’s miracles there.

In our verse, Amos utilizes multiple Eliyahu-images to continue the theme of the futility of fleeing from God.

First of all, he invokes “hiding” – *yechavu –* which, once coupled with the location, brings to mind the heroic acts of Ovadia mentioned above. If people are hiding (or trying to) on top of Carmel, they are likely doing so in caves, as Radak suggests. Hiding under trees, as R. Eliezer of Beaugency proposes, is absolutely useless. Given God’s response in the next clause – *mi-sham* ***achapes*,** “I will **search**” – the notion of their hiding under the broad branches of trees an unlikely read of the verse. Ovadia hid those hundred prophets of Hashem in caves, cementing our verse with the Eliyahu narrative.

Note, by the way, that in both of Amos’s mentions of Carmel, he does not refer to it as “Har Ha-Carmel” but as “**Rosh** Ha-Carmel.” We will address this when we take a broader look at this vision, after we have completed our textual analysis.

***Mi-sham*** *achapes u-lekachtim*

from there I will search out and take them;

We have already discussed the difficulty presented by the additional prepositional prefix – ***mi****sham*. It should, by rights, read *sham*; God isn’t going to look for him “from there,” but rather will “look for him there” (or, more accurately, “I will ferret him out there”). As argued previosly, the prepositional *mem* is added to maintain the rhythm, as established in the previous verse, where ***mi-****sham* makes contextual sense.

The only occurrence of *achapes* is in *Tzefania*:

*Ve-haya ba-eit ha-hi* ***achapes*** *et Yerushalayim ba-neirot…*

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are thickening upon their lees, those who say in their hearts, “The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.” (*Tzephania* 1:12)

In both cases, God is searching for sinners who are apparently trying to hide from Him. It is entirely possible that Tzephania (a contemporary of Yirmiyahu) borrowed this phrasing from Amos’s image of God “searching” for those hiding from him atop the Carmel.

***Ve-im*** *yisatru mi-neged einai*

And though they hide from My sight

This is clearly an ironic phrase; no one can hide from God (a point that the *Tanakh* makes from the first interaction between God and Man in *Bereishit* chapter 3). Thus, we should read it as “though they *think to* hide from My sight.”

*Be-karka ha-yam*

at the bottom of the sea

*Karka* (floor) appears 8 times in *Tanakh* (in 6 verses); 7 of the appearances are in *Bamidbar* (1) and *Melakhim* (6), and all of them refer to the floor of the *Mishkan*. In *Bamidbar*, it is mentioned as part of the Sota ceremony, in *Melakhim* (all in *Melakhim* I chapters 6-7) in describing the *Mikdash* of Shelomo. Why did Amos pick this *Mikdash* word to denote the bottom of the sea, when he could have used *be-tachtit hayam* or even just *ba-yam*?

In any case, the association with Yona couldn’t be clearer, and our chiastic structure is complete with this phrase:

Yona (*she’ol*) 🡪 Eliyahu (*shamayim*); Eliyahu (Carmel) 🡪Yona (*yam*).

Note that R. Yosef Kara, undoubtedly bothered by *karka* and following the Targum, interpreted it as “islands,” which, of course, have a *karka*. This reading, however, doesn’t fit the rest of the imagery or poetic symmetry of the vision.

Other *Rishonim* read it as the bottom of the sea, as can be seen from their interpretation of the *nachash* (see below).

I would like to suggest that context will help us here. Amos begins this vision with an image of God standing atop the altar; he then takes us up to Carmel, a worship site used once by Eliyahu. He then takes us down to the bottom of the sea and refers to the sea floor with a *Mikdash* word. He is subtly (ah, that rhetorical genius at work again!) informing his audience that the entire world, from the top of high mountains to the bottom of the sea, is God’s territory – His *Mikdash*, as it were. There is no use trying to hide, as it is all not only visible to God, **it is all in His territory**.

***Mi-sham*** *atzaveh et ha-nachash u-neshakham*

There I will command the serpent and it shall bite them.

Again, the prepositional prefix is used here for rhetorical rhythm, matching the *mi-sham* of the doubled couplet.

The *nachash* here might be symbolic (within the entire symbolism of this vision), per Yonatan (and, following him, Rashi), who interprets it as “the nations, which are strong like a snake.”

Ibn Ezra and Radak explicitly point to the sea serpents mentioned by Yeshayahu:

*Ba-yom ha-hu yifkod Hashem be-charbo ha-kasha ve-hagedola al* ***livyatan nachash bariach ve-el livyatan nachash akalaton*** *ve-harag et ha-****tanim*** *asher ba-yam.*

On that day, the Lord with His sore and great and strong sword will punish **leviathan the slant serpent and leviathan the tortuous serpent**; and He will slay the dragon that is in the sea. (*Yeshayahu* 27:1)

R. Eliezer of Beaugency is a bit circumspect about snakes living at the bottom of the sea (the Leviathan in *Tanakh* is a complex issue on its own and beyond the scope of this *shiur*). He comments that the snake “lives in holes in the earth,” leaving it unclear how the snake, which is a terrestrial reptile, gets to the bottom of the sea.

Amos can, of course, leave that to the imagination of his audience, since, as we have argued, the “reality” of the vision is coming in the next verse, which we will address in next week’s *shiur*.

1. According to BDB (ad loc.) and Gesenius (sec. 85, par. 52), it is a modified form of *kerem* with *lamed* afformative. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This should not be confused with the word *karmil*, which means “crimson” (2 *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 2:6, 13 and ibid. 3: 14, and, according to some, *Shir Ha-Shirim* 7:6 (the most likely meaning there, per the context and parallel descriptive terms). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Yeshayahu* 33:9; *Yirmiyahu* 50:19; see also *Nachum* 1:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Yeshayahu* 35:2; see also *Nachum* 1:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Yirmiyahu* 46:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In all five mentions in *Melakhim*, as well as one mention each in *Yeshayahu* and *Yirmiyahu*, besides both mentions in *Amos.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. And since the focus of the text, from the split kingdom, was on the Northern Kingdom, as can be seen by a cursory comparison of *Shmuel-Melakhim* with *Divrei Ha-Yamim.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See BT *Megilla* 25b. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See BT *Avoda Zara* 11a and the correlation between the story of Onkelos and the three delegations of Roman soldiers sent to seize him. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See BT *Sota* 47a. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)