**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 LOVING MEMORY OF

Jeffrey Paul Friedman

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לע"נ

יהודה פנחס בן הרב שרגא פייוועל

כ"ב אב תשכ"ח – י' אב תשע"ב

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***Shiur* #94:**

**The Prophecies of Amos:**

**DAY OF DOOM**

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

**PART 7:**

**THE HYMN (verse 5)**

In last week’s *shiur*, we completed our study of the judgment/punishment segment of the fifth and final “vision” that Amos presents. This vision sits at the heart of Amos’s “end-of-days” prophecy and may animate and inform it, at least to some degree. In the next two *shiurim*, we will conclude our analysis of the entire vision, focusing on the hymn that comprises the last two verses. This hymn is not the only occasion where Amos takes leave of his audience and his rebukes and warnings to praise God; we’ve already seen this in chapter 4 (verse 13) and chapter 5 (verses 8-9). After completing our text analysis of these two verses in this and the next *shiur*, we will view them within the larger framework of Amos’s hymns (in shiur #96), comparing these two verses with the three earlier praise segments.

THE TEXT

*Va-A-D-N-Y Elokim (Hashem) ha-Tzevakot*

The Lord, GOD of hosts,

Amos uses the Divine cognomen “A-D-N-Y” numerous times, most forcefully when introducing rebukes. Indeed, the frequency of A-D-N-Y in his book – 24 times – is only rivaled by that of Yechezkel (215 times).[[1]](#footnote-1) The sequence *A-D-N-Y Hashem Tzevakot* appears a few times in prophetic oratory and once in *Tehillim* (69:7), but this particular form, with the definite article before the last Name (***ha-****Tzevakot*), is unmatched in *Tanakh*. Even more curious is Amos’s prominent role in using this Name – it only appears four times in all of *Tanakh*[[2]](#footnote-2) with the definite article, three of which are in Amos’s speeches. The only other mention is in *Hoshea*:

*Va-Hashem Elokei* ***ha-****Tzevakot, Hashem zikhro*

the LORD the God of (**the**) hosts, the LORD is His name

The context there may be revealing as to Hoshea’s reason for using this uncommon form. The verse before poetically describes Yaakov’s “wrestling match” with the angel (*Bereishit* 32), from which he emerged successfully. R. Eliezer of Beaugency explains (ad loc.):

*Va-Hashem Elokei (ha-[[3]](#footnote-3))Tzevakot*: The heavenly and earthly hosts, for his [Yaakov’s] enemies surrendered to him and then emboldened him to be prince-like (*ve-heisir oto*) with God and man [per *ki sarita im Elokim ve-im anashim va-tukhal*, *Bereishit* 32:29].

In other words, since the context there is about Yaakov’s mastery over “God’s hosts,” confirming and assuring him that he will also prevail over human adversaries (Esav), the descriptor *Tzevakot* is prefaced with the definite article. To wit, God is the ruler over all of these mighty ones, and He gave Yaakov the strength to hold his own against all of them.

In contrast, the two earlier instances in *Amos* both appear in the context of dire warnings of punishment:

*Shimu ve-ha’idu be-veit Yaakov, ne’um-A-D-N-Y Elokim (Hashem) Elokei* ***ha-Tzevakot***

Harken and testify against the house of Yaakov, says the Lord God, the God of (the) hosts. (3:13)

This is followed by the warning of a day of divine judgment, when God will smite the winter and summer houses, along with all of the other fancy mansions. He will also tear down the horns of the altar at Beit-El:

For on the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him, I will also punish the altars of Beit-El, **and the horns of the altar shall be cut off** and fall to the ground.

And **I will smite the winter-house with the summer-house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end**, says the Lord.

The other mention is no less agitated:

*Ki hineni meikim aleikhem Beit Yisrael ne’um Hashem Elokei* ***ha-Tzevakot*** *goy; ve-lachatzu etkhem mi-levo Chamat ad nachal ha-Arava.*

For, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, says the Lord, the God of (the) hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entrance of Chamat unto the Brook of the Arava. (6:14)

Unlike the mention in chapter 3, this one comes at the culmination and as the signature of the prophecy. Nonetheless, the context is strikingly similar:

For, behold, the Lord commands, **and the great house shall be smitten into splinters and the little house into chips**…You that rejoice in a thing of naught, who say: 'Have we not taken to us **horns** by our own strength?'

Each time that Amos uses this Divine cognomen with the stressed and uncommon definite article, it is in the context of the destruction of the houses and power (“horns”) of the aristocracy of the Northern Kingdom.

As Amos moves us from the immediate prophecies against Beit-El and the “marble houses” of his present audience, he takes those same terms and uses them in the meta-future context of his *eschaton*. The entire vision begins with the shaking of the house, of a sanctuary (with the deliberate ambiguity essential to remote prophecies), and the leaders – the powerful – can no longer find refuge in their homes; they cannot even find it at the farthest reaches of the world (above, below), nor even when being taken away in the chains of their captors. God is the Lord of **all** hosts, *Elokei* ***ha-****Tzevakot*,and there is no shield that can protect when He is judging, no house stable enough to stand up against His judgment.

This sense of power – not just great power, but the irresistible force against which no power is immovable – is then poetically portrayed by the prophet.

One final note before moving on. The use of the definite article becomes something of a translation challenge, which reflects some ambiguity of meaning. That is why most translations avoid the problem altogether and render it as if the definite article isn’t there – “Lord of hosts” as opposed to “Lord of **the** hosts.”

I would like to propose – admittedly with no firm textual proof – that we understand the phrase *as if* it were written as *va-adon****ei ha-Tzeva’ot*** –i.e. “the master **of** (all of) **the** (heavenly and earthly) hosts” – reading the opening Name in the construct form, with a *tzeirei* under the *nun*. However, because the essential Name – the Tetragammaton – is desired here, it changes the vocalization of the previous word and falls back on the more familiar *ado-n****ai***.[[4]](#footnote-4)This would work seamlessly in all three of Amos’s uses of this rare form, as well as in the one instance in *Hoshea*.[[5]](#footnote-5)

*Ha-noge’a ba-aretz va-tamog*

He who touches the earth and it melts

The imagery of God “touching” anything earthly is uncommon. *Yirmiyahu* (1:9) describes God as “touching my mouth” as indication that he is indeed a Divine agent and that “I have placed My words in your mouth,” but that is not cut of the same cloth as Amos’s description of God as touching the earth. There are two similar mentions, but both are in *Tehillim*. In other words, Amos is the only prophet to utilize the imagery of God touching earth, mountains, people – anything.

In *Tehillim* 104:32, after reading the indescribably beautiful paean to God’s creation, we are told that God is:

*Ha-mabit la-aretz va-tir’ad,* ***yiga be-harim*** *ve-ye’eshanu*

He looks at the earth and it quakes, **touches the mountains** and they smoke

In nearly parallel imagery, albeit in a different mood, we read later on in *Tehillim* (144:5):

*Hashem, hat shamekha ve-teired,* ***ga be-harim*** *ve-ye’eshanu*

Hashem, stretch your heavens and descend, **touch the mountains** that they may smoke

The first mention (psalm 104) is purely descriptive; it is the near-culmination of a wide- and deep-ranging praise for God’s creation. The latter instance (psalm 144) is a prayer for support during times of war; recognizing the nullity of Man’s power, David pleads with God to intercede on his behalf, including this overt intervention in the natural order.

Notice the two significant components that these texts share. When God touches the earth, He touches mountains. The reaction of the mountains to His touch is smoke – not to quake (as does the earth in ps. 104), nor to melt (as does Amos’s earth). The Biblical trope of God’s impact on mountains seems to be anchored in the seminal event at Sinai. In the description of that foundational occurrence, we read:

*Ve-Har Sinai ashan kulo, mipnei asher yarad alav Hashem ba-esh*

Mount Sinai, all it, smoked, because Hashem descended on it in fire…

The two mentions in *Tehillim* seem to take their cue from *ma’amad* *Har Sinai* and read God’s “touching” the mountains as a more intense version of God’s presence descending on the mountain “in fire.”

Amos, on the other hand, has God touching the earth (so to speak) and the earth melts: *va-tamog*. The verb *mog*, in its various conjugations, appears 17 times in *Tanakh*, roughly half of them (9) in reference to individuals or, typically, nations, whose collective hearts melt in fear. Perhaps best known is the anticipatory line in *Shirat Ha-Yam*:

*…namogu kol yoshevei Kenaan*

[The hearts of] all those who dwell in Canaan have melted (*Shemot* 15:15)

This excited utterance is confirmed by Rachav as part of her explanation for her behavior towards the two spies and giving them refuge in her house (*Yehoshua* 2:9), and it is repeated in their report to Yehoshua (ibid. v. 24).

There are only 4 clear instances in which the root *mog* is used to describe the earth (or parts of it) “melting.” Two of these are in *Tehillim* – again, no surprise there. The other two of them are in *Amos*.

In *Tehillim* 46:7:

*Hamu goyim, matu mamlakhot; natan be-kolo* ***tamug*** *ha-aretz*

Nations were in tumult, kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted.

Note that here, the earth melts in response to God’s voice – without “touch.”

Later in the psalter (75:4):

***Nemogim*** *eretz ve-khol yosheveha, anokhi tikanti amudeha, Sela!*

The earth and all who dwell in it melt;[[6]](#footnote-6) it is I who have firmly set its pillars. Selah.

In the beautiful epilogue to Amos, he pictures the mountains melting with their juice:

*Hinei yamim ba’im, ne’um Hashem, ve-nigash choresh ba-kotzer ve-doreikh anavim be-mosheikh ha-zara, ve-hitifi he-harim asis ve-khol ha-geva’ot* ***titmogagna****.*

Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall **melt**.

We will address this passage in the last set of *shiurim*. Suffice it to say for now that as beautiful as this vision is (and how blessed is our generation that has merited seeing it come to fruition), it is of a different caste from our verse. The mountains here are pictured as melting due to their overabundance of juice; in our case, the earth is melting due to God’s direct interaction (“touching”), and there is nothing festive or joyous about it. Indeed, it is possible that along with numerous other circles that Amos endeavors to close in his epilogue, the “melting” motif is being redeemed along with the hills, the Land, and the people.

In the final analysis, Amos’s imagery here is a combination of other Biblical motifs – God’s touching the earth, the earth melting – but that poetic amalgamation is unique to our Judean prophet and another demonstration of his rhetorical genius.

*Ve-avlu kol yoshvei vah*

and all who dwell in it mourn

When God “touches” the (dry) earth, it melts. That same moist image, here seen as the dissolving of the earth’s stability as it comes apart, returns a few verses later (see above) when the mountains “melt” with the juices of the plentiful produce they give forth. In a deliberately ironic twist, that melting moistness leads to a drying and withering among its inhabitants.

We have seen the verb *avel* used several times, first in Amos’ anthemic refrain – *ve-avlu ne’ot ha-ro’im ve-yavesh rosh ha-Karmel*, “the pastures of the herders will wither and the top of the [lush] Carmel will be sere.”

The word *avel* appears one more time in *Amos*, in the last verse before (per our arrangement) Amos begins his eschatological sequence of prophecies. In other words, this double-entendre of “mourning” and “withering out” is used as a near-perfect envelope structure – “inclusio” – for Amos’s relatively immediate prophecies. His use of this motif again in his eschaton is part of a larger rhetorical scheme that we will suggest at the conclusion of the book. For now, suffice it to say that Amos utilized many bits – small selections – from his mediate prophecies to build his grand finale.

*Ve-alta kha-ye’or kula*

and all of it rises like the Nile,

*Ve-shake’ah ke-ye’or Mitzrayim*

and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt

This couplet is a nearly perfect repeat of the end of Amos’s “pre-eschatology” prophecy (8:8). As such, we will compare the two side by side and comment on the differences between them, quoting our commentary from chapter 8 where helpful.

**chapter 8, verse 8 chapter 9, verse 5**

*Ve-alta kha-or kula Ve-alta kha-ye’or kula*

*Ve-nigeresha ve-nishke’ah Ve-shake’ah*

*Ke-ye’or Mitzrayim Ke-ye’or Mitzrayim*

The first (slight) difference is in the first line – *ka-or* has morphed into *ka-****ye****’or*. Most of the commentators, modern as well as medieval, assume *ka-or* to be a form (variant? scribal error?) of *ke-ye’or*. Rashi and R. Yosef Kara cite another possibility – that it really means “light” and refers to a cloud (based on *Iyov* 37:11). R. Yosef Kara explains that the referent is a dark cloud that carries heavy amounts of rainwater. Neither commentator raises this as a possible reading in chapter 9. Rashi is silent and R. Yosef Kara’s comment refers directly to the Nile:

“And all of it rises like the Nile and sinks again like the Nile of Egypt” – which rises and irrigates all of the land of Egypt and brings up mud and detritus on the banks of the Nile. In the same way, I will make the wicked ones sink. They are like the waters that dreg up mud and silt, and the righteous ones will remain.

Radak, who understood the mention in chapter 8 to also be about the Nile, simply notes that *ye’or* here is the same as the one before, “which was missing the *yod.*”

Chapter 8 adds *nigeresha*. It is based on the root *garesh*, used elsewhere in *Tanakh* to refer to the “washing away” of mud and detritus in a storm (see *Yeshayahu* 57:20). It is possible, following Radak’s lead, that this passage is a slight variation of the earlier one. Radak points out that the passive is used in chapter 8 (*ve-nishka*) and the active (*ve-shakeah*) in our verse, as if noting the variants of what are otherwise two parallel verses.

On the other hand, we may wish to see the earlier verse as one that describes a “cleansing,” such that the waters bring up the silt and then wash it away, following their normal tidal movements. Our verse, on the other hand, describes a deliberate movement on the part of the river as if it intends to cause utter destruction, flooding the land and then draining all of the water down.

Finally, note the powerful parallelism in our verse, which argues (*contra* Radak) that this verse is contextually and referentially unrelated to the other one, but that Amos deliberately borrows from his own wording to create this image of destruction:

*Ha-noge’a ba-aretz* ***va-tamog***(wet)***ve-avlu*** *kol yoshvei vah* (dry)

***Ve-alta*** *ka-ye’or kula* (wet) ***ve-shake’ah*** *keye’or Mitzrayim* (dry)

In next week’s *shiur*, we will complete our study of the text of the “hymn” and of the entire vision-sequence.

1. Although Yeshayahu employs it twice as many times (48), that is over the stretch of a much larger book; Amos’s usage is far more **intense** than that of Yeshayahu. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I am discounting *Divrei Ha-Yamim* I 27:3, as *tzeva’ot* there refers to David’s honor guard and not to any divine being or celestial body. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is unclear from R. Eliezer’s *lemma* whether he had a version without the opening letter *heh*. See also Ibn Ezra’s second comment ad loc. for the possibility of an even more surprising reading. Nonetheless, the Masoretic notes indicate that this reading is correct. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See also Hakham, *Da’at Mikra*, p. 70, who he makes a somewhat similar suggestion, reading *Elokei ha-Tzevakot.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As noted above (note 2), the fifth use of *ha-tzevakot* has a completely different meaning and context, and even though the *masorah parva* note indicates “five times” at each of these occurrences, that is for orthographic considerations alone and does not impact on meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Most translations have either “totter” or “dissolve” here. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)