**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**

**Shiur #102:**

**The Prophecies of Amos:**

**THE MULTI-GENERATIONAL IMPACT OF AMOS’S ORATORY**

**ADDENDUM 2**

**AMOS AS MASTER TEACHER TO THE PROPHETS**

As we have seen numerous times in this series, Amos introduces many images, rhetorical flairs, instances of word play and much more, each of which become part of the literary arsenal of the prophets in Israel that follow him. Beyond that, Amos’s words reverberate throughout the centuries; many is the preacher who has invoked “Let justice well up as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream” (if that’s really what it means!). The lyricists who penned the song *Al Shelosha Pishei Damesek* during the Yom Kippur War were lifting a line directly from Amos’s repertoire of oratorial skill. In this final installment on *Amos*, I will sketch out the evident or presumed influence of Amos on the later prophets of the First Commonwealth, Exile and early post-Exilic period.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

We will start at the end. Amos is the first to make mention of “the Day of the Lord,” in his sardonic rebuke of those who long for such an epoch and have no idea what it is they are inviting into their lives. Following his call to recite elegies over the “fallen maiden of Israel,” he then ridicules those who fall back on the “Day of the Lord” mantra:

Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord!

Wherefore would you have the day of the Lord?

It is darkness, and not light.

As if a man did flee from a lion,

And a bear met him;

And went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall,

And a serpent bit him.

Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light?

Even very dark, and no brightness in it? (5:18-20)

Amos, however, redeems the eschatological yearning for a “new day” in the final nineteen verses of the book, where he describes a culmination of history which initially threatens to label the Jewish people as no more than just any other nation — and then sets them apart as the one nation that will survive the vicissitudes of exile and persecution. They will ultimately be brought home, be firmly planted in their land and enjoy an unprecedented blessing of plenty from their Land. These are all part of the **real** Day of the Lord which Amos promises is coming.

The notion of an eschaton is prominent in the oeuvre of a number of prophets who follow him and is present in the work of nearly every *navi*. For example, Yeshayahu foresees the great day when the nations of the world will stream to Yerushalayim to learn God’s word (2:1-4). He prophesizes of a day when God will reenact the Exodus in redeeming His children again (11:15) and provides a number of vibrant images of a “new world” under the rule of a “shoot of Yishai,” a rightful heir to the Davidic throne who will judge correctly and impressively. The lion and lamb lie together and the world is filled with the knowledge of God — all this is part of this beautiful image that concludes the first section of the Book of *Yeshayahu* (Chapters 11-12).

The eschatology of the Day of the Lord extends, of course, well beyond the Biblical era, but even within that period, it is invoked over and over, echoing Amos’s usage, expanding and providing a wide spectrum of possible outcomes.

These include Zekharya’s frightening vision in Chapters 12-13 of his book, which culminates in the “day which is darkness, not light” of the final prophecy there (Chapter 14).

If we accept the thesis, mentioned in earlier *shiurim*, that the last six chapters of *Zekharya* are the work of an earlier First Commonwealth prophet, then we still have “the day of the Lord” in Malakhi’s final prophecy:

For, behold, the day comes,

It burns as a furnace;

And all the proud, and all that work wickedness, shall be stubble;

And the day that comes shall set them ablaze,

Says the Lord of hosts,

That it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

But unto you that fear My name

Shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings;

And you shall go forth, and gambol as calves of the stall. …

Behold, I will send you Eliya the prophet

Before the coming

Of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children,

And the heart of the children to their fathers;

Lest I come and smite the land with utter destruction. (3:19-20, 23-24)

The vision of a terrible, frightening day which threatens some or much or all of humanity, which has the Jewish people (or some remnant thereof) emerging as either validated or even sovereign, originates with Amos’s eschatology.

Amos introduces his *eschaton* with the phrase *“Hinei yamim ba’im,”* “Behold the days are coming,” a phrase which he uses three times; once in a proximate and immediate sense of looming punishment (4:2) and twice in introducing each of two prongs of a more distant and culminating vision (8:11, 9:13).

It is telling that Yirmeyahu uses this phrase fifteen times, all of them in introducing prophecies of a distant nature.

Although the phrase does show up one time before Amos (in *I Shemuel* 2:31), that is in a personal and more immediate sense, similar to Amos’s usage of the term in Chapter 4. Using this phrase as associated with the awaited and/ or dreaded “Day of the Lord” begins with Amos.

ADDRESSING THE NATIONS

During the extended period of “pre-literary prophets,” which effectively began with Moshe and concluded with Elisha, *nevi’im* limit their addresses to their immediate audiences. At most, their addresses are meant to be communicated further to the people or to the members of the Israelite aristocracy or ruling class. With the exception of Moshe’s early interactions with Pharaoh, foreign nations are never part of the equation — not as a direct audience nor as an implied (or “feigned”) audience. The only pre-literary prophet who makes other nations part of his prophecy is Bilam. Even he, however, only addresses his words to how the Jewish people will interact with those other nations “at the end of days.” Thus, no message to those nations is implied.

Amos’s opening series of oracles is aimed, directly or otherwise, at six neighboring nations, calling them to account for their brutal immoral behavior and declaiming a Divine punishment which awaits each of them.

Again, Amos sets a model, picked up by numerous later prophets. Yeshayahu has a series of prophecies, each introduced as a “burden” (*masa*), aimed at neighboring and even far-off nations, which comprise Chapters 13-23 of his book. Nachum’s entire prophecy is aimed at Assyria[[1]](#footnote-1) and Ovadya’s entire oeuvre of twenty-one verses is “against Edom.” Yirmeyahu concludes his work with a series of diatribes against those neighboring nations who hurt Israel (Chapters 46-51).

Again, the entire significant segment of prophetic literature which may be classified as “against the nations” begins with Amos.

THE DIVINE ARROWS AIMED AT HIS OWN PEOPLE

In the Torah, *Vayikra* and *Devarim* both include threats as part of the covenant between God and His people; both of these are broadly included in the covenants of Sinai (*Vayikra* 26) and Arvot Moav (*Devarim* 28-29). A number of these threats bring to mind the most spectacular demonstration of God’s power, the plagues against Egypt. The painful irony of these plagues is that the same power used to demonstrate God’s favoring His “firstborn son Israel” will now be used against them. Nonetheless, the only two **recounted** attacks which plague the Jewish people in the pre-literary era of prophecy are famine and war. Famine is understood clearly to be a sign of Divine disfavor, whereas war is a trickier issue. It reflects a removal of God’s protection of His people but also an actualized desire on the part of other nations to conquer, avenge and/ or despoil.

The various military defeats and subsequent subjugations recorded in *Shoftim* are presented as a Divine response to their sinfulness. The famines endured during Eliyahu’s and Elisha’s careers are the first clearly Divine act of retribution aimed at His own people. Until Amos’s time, however, these are the only tribally or nationally experienced calamities recorded. In the “hearken” sequence,[[2]](#footnote-2) Amos presents a series of regional catastrophes, including a famine and a drought, both of which are familiar to us. However, after that, he lists edema and blight and a locust plague. This is the first mention of a plague of any sort used **against** the Jewish people as Divine punishment. This series culminates with the stench of death arising from their camp and speaks to an increasingly more violent and deadly national condition. Unlike the threats in *Vayikra* and *Devarim*, these are recorded as events which have taken place, with the aim of getting the Jewish people to return to God. It doesn’t work.

Again, other prophets pick up on this theme. Notably, Yoel records an awful locust plague in his opening prophecy. The commentators are divided as to whether this is an actual plague of locusts or an incursion by a foreign army that the prophet likens to a swarm of locusts. This trend of understanding climactic and agronomic catastrophes as God’s deliberate act against His people continues into the Second Temple period, where Chaggai points to the agricultural disaster the people have experienced and explains that this is God’s retribution for their reticence to fully embrace the rebuilding of the Temple. (See Chapter 1.)

Once again, Amos blazes yet another trail upon the rhetorical roadmap of literary prophets.

AGAINST THE WOMEN

There are two evil queens who deserve (and, in one case, receive) significant Divine opprobrium during the pre-literary era: Atalya (II *Melakhim* 11) and, of course, Izevel (Jezebel). The latter’s misdeeds are recorded in I *Melakhim* 18-19 and 21, and her death at the hands of Yehu is recorded in II *Melakhim* 9.

However, there are no groups of women who are targets of prophetic rebuke until Amos comes along. In his famous speech to “the cows of the Bashan,” he directs his ire at the wealthy women who cajole their husbands to bring them more luxuries, presumably at the expense of some exploited poor person. The punishment awaiting them is specifically and explicitly aimed at those ladies:

The Lord God has sworn by His holiness:

Lo, surely the days shall come upon you,

That you shall be taken away with hooks,

And your residue with fish-hooks.

And you shall go out at the breaches, every one straight before her;

And you shall be cast into the Harmon,

Says the Lord. (4:2-3)

The technique of targeting wealthy and exploitative women is picked up by Yeshayahu, in his rebuke of the salacious women of Yerushalayim (3:16-26). Yechezkel (8:14) takes specific aim at the women who idolatrously “weep over the Tammuz.” It may even be argued that God’s directive to Hoshea to take two different wanton women (Chapters 1 and 3), couched in the metaphor of Israel as an adulterous wife, is a subtle rebuke of the women in his audience.

Typically, the audiences of Biblical prophets are powerful men — kings, leaders or priests (e.g. *Malakhi* 1). Amos is the first to set aside a pointed oratory at the women of his audience; until now, they could hide their shame behind their husbands. Amos forces them out to face their own complicity in the unraveling of societal ethics. From this example set by our author, his colleagues Yeshayahu and Hoshea take a cue; nearly two centuries later, Yechezkel launches a rebuke against the women who “weep over the Tammuz.”

“LET JUSTICE WELL UP AS WATERS, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS AS A MIGHTY STREAM”

Earlier prophets inveigh against faithlessness, betrayal and misguided priorities. In his famous response to Shaul’s cries of innocence, Shemuel declares the clarion call of proper service of God:

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices,

As in hearkening to the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,

And to hearken than the fat of rams.

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,

And stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim. (I *Shemuel* 15:22-23)

Shaul has a warped sense of loyalty to God, presuming that God prefers ill-gotten fat calves to obeisance to His word. (At least, that is how Shaul presents his case to Shemuel.) Shemuel corrects this mistaken notion by setting his priorities straight: the main measure of fealty to God is loyalty to His word.

Still, justice and interpersonal behavior is not (yet) on the agenda. Indeed, earlier on in pre-literary prophetic history, we almost see an inverted perspective. When Eli chastises his sons for their (vague) misdeeds a generation earlier, he states:

If one man sin against another, God shall judge him;

But if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? (Ibid. 2:25)

Amos raises, time and again, the issue of justice and judicial corruption. Of course, these are topics the Torah addresses in its laws; but including them as the **reason** for God’s disfavor and anger starts with Amos.

There are many examples of this phenomenon throughout the book, but we will suffice with two of the most famous:

Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of Israel,

Yea, for four, I will not reverse it:

Because they sell the righteous for silver,

And the needy for a pair of shoes;

That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor,

And turn aside the way of the humble. (*Amos* 2:6-7)

They hate him that reproves in the gate,

And they abhor him that speaks uprightly.

Therefore, because you trample upon the poor,

And take from him exactions of wheat,

You have built houses of hewn stone,

But you shall not dwell in them,

You have planted pleasant vineyards,

But you shall not drink the wine thereof.

For I know how manifold are your transgressions,

And how mighty are your sins;

You that afflict the just, that take a ransom,

And that turn aside the needy in the gate.

Therefore the prudent does keep silence in such a time;

For it is an evil time.

Seek good, and not evil, that you may live;

And so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you say.

Hate the evil, and love the good,

And establish justice in the gate;

It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts,

Will be gracious unto the remnant of Yosef…

But let justice well up as waters,

And righteousness as a mighty stream. (5:10-15, 24)

It is not difficult to point to this theme as recurring, with a beautiful range of poetic and literary flourishes, in the words of subsequent prophets. Yeshayahu’s play with the words *mishpat-mispach* and *tzedaka-tze’aka* (5:7) precedes a long rebuke of the corrupt court system which, again, exploits and harms the poor and disenfranchised. Mikha picks up this theme (6:11-12); as does Chavakuk (Chapter 2); as well as Yirmeyahu (Chapter 34), who pins the cause of the impending destruction on the treatment of Hebrew slaves by their masters, who refuse to emancipate them when their time is due.[[3]](#footnote-3)

SUMMARY

In this brief overview, we have noted both linguistic flairs as well as themes that Amos introduces and that are picked up by his colleagues and/ or later prophets. Amos’s impact on the language of prophecy, on the message of prophecy and on the imagery of prophecy is clear.

Perhaps this gives us a new appreciation for his *apologia* stated to Amatzya (7:14), “I am neither a *navi* nor a *ben navi.*” We may contemplate the possibility that it takes someone outside of the prophetic guild, outside of the circles of prophetic tradition, to create an entirely new genre that informs the next few generations of prophets. His words, and their words, representing the Divine message, echo throughout the generations and give us greater insight into understanding, to quote *Mikha* (6:8), “What does the Lord your God ask of you…”

After the *chagim*, we will begin a new series of *shiurim*: “Hoshea: The Strained Bonds of Divine Love.”

*Chag Same’ach!*

1. I am deliberately omitting *Yona* from our discussion due to some broader difficulties with that mission. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Amos* 4:6-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Note that the entire focus of Yona’s mission is about justice and ill-gotten gains, but again we will leave *Yona* out of our direct discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)