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 Rabbi Dr. Barrett (Chaim Dov) Broyde zt”l

הוֹלֵךְ תָּמִים וּפֹעֵל צֶדֶק וְדֹבֵר אֱמֶת בִּלְבָבוֹ

Steven Weiner & Lisa Wise

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In memory of Tzirile bat Moshe *z”l* whose *yarhtzeit* is 11 Kislev

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**Shiur #29**

**The Prophecies of Amos: "The Hearken Sequence"**

In [last week's *shiur*](https://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-28-prophecies-amos-hearken-sequence), we studied the opening of the first of Amos's "hearken" sequence of oracles. The opening two verses, which we analyzed, comprise the indictment against Shomeron — along with an "invitation" for the Egyptian and Philistine neighbors to come around to the mountains surrounding Samaria to attest to the evils in that society.

In this (and the next) *shiur*, we will analyze the subsequent punishment which Amos prophesizes. This punishment is detailed in Chapter 3, verses 11-15.

In this *shiur*, we will examine the text of the first two of these verses. In the next *shiur*, we will look at the final three verses. In the *shiur* which follows, we'll look at the larger picture of this oracle, its structure and meaning.

To clarify; the punishment section is made up of two clearly demarcated halves: vv. 11-12 and then vv. 13-15. Verse 13 begins with the introductory *shimu* and gives further details about the punishment, which are of a different context than the first section. We will analyze these sections, for the purposes of these *shiurim*, separately.

THE TEXT (vv. 11-12)

**11** Therefore thus says the Lord God: An adversary, and around the land! And he shall bring down your strength from you, and your palaces shall be spoiled. **12** Thus says the Lord: Just as the shepherd rescues out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, similarly, the Israelites who live in Samaria shall escape with the corner of a couch and the leg of a bed.

11A: THE UPCOMING SIEGE

*Lakhein* (Therefore) *—* This bridging word is used frequently in prophetic rhetoric as a means of transitioning from the accusation to the consequence, including numerous times in *Amos* (4:12; 5:11, 15, 16; 6:7; 7:17).

*Ko amar* (Thus says) *—* We discussed the "messenger formula" in last year's *shiurim* (at 1:3); we noted there that it generally appears at the beginning of a divine speech;, our verse is an exception. Even though Amos is most of the way through this speech, and has already begun pronouncing "sentence" on Shomeron, he underscores the punishment that he is about to describe by using a formal introduction. See below at 12a when it is used again and our comments there. He then uses the fuller Divine Name, *Ado-nai Elokim,* as he did above, at 1:8. It may be significant that of the eight nations who are the targets of the oracles, three conclude with the formula *"amar Hashem"*, but the only one to have the fuller signature (*"amar Ado-nai Elokim”*) is Aza-Peleshet, one of the two nations "invited" to attest to the sins of Samarian society.

*Tzar* (An adversary) *—* This is an unnamed enemy who is being summoned to mete out God's punishment against Shomeron. The anonymity of the enemy may be a rhetorical device, used to instill more fear in the audience: they won't know from where the attack will come and in which direction to defend, with whom to attempt to make a pre-emptive treaty etc. Alternatively, it may be the case that Amos himself has no idea who that enemy is; the vanquishing army turns out to be Assyria who, at this point in time, is not an obvious threat and is dealing with internal turmoil and empire-rebuilding.

Although the word *tzar* means enemy (cf. *Bamidbar* 10:9, *Esther* 7:6), there may be another allusion here. Just as the *otzerim* and *shod* in v. 10 are alliterative allusions to Mitzrayim and Ashdod, respectively, the use of *tzar* (instead of the expected *oyev)* may be an allusion to Tzor (Tyre), the capital of the Phoenician kingdom and the third neighbor mentioned in the opening set of the "oracles against the nations" in Chapter 1 (vv. 9-10). Note that the first three nations listed in those oracles are Aram (Damascus), Philistia (Ashdod) and Phoenicia (Tyre). All three are alluded to in our section,[[1]](#footnote-1) further supporting the hypothesis that this oracle was presented after — and to the same audience as — the first set (Chapters 1-2).

*U-sviv ha-aretz* – literally "and around the land." The word *u-sviv* is hard to explain, as following the introduction of the enemy (*tzar*) we would expect a predicate. For this reason, modern commentators who are devotees of text criticism read it as *yesovev* and assume a *vav/ yud* error, assuming a defective (*ketiv chaser*) *seviv,* written *samekh-bet-bet*. Paul[[2]](#footnote-2) suggests a reading of *sovev* and brings *II Melakhim* 6:15 as support. The difficulty with this, besides the testimony of the Masoretic Text (and all witnesses have *yesovev*) is that *sovev* as used there is a present-tense verb, whereas here it is likely in the future tense — if not an imperative (see below).

The classic commentators (Rashi, R. Yosef Kara, Radak and others) read it as if there were a missing word *yachaneh*, i.e. the enemy will come and (encamp) around the land; the notion is that the enemy will encamp and surround Samaria. Ibn Ezra, perhaps bothered by the odd *u-sviv*, reads *tzar* not as an enemy (or, not exclusively as an enemy), rather as the verb "to besiege", and understands that *u-sviv* modifies that verb. To wit, they will set up a siege all around the city.

Hakham[[3]](#footnote-3) suggests that the *vav* before *u-sviv* establishes a new clause, which makes *tzar* an independent statement, which must be expanded to "the enemy will come" and then *u-sviv* modifies where they will be — all around the land.

Hakham further notes that the use of *ha-aretz* means that the enemy will not limit his encampment to Shomeron, but will encircle the entire land. This is not necessarily the only way to read *ha-aretz*, as *ha-aretz* is used elsewhere in *Tanakh* to refer to one city. For instance, in *Yehoshua* 2:1, the leader sends two spies to "spy out the land and Yericho" – and the mission is clearly limited to Yericho and its environs (the aforementioned “*aretz"*). In addition, the entire imagery set up in v. 9 of enemies coming around to witness the evils of the city are called to assemble on *harei Shomeron —* i.e. to surround Samaria alone. The *aretz* referenced here is likely the area surrounding Shomeron, not the entire northern kingdom.

The *etnachta* (Masoretic punctuation mark indicating the midpoint of the verse) rests under *ha-aretz*; so the intent of the verse seems to be that the enemy will come and surround the land — and the second half of the verse details what the enemy will do once there.

Before moving on to the anticipated actions of the enemy, I'd like to take one more look at the difficult word *u-sviv*. Perhaps we should read both opening words *tzar* and *seviv* (or *tzar u-sviv*) as imperatives. God is calling the attesting nations to besiege (per ibn Ezra) and surround the city. The horror of a scene in which God Himself summons the enemies to witness the sinful deeds of His people is compounded by His inviting them, as a consequence of their attestation, to come and attack the capital city of Yisrael. This follows the flavor of the rule established in *Devarim*:

The hands of the witnesses shall be upon him first… (*Devarim* 17:7)

The tone of this phrase as divinely directed, as opposed to divinely foreseen or ordained, punishment fits the previous verses much more smoothly. God invites His witnesses to see, then, exact punishment of His wayward people.

11B – THE BREACH OF SAMARIA

The second half of v. 11 is made up of a synthetic parallelism, where the second half completes the image that the first half introduces:

*Vehorid mimeikh venavozu*

He (they) will take down from you they will be despoiled

*Uzeikh armenotayikh*

Your strength your palaces/ fortresses

Note that, likely for purposes of variation, the second half of the parallel uses the passive voice (*venavozu*) as opposed to the active (*uvazezu*). Note also that the final word here is *armenotayikh*, which serves not only as a *leitwort* but as a *leitmotif* in this entire speech.

In the first half, the enemy will "take down your strength from you." The word *oz*, translated here as "strength", has two common meanings in biblical poetry. It means "strength", as in *ozi ve-zimrat(i) Y-ah* (*Shemot* 15:3): "God is my strength and song (?)" and likely the meaning of the famous coda to the "voice of God on the waters," “*Hashem oz le-ammo yitein,” “*God gives strength to His people” (*Tehillim* 29:11). It also means "glory", as used in that same psalm, “*Havu la-Shem kavod va-oz”* (29:1). Although conventionally translated as "strength", when used in juxtaposition with *kavod* or *hadar* (as in *Mishlei* 31:25), it seems to take on a meaning of "honor." In any case, the *oz* here is independent of any modifying juxtaposition, so we will read it as "strength." Per our suggestion above, the witnessing nations that will besiege the city will then take down her strength, i.e. her walls. Following the more conventional reading, the unnamed (and currently unknown) enemy will come in and besiege the city and take down her walls.

Taking the strength down "from you" makes the anticipated destruction of the walls of Shomeron that much more personal, reminding us of the cries of the Edomites "Strip her naked, down to the foundation" at the Babylonian destruction of Yerushalayim (*Tehillim* 137:7).

The *armenotayikh* of the second hemistich are, as mentioned above, a *leitwort* in this section. They are mentioned twice in the "summons", to sound the invitation to the fortresses of Ashdod and the fortresses of Egypt (each time, *armenot*) and to come see the ill-gotten loot stored up in the *armenot* of Shomeron. These same *armenot*, symbol of the greed of the Samarian aristocracy, will now fall and, in a clear example of poetic justice (*midda ke-neged midda)*, that wealth will now be plundered by outsiders.

The use of the passive voice in this last phrase (*venavozu*) opens up the frightening possibility that not only the besieging enemy will take spoils from the fortresses, but they will be laid open for all to plunder.

THE TEXT: 12A

Oddly enough, the text uses another *“Ko amar”* introduction, as if intensifying the imagery (which is, indeed, intense) by re-stressing that this is God's word. This time, the Name of God used is simply *Hashem*, as opposed to earlier. This is similar to the formula that the rabbis use in creating the framework for *berakhot*. First there is a proper, full address to God at the introduction (*peticha)*, i.e. "*Hashem, Elokeinu Melekh Ha-olam*,” “Lord, our God, King of the Universe," but in the case of long (or some other) *berakhot*, the signature (*chatima*) is just *Hashem —* as in “*Barukh Ata Hashem, mekadesh ha-Shabbat*.” We seem to have a somewhat parallel *peticha/ chatima* relationship here, between the opening introductory pronouncement of punishment (summoning the besieging army to come around and to tear down the walls and fortresses of Shomeron) and the resultant pillaging which we will read about with terrifying imagery in this verse.

The pronouncement is presented as an analogous parallel, using the formulaic *ka-asher/ kein* pair, which appear numerous times throughout *Tanakh*, albeit almost always in a different format. Usually, the *ka-asher / kein* pair reflect either a fluidity of action: “Just as (*ka-asher*) Hashem commanded [Moshe and Aharon], similarly (*kein*) they did”(*Shemot* 7:6 and dozens more times in the Torah);or “Just as (*ka-asher*) I did, similarly (*kein*), God has paid me back” (*Shoftim* 1:7). In all of these instances, the text testifies (or the person testifies about himself) that the commanded action is fulfilled **as directed** or that what was supposed to happen did occur. In the case of Adoni-Bezek (*Shoftim* 1:7), he acknowledges the righteousness of his punishment. In none of these cases, however, is the *ka-asher/ kein* a bridge from analogy to referent.

In our case, however, Amos is using an image from the animal kingdom, an image which is evidently known to his audience, and he uses it to illustrate the terror that awaits them. This type of *ka-asher/ kein* pairing appears in only two other places in *Tanakh*, both at least a century after Amos.

In *Yirmeyahu* 13:11, when God describes the close relationship He has forged with Bnei Yisrael, he compares it to the way that a belt cleaves to a man's waist.

In *Yechezkel* 15:6, the prophet compares the impending destruction of the Judean kingdom to the destruction of a grapevine when fire consumes the forest.

Perhaps serendipitously, or perhaps significantly, both of these declarations are prefaced with *“Ko amar Hashem*.”

THE ANALOGY

Part 1: The Analogy

Just as (*ka-asher*) the shepherd rescues (*yatzil*) out of the mouth of the lion

Two legs or a piece of an ear *(bedal ozen*)

This is not the first time that Amos has invoked the lion; his anthemic opening line is as follows:

God roars from Tziyon, and gives forth his voice from Yerushalayim

And the pastures of the shepherds wither and the top of Carmel is made sere (1:2)

There he uses the lion imagery to illustrate the fearful roar of God's voice of rebuke and punishment.

Additionally, in the "inevitability of prophecy" section which precedes ours, we find:

Does the lion roar if he has no prey? Does the cub give forth his voice if he has no (hunted) meat?

This is used to develop the argument of causality which leads to the following:

When the lion roars, who shall not fear?

(and then:) When the Lord, God speaks, who can but prophesy?

Here, Amos uses the lion differently: it represents the enemy, and Yisrael is the poor flock that is under attack by the predator. The shepherd, whose job is to guard the flock from such attacks, is virtually helpless; at most, he can only save some remnants of a lamb that has been taken and almost totally devoured.

Although it seems that the shepherd is trying to save what he can, ibn Ezra and R. Yosef Kara suggest another motivation: the shepherd will grab what he can to bring as testimony that the animal has been, indeed, killed by a predator, to exempt himself from payment to the rancher (see *Shemot* 22:12).

The word *bedal* (the nominal form is a *badal;* due to the construct state*,* the opening *kamatz* becomes a *sheva)* is a *hapax legomenon*, a singular word that appears only once in the canon. However, the root letters indicate that it means to be separate or be a distinct part. *Bedal ozen*, is, therefore, a separated piece of the ear. The Targum, quoted favorably by Rashi, Radak and others, renders *bedal ozen* as *chaschos de-odan* (the cartilage of the ear). It is unclear if this is a translation of *bedal* or an interpretation — that the separated piece of the ear would be, reasonably, the cartilage. Radak suggests that the hind legs and cartilage of the ear are the last thing the lion would eat, which is why the shepherd would be able to rescue them.

In any case, the model presented by Amos is of a shepherd, who is either so devoted to his flock that he will save what he can (but far too little, much too late) or else sufficiently concerned with his own liability that he'll risk life and limb to bring evidence of his diligence. We know who the lion is in this metaphor (the enemy) and we understand that the flock is the people of Yisrael.

Who, however, is the shepherd? Is it God? This hardly seems to fit; presenting God as so impotent that He can only save a small remnant. Perhaps the shepherd is the prophet, which is a scary possibility. Is Amos telling his audience (and us) that he is issuing the warning to bring evidence to God of his loyalty and diligence, as it were saying: "But there was nothing I could do"?

**Part 2: The Target**

Similarly, the Israelites who live in Samaria shall escape (*yinatzelu*) with the corner of a couch (*pe’at mita*) and the leg of a bed (*demeshek eres*).

(Translating this last phrase is problematic; see below).

The application of the analogy (the "target") is introduced with *kein* (similarly).

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In v. 11, the active voice (*vehorid)* in the first hemistich is offset by the passive voice in the second hemistich (*venavozu)*. In much the same way, in our verse, the active verb describing the shepherd saving the remnants of the torn sheep (*yatzil*) is matched, in this second half of the verse, with the same root in the passive voice (*yinatzelu*). Although there is an oratorical advantage to this, being able to use the same root with variations in voice, there may be something more going on here. Perhaps the move from an active verb to a passive one — both in describing the destruction of Shomeron — may subtly speak to the impotence that the vanquished kingdom will experience in the face of their (anonymous) enemy.

The translation presented above — that the people who live in Shomeron will escape, but with little furniture — not only seems to miss the mark of the analogy, it is also a weak and anticlimactic phrase considering the punishment anticipated here.

Perhaps it is for this reason that ibn Ezra explains that the phrase should be rendered something like "those who lie on the bed in the corner" and that means that the only people who will survive the onslaught will be those who are too sick, in bed, and cannot go out to fight. He explains that the word *pei’a*, which means "corner," refers not to the corner of the bed but the bed which is placed in the corner of the house and out of view. This is syntactically unusual but it does render a more palatable translation along with fitting the analogy more smoothly.

The most challenging word in this verse is *demeshek* (or is it *demesek?*). To begin with, the word *eres* is a solid parallel with *mita;* both mean bed/ couch. It stands to reason that the word before *mita* would mean something like "corner." But what is that word? If it is *demesek*, is it an allusion to the ancient city of Damascus? If so, what does it have to do with the edge of a couch?

The commentators present a wide range of approaches — but first, let us consider the text itself. R. Yedidya Norzi, the 16th-century Mantuan Masorete, in his monumental *Minchat Shai*, records that the Targum and *Midrash Seder Olam* seem to read it with a "left *shin*" (*demesek*) but he points out that all the best Masoretic manuscripts have a "right *shin*" (*demeshek)*. This makes the word another *hapax legomenon* and makes interpretation a bit more challenging, although context will help. As pointed out above, using parallelism, we would interpret the word as something like a corner or edge. Paul (*Mikra leYisrael)* suggests that it may mean the leg of a bed (hence the translation above) and that *pe'at mita* refers to the head of a bed. This fits the metaphor well: just as the only part of the lamb that is "rescued" are two extremities (legs and ears), similarly, the two opposite sides of the bed will be all that is saved.

I'd like to recommend another reading here.

Amos has issued a summons to Egypt and Philistia to come and attest to the evils of the Shomeron society — and then invited them (in God's Name) to surround the city and besiege it. The word for "siege" as used here is *tzar*, hinting to a northern neighbor (Tyre/ Phoenicia). Perhaps the use of the singular *demeshek* (which may mean a corner or edge) is selected because of its orthographic and auditory similarity with the capital of Yisrael's constant enemy, Aram.[[4]](#footnote-4) Keep in mind that Aram/ Damascus are the first nation to stand accused in the oracles of the nations. At this point, Amos has invoked — or at least hinted to — the first three nations presented there, along with Egypt, the cradle of Israelite history. These nations, who stand to be punished per the earlier oracles, will now (potentially) serve as God's rod of anger against His people.

In the next *shiur*, we will look at the final three verses of this first "hearken" oracle.

1. Re: Damascus, see our discussion of the word *demeshek/ demesek* in v. 12 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Mikra leYisrael*: *Yoel, Amos* (Tel Aviv: 1994), p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Da'at Mikra*, *Trei Asar I* (Jerusalem: 1990), p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The LXX has an entirely different read of the end of the verse and certainly has a "left *shin*" and reads it as Damascus. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)