YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE:**

**THE PROPHECIES OF HOSHEA AND AMOS**

**By Rav Yitzchak Etshalom**

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

This shiur is dedicated in memory of Israel Koschitzky zt"l, whose yahrzeit falls on the 19th of Kislev. May the worldwide dissemination of Torah through the VBM be a fitting tribute to a man whose lifetime achievements exemplified the love of Eretz Yisrael and Torat Yisrael.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Shiur #30:**

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

In [last week's *shiur*](https://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-29-prophecies-amos-hearken-sequence), we studied the first two verses of the punishment segment of Amos's first of the "hearken" sequence of oracles. Those opening two verses are a call to the enemy (Ashdod and Egypt? Aram?) to come to the land, surround it and besiege the city of Shomeron, ultimately tearing down its walls and ridding it of its strength.

In this *shiur*, we will complete our analysis of the punishment segment of this first "hearken" oracle, which comprises the final three verses of Chapter 3.

To clarify; the punishment section is made up of two clearly demarcated halves: vv. 11-12 and then vv. 13-15. V. 13 begins with the introductory *shimu* and gives further details about the punishment which are of a different context than the first section.

**THE TEXT (VV. 13-15)**

**VERSE 13: INTRODUCTION**

*Shimu ve-ha'idu*

Hearken and testify against…

Even though this verse begins with another *shimu*, we consider it to be the conclusion of the previous passage on two counts. First of all, there is no new indictment here. The punishment is apparently an expansion on the punishment presented in vv. 11-12, and those verses are the divine response to the accusation which appears in vv. 9-10. Furthermore, the mention in v. 14 of "the day that I visit the transgressions of Yisrael upon him (Yisrael)" indicates that this is a presentation of more information regarding the consequences listed above, per that reference.

Secondly, although the opening imperative *shimu* is likely directed to the audience, to whom is the subsequent directive of *ve-ha'idu* addressed? Witnesses are consistently those (whether real, as in legal texts, or imagined, as in many prophetic texts) who are decidedly not the subject of the given testimony. For the aristocracy and monarchy in Shomeron to testify here is odd, unless they are testifying to their own sins (what we could more correctly call "confession").

Perhaps the terms are distributive: *shimu* is addressed to the real audience of Israelites whereas *ha'idu* is addressed to the Philistine and Egyptian neighbors who, as we recall, were summoned to testify as to the ills of the society. It is important to note that the root *ada* (*ayin-daled-heh*), which usually means "testify," means "warn" in Akkadian.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This introduction to the intensified stage of punishment takes on a new meaning: not only are these neighbors going to come witness the sins of Shomeron (and, perhaps, be the leading invaders to carry out God's punishment; see the previous *shiur*), but they will also be the ones to warn them of the upcoming punishment. In any case, the summons is illusory and a rhetorical device (like the oracles of the first two chapters), but that is most pronounced here. The first new consequence here is the destruction of idolatrous sites, which would be an unlikely warning to come from idolatrous nations. Nonetheless, the image is powerful: enemies from whom God has saved us (in the case of the Philistines, repeatedly) come to see our sins and then to be God's agents, delivering the warning of His intended punishment.

*Be-veit Yaakov*

Against the house of Yaakov

House of Yaakov is a relatively rare name for the people; it appears roughly twenty times in the canon, nearly all of them in the rhetoric of the literary prophets. Amos uses it twice — which raises the question: why use it here? Amos is comfortable using "Shomeron" as well as "Yisrael," so why "Beit Yaakov"?

I'd like to offer two proposals here. Firstly, Amos continues to address the ongoing violation of the downtrodden and disenfranchised (in this prophecy, they are the *ashukim,* oppressed). There are numerous avenues of suasion to counter this greed and oppression, including the responsibility of the leaders for the welfare of the people, the general weal to be gained by society when everyone is earning responsibly and able to maintain his own family and the providential argument that wealth is given to the wealthy as a gift from God, and that the most appropriate way to acknowledge that is to share it with the less fortunate. Perhaps rising above all of them (and, to some extent, encompassing them all as well) is the argument of unity. Since we are all one people, with one father (Yaakov) and all emanating from his house of twelve sons (Beit Yaakov), subjugation and exploitation is an essential denial of that history.[[2]](#footnote-2) Perhaps invoking Beit Yaakov serves to remind the audience of their historic and covenantal ties to the ones whom they are oppressing.

Secondly, as we will see in v. 14, for the first time, Amos turns to the worship practices of the north, at least in the context of punishment. Those worship practices emanate from Yerovam ben Nevat's establishment of two alternative worship sites — at Beit El and at Dan — which would allow the people to worship God without going to Yerushalayim (thereby switching allegiance to the kingdom of Yehuda). Although Amos’s wording of "altars" in the plural in v. 14 implies that he is addressing out-and-out idolatry as opposed to the "off-Jerusalem" site as originally set up, the starting point for Yerovam’s worship is there and is basically a deviation from the "single-nation, single-Temple" model directed by Moshe in *Devarim* 12. We will elaborate on this a bit as we analyze the next verse and then again concerning the brief narrative which takes place at "the" altar in Beit El in Chapter 7.

Although Amos uses "Yaakov" to denote the northern kingdom with some frequency, especially in Chapter 7, the addition of "Beit" here serves two (perhaps three) purposes. First of all, as above, it serves as a reminder of "Beit Yaakov" who all come to Egypt together[[3]](#footnote-3) (a common history) as well as "Beit Yaakov' who stand at Sinai and accept the covenant[[4]](#footnote-4) (a common mission).

Secondly, the word *bayit* (house) is a *leitwort* in this passage, appearing six times in a brief three verses.

Finally, it may be generated by another allusion to create yet a different association for the audience. Amos' contemporary, Yeshayahu, refers to the Mikdash as *"Beit Elokei Yaakov" (Yeshayahu* 2:2) and it is Yaakov, alone among the Patriarchs, who references a sanctified place as a "house." Yaakov changes the name of Luz to "Beit El" and promises to return and make the place a "*Beit* *Elokim*" (*Bereishit* 28). Since he is going to invoke a punishment against the idolatrous altars at "Beit El," he prefaces it with the reminder that he, as well as his audience, are all "Beit Yaakov.”. How ironic! Yaakov was the one who recognized God's Presence there and renamed it accordingly; now his descendants are using the same site for pagan worship.

*Ne’um Ado-nai Elokim Elokei Ha-tzevaot*

This is the longest name for God used by Amos (who usually uses the Tetragrammaton alone or adds *Elokim*). The cognomen *tzevaot* (hosts) is difficult to translate. It may mean "Who rules the heavens" (*tzivot ha-shamayim,* the hosts of the heavens*),* or “Who leads the camp of Yisrael” (the Israelites are led out from Egypt “*al tzivotam,” “*by their hosts,” in *Shemot* 12:51*)* or “Who wages war” (e.g. *Bamidbar* 1:3). In any case, the commentators fail to address the issue of why this long name-sequence appears here, of all places. Parenthetically, this particular sequence is unmatched in the canon.

I'd like to suggest that this is the point where Amos shifts his accusations from the purely societal to the religious and subtly condemns the worship at Beit El (which he will attack more overtly further on). God not only demands responsibility for the poor on the part of the rich, an oppression-free society et cetera, but He also demands exclusivity of worship. Perhaps, because of that, now the full picture of Yisrael's crimes is beginning to emerge. Perhaps that's why this long name-sequence is used here.

**VERSE 14: DESTRUCTION OF THE IDOLATROUS SITES**

The opening word, *ki*, is usually (mis)translated as "because"; in most cases in *Tanakh*, it carries another transitional meaning. In this case, it is probably best to read it as "for," as we have rendered it above. It is not giving justification for the coming punishment (which would then be "because"); that has already been stated. Rather, it gives stress to the warning (*ha'idu)* that the other nations are going to deliver, as it were, in God's name.

*Be-yom pokdi pishei Yisrael alav*

On the day that I visit the sins of Yisrael on him (Yisrael)

The idiomatic "visiting sins" in *Tanakh* refers to God's accounting with Man — when the bills come due. This is a phrase that first appears in the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf:

*U-vyom pokdi, ufakadti aleihem chatatam.*

And on the day that I remember(?), I will visit their sin upon them (*Shemot* 32:34)

It seems to be a deliberate turn of the phrase here, as the punishment that Amos points to is the destruction of the altars at Beit El. As mentioned above, the beginning of "sinful" worship (or, more appropriately, "wrong worship") at Beit El dates to the reforms of Yerovam ben Nevat, who establishes worship sites at Beit El and Dan, the southern and northern borders of his newly defined kingdom. At each site, he erects a golden calf and, echoing the call from *Shemot*, points to them and said: "These are your gods, Yisrael” — or "This is your God, Yisrael"— “who took you up out of Egypt" (*I Melakhim* 12:28).

However, unlike the first mention of a "day of reckoning" in *Shemot*, this one seems to be nigh. In *Shemot*, the clear intent of the verse is that full punishment is being stayed temporarily and that a later day will come when the people will be punished for this sin. Contradistinctively, the sense here is that this day of reckoning is coming, and right soon.

There is yet another critical difference between *Amos* and *Shemot* — one that, again, hangs the dark cloud much heavier over Shomeron. Whereas the sin of the Golden Calf is referred to, at least in the context of the "day of reckoning" as a *cheit* (literally "error"), here, Amos speaks about the day in which God holds Yisrael accountable for their *pesha’im*. As noted in our opening *shiurim* on Chapter 1, a *pesha* is literally a rebellion and is used both in describing the deliberate rebellion against vassalage (e.g. *II Melakhim* 3:5, ibid 8:20) as well as rebellion against God (*Yeshayahu* 1:2; see also the sequence at *Tehillim* 19:13-14). Whereas God may have been more forgiving and understanding regarding the "error" of the Golden Calf, born of the fear of being leaderless in the desert (or any of the myriad ways in which that sin has been understood in the long history of interpretation), in this case, the people's behavior is viewed as rebellious and that judgment will not only come swiftly, it will be harsh. This is the sense that the prophet wishes to subtly communicate to his audience.

The second half of the verse defines what the *pekida* will be. Its structure is triangular parallelism, with both the A and B clauses matched by the C clause, as below:

*Ufakadti al mizbechot Beit El Venigde’u karnot ha-mizbei’ach*

I will punish the altars of Beit El and the horns of the altar will be cut

*Venafelu la-aretz*

And they will fall to the ground

Both the altars as well as their horns are modified by the phrase "will fall to the ground," while the "horns" of the B clause also define the altars in "A". In this eloquent rhetorical flourish, Amos brings the idolatrous altars of Beit El crashing down.

Let us consider several notes about this verse. First of all, Amos's focus here is solely on the worship site of Beit El, even though Dan was set up as a parallel site as noted above. The reason for this seems clear from the narrative in *I Melakhim* 13. The *ish ha-Elokim* (unnamed prophet) comes to Beit El, sees Yerovam himself offering up on the altar and utters his vision about a scion of David (Yoshiyahu) coming and cutting down this altar and all of the *kohanim* serving there. It seems that Beit El was always seen as the central worship site, associated with the royal house, a "*mikdash melekh,*" as Amatzya the priest will declare in the brief narrative ahead in Chapter 7.

The special character of Beit El, besides the few mentions in *Bereishit* (as both Avraham and Yaakov recognize it as special and build worship sites there), first appears in Shemuel. When Shemuel gives Shaul the three signs that he is truly going to be king, the second of those signs is that he will meet three men "going up to God at Beit El,” bringing offerings, some of which they will offer to Shaul (*I Shemuel* 10:3-4). In other words, during the period between the destruction of Shilo (during Shemuel's youth) and the building of the *Mikdash*, when *bamot* (altars outside the Tabernacle or Temple) were permitted, Beit El was a nationally-recognized location for worship. It was a natural selection for Yerovam when he decided to set up northern altars.

The mention of "altars" in the plural, however, is unusual. In all of the Beit El narratives (including *I Melakhim* 13:2 and its resolution in *II Melakhim* 23:15), there is only mention of a single altar. Some have suggested that there were ancillary altars, but the second clause of this passage seems to militate against that: "the horns **of the altar** will be broken off," again a reference to a single altar.

I'd like to suggest that Amos is deftly equating the "off-site" worship initiated by Yerovam to idolatry; i.e. an altar which stands anywhere but in Yerushalayim is considered idolatrous and is deemed as if the worshipper has built **many** altars, to many gods. To be sure, this is not to suggest that the two are halakhically equivalent, but that creating a "new" place for worship (or reviving an old, but rejected, place) stems from the same mindset that drives idolatrous religions — a desire for man to set the parameters of worship.

Typically, altars throughout the ancient Levant had "horns", a small abutment at each of the four corners. In ancient times, including in Israel, holding on to the *karnot ha-mizbei’ach* was an indication of taking sanctuary and seeking God's protection from the "long arm of the law." In addition, the horns were used for receiving the blood of certain offerings and were, in any case, a typical sign of an altar. In other words, certainly the "off-site" and even the idolatrous altars built by the northern kings, whether in Beit El or elsewhere, would have *keranot*. Tearing down the *karnot ha-mizbei’ach*, then, is another way of describing the destruction of a worship-site.

Let us consider one further note about the word. The literal translation of *keren* is "horn", thus the corner-pieces (which resemble the horns of an animal) are called *keranot*. However, *keren* throughout *Tanakh* is used to depict power. For instance, the last line of Chana's thanksgiving prayer is (*I Shemuel* 2:10) "He will give strength to his king and exalt the *keren* of his anointed."

Hence, the "cutting down of the *keranot*" is understood by the audience as a deliberate double entendre. On one level, the altars will be destroyed, symbolizing not only the destruction of the idolatrous worship but also a sundering of the monarchy (as the altar at Beit El was a royal sanctuary). In addition, the phrase symbolizes the tearing down of that kingdom's power.

Let us consider one final point about this verse. As we have seen above, Amos likes to alternate between the active and passive voice in delivering his rebuke. Here, God promises to "punish/ call to account" the altars and then the horns "will be cut off." *Venigde’u* is a passive verb. This may be a case of rhetorical variation for its own sake, or it may be saying something more powerful: namely, that once God attacks the altars, their horns (and the power) will fall to the ground **of their own accord**.

**VERSE 15: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PALACES**

The final verse of this oracle returns to the wealth and the clear disparity between the haves and the have-nots in Shomeron. Whereas the disempowered are so severely oppressed that God is intervening to punish the city, the empowered citizens, whether royalty or aristocracy, have multiple fancy homes.

*Vehikeiti beit ha-choref al beit ha-kayitz*

I will smite the winter house with the summer house

It was not uncommon for the wealthy to have two homes, one in a hotter clime for use in the winter and one in the colder areas for the summer months. Yirmeyahu makes mention of Yehoyakim’s winter home.[[5]](#footnote-5) A famous post-biblical example is Herod, whose summer home was Herodium, near Amos’s home town of Tekoa. For God to destroy both the summer as well as winter homes means not only depriving the wealthy of their luxuries, but evicting them from all of their domiciles and rendering them, essentially, homeless.

*Ve'avedu batei ha-shein vesafu batim rabim*

The houses of ivory will perish and the end will come to many houses.

This entire stich is presented in the passive voice, as if once the destruction of the winter homes has begun, the rest of the infrastructure will come tumbling down on its own.

Ivory was always considered to be a sign of luxury. Shelomo’s throne is described as made of ivory[[6]](#footnote-6) and an “ivory house” is ascribed to Achav[[7]](#footnote-7) (ironically, as part of his “eulogy”). Whereas both Rashi and R. Yosef Kara read *shein* here as “ivory” and understand that it means ivory-plating, R. Eliezer of Beaugency understands *shein* as tooth, meaning promontory,[[8]](#footnote-8) and he interprets the phrase to refer to homes built on two promontories. In any case, these are luxury homes which will fall, along with “many homes” (or, perhaps, “great homes” [Radak]).

To sum up, the destruction will begin at the idolatrous altars of Beit El and will conclude with the end of the great palaces of the rich.

This oracle concludes with a “signature form” of:

*Ne’um Hashem*

Says the Lord

We have already discussed the “signature formula” in our *shiurim* on Chapter 1; it is used here to clearly demarcate the end of this prophecy and prepare us for the next rebuke, to be issued against the notorious “cows of the Bashan,” which we will begin in the next *shiur*.

1. Hence the clever word play in *Bereishit* 4:23, in which Lemekh is **warning** his two wives, appropriately named **Ada** (warning) and **Tzila** (ringing sound [in the ears of someone hearing a threat; see e.g. *I Shemuel* 3:11]). See also *Bereishit* 43:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, for instance, JT *Nedarim* 9:4 where the prohibitions of revenge and holding a grudge are explained with an analogy to the ludicrous image of one part of the body taking "revenge" on another limb that inadvertently caused it pain. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Bereishit* 46:27. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Shemot* 19:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Yirmeyahu* 36:22; see also *Shoftim* 3:20 where Eglon has a summer palace with a “cooling room.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *I Melakhim* 10:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *I Melakhim* 22:39. Radak makes this connection and suggests that it is Achav’s “ivory palace” that is the referent in this verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. As in *I Shemuel* 14:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)