

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

The prophet Amos prophesied in the days of Uziyahu king of Judah and Yerovam ben Yoash king of Israel, in the middle of the eighth century BCE. Some say he was the first of the prophets to be recorded in writing. There were three other prophets who were contemporaries of his – Hoshea, Micha and Yishayahu. Together they are called “the four prophets who prophesied at the same time”. Amos was a herdsman who lived in Tekoa. His prophecies are mostly directed at the kingdom of Israel. This was a period of economic prosperity and security in the kingdom of Israel: they had great military victories, the borders were expanded and there was peace between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. However, along with the national successes, the wars caused the lower classes to become impoverished while at the same time the upper classes were strengthened, creating deep and intolerable social disparities. The result of the upper classes becoming wealthier was the oppression of the lower, poorer classes. Most of Amos’s prophecies are moral rebuke directed at the distorted and degenerate social situation created in the kingdom. He prophesies the destruction of the kingdom of Israel as a punishment for these social distortions.

In perakim 1-2 there is a series of prophecies of rebuke which are directed at different nations.

- 1:3-5 is directed at Damascus (Aram)
- 1:6-8 is directed at Gaza (the Philistines)
- 1:11-12 is directed at Edom
- 1:13-14 is directed at Amon
- 2:1-3 is directed at Moav
- 2:4-5 is directed at Judah

All of the prophecies have the same structure – “For three transgressions of _____, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment” and then the fourth transgression, the worst of them all, for which God will not forgive them, is described. The series ends with a

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prophecy of rebuke about the sins of the kingdom of Israel (6-16). This is the most detailed and comprehensive prophecy and it constitutes the essence and the purpose of the series.

The Prophecies for the Nations and for the Kingdom of Israel (1:3-2:5)

1.

The first five prophecies in the series are similar in terms of the style, the types of sins and the population at which they are directed. Pay attention to the parallel aspects of the first and fifth prophecies, and the similarity and the progression in the description of the sins in the third, fourth and fifth prophecies.

2.

The first prophecy in the series (1:3-5) is directed at Aram, who cruelly wounded and subjugated the inhabitants of the Gilad in Transjordan. Study the background to this cruel act in Melachim II 13:7. The punishment of exile which is decreed for Aram (5) repeats in the prophecies to the other nations as well, but only in this prophecy is the place to which they will be exiled mentioned – “Kir”. See the prophecy of Amos in the continuation of the book (9:7) and discuss what the return of Aram to Kir symbolizes.

3.


The sixth and seventh prophecies in the series are different from the first five in a few aspects:
a | See the prophecy for Moav, and examine what is new in the sins of Moav and what it teaches us about the root of the prophecies of rebuke for the nations. Use this commentary by **M. Weiss**:

When the listeners heard that the decisive sin of Moav was not one of the prevalent, unforgettable acts of terror against Israel but rather a one-time act against the king of Edom, they were surprised and confused, and they did not understand that the deciding factor in God’s judgment is not on whom the injustice was perpetrated, but rather the act of injustice itself.

b | Study the prophecy about Judah (2:4-5) and discuss what separates the sin of Judah from the other sins mentioned. Think about how this reflects the difference between Israel and the nations, and how it is reflected in the prophecy about the kingdom of Israel as well.

4.

In conclusion, try to understand why this series of prophecies were placed as an introduction to the prophecy about Israel, and what the lesson for Israel is which we learn from the placement of the prophecy as part of this series.

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The Prophecy for the Kingdom of Israel (2:6-16)

5.

See the four sins of which the kingdom of Israel is accused, and examine the nature of the first two sins (6,7) as opposed to the third sin (7). Consider the connection of the fourth sin (8) to the sins that precede it, and note the ambiguous use of the verb y.t.o. (to turn aside or to recline) in pesukim 7-8.

6.

In contrast to the sins of the nation, in pesukim 9-10 Amos mentions God's acts of kindness from the past. Note the three historical stages which are mentioned here. Pay attention to the play of strength vs. weakness in these pesukim. How are these acts of kindness a contrast to the sins of Israel in the present?

7.

In pasuk 11 a different kindness which God did for his nation appears – establishing the prophets and the Nazirites. What is the connection between these two roles? Examine the essence of the role according to Amos's prophecy and think about how establishing prophets and Nazirites is a continuation of God's kind acts in the past.

APPENDIX

The book of Amos begins by noting the time of the prophecy in pasuk 1 – “two years before the earthquake”. This refers to the earthquake which occurred in that period which is also mentioned in Zecharia 14:5 “And you shall flee as you fled because of the earthquake, in the days of Uziyah the King of Judah.” The reverberations of this earthquake are felt in several places in the prophecies of Amos, and some say that the roar of God mentioned in the next pasuk is a reference to this as well. “And he said: The Lord shall roar from Zion, and He shall give forth His voice from Jerusalem, and the dwellings of the shepherds shall be cut off, and the choice of the fruitful land shall wither.” In archeological finds at the digs at Tel Chatzor and the Shomron the effects of the earthquake are clearly discernable, and can be dated to the year 760 BCE. An interesting commentary on Amos and the earthquake appears in the writings of Azariah dei Rossi, a Jewish scholar who lived in Italy in the 16th century, who is thought to be one of the first Jewish scholars and historians. In the beginning of his book “Maor Einayim” (The Light of the Eyes), Azariah describes the earthquake which he experienced in his hometown of Ferrara in the year 1570, which inspired him to write his book. During the description Azariah

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explains parts of Amos's prophecy in light of his personal experiences in the earthquake:

And in the course of this story, we cannot help but mention the words of Amos which he prophesied about the great earthquake which took place in his days in the year of the death of King Uziyahu. With my experience it seems that it is possible to explain the pesukim differently from the way that our Rabbis explained it. That which is written: *"Behold, I will oppress your dwelling place"* which they were forced to explain as being related to war, Rashi explained with common sense:

your dwelling place: Your camping place.

And the meaning of these words is that the land itself upon which they were camped raged and shouted, and these things, are certainly possible without being allegorical. And we can understand the last pasuk thus: *"And the stout-hearted among the mighty shall flee naked on that day, says the Lord."* For if we are talking about war, why would the hero be fleeing naked... It must be that the intention is the earthquake, which according to the scholars and what we have experienced in our times, is most powerful at night after midnight, a time when most people are sleeping. And especially when it is sent from God as was the earthquake in the time of Uziyahu...And even the bravest of men when a holocaust comes upon him suddenly will not think to delay while he feels in the dark for his robe, he will flee as quickly as he can while naked, before the house and roof terrifyingly fall on him and bury him. And indeed this has happened to many of the families of the benefactors now in Ferrara. For when the earth began to quake, they hastily ran naked, without clothes or cover into the freezing night.



► Street Mosaic on Herzl Blvd. in Jerusalem which includes the pasuk *"And he said: The Lord shall roar from Zion, and He shall give forth His voice from Jerusalem, and the dwellings of the shepherds shall be cut off, and the choice of the fruitful land shall wither."* (Amos 1:2). The artwork was planned by the artist Chaim Kapchich and executed by the artists Patricia Gutman and Yehudit Eisenberg.

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