

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

In memory of our beloved father Naftali Yosef ben Breindel and Shmuel Elazar who passed away on 4 Shevat 5748.

Perakim 7-8:3

This section includes four prophetic visions by Amos. The four visions describe the calamity which is about to befall the people. The visions are arranged in two pairs, while each vision is an independent prophetic unit. In the first vision (7:1-3), Amos sees a plague of locusts descending on the people. In the second vision (7:4-6), the punishment is delivered by means of fire. In the third vision (7:7-9), God Himself stands upon a wall made by a plumbline, ready to strike at the people. Finally, in the fourth vision (8:1-3), Amos sees a basket of late figs which symbolize the end of the people. Between the third and fourth visions appears the only biographical story in the book of Amos (7:10-17). This story relates the reaction of Amatzia, the priest of Beit El, to Amos's prophecy and Amos's sharp response to that reaction.

1.

The first two visions can be grouped as a pair for several reasons. Note the similarities in style and substance, and the internal development. Especially note the imagery of eating in each vision. Examine as well the response of the prophet in each vision. In order to better understand the meaning of a double vision, see the words of Yosef to Pharaoh in Bereshit 41:32.

2.

The second pair of visions is made up of four parts:

1. In the first part there is a static image (7:7 and 8:1).
2. In the second part Amos is asked about the meaning of the vision (7:8 and 8:2).
3. In the third part Amos describes the vision but does not interpret it (7:8 and 8:2).
4. In the fourth part God explains the meaning and the message of the vision (7:8-9 and 8:2-3).

Amos 7-9

a | What do you think is the relationship between the third and fourth visions? What conceptual development separates between these visions and the first two visions (7:1-6)?

b | Pay attention to the role of the prophet and the response of God in each of the pairs. What characterizes God's role in each pair?

3.

a | In Amatzia's words to Yerovam and Amos we can see his perspective on the character of prophecy and the role of the prophet. Explore this understanding, paying attention to who Amatzia is, the political side of Amos's prophecy (10), and the reason for forbidding Amos from prophesying specifically in Beit El (13). Note the difference between Amos's prophecy about Yerovam and the way that it is quoted by Amatzia.

b | Discuss the contrast between Amos's and Amatzia's understandings of the role of prophecy. Focus on the motive of prophecy. See also Amos 3:7-8 and the words of the **Ibn Ezra**:

I was neither a prophet of God nor the son of a prophet, but a cattle herder or one who plows with cattle... and *I was taken* – I was forced. And moreover...Since (Amatzia) said to him “*and eat bread there*”, he responded - I am not like the false prophets who prophesy for bread, or like the sons of the false prophets, for I have no need for bread, I am a cattle herder...I did not prophesy out of need. How shall I abandon the words of God which He commanded me to prophesy and listen to you telling me not to prophesy?

Perakim 8:4 – 9

Following the four visions there is a series of prophecies (8:4-14) which describe the oppression and deceit in trade which were prevalent in the kingdom of Israel, and the calamity which they will bring. Afterward there is a fifth vision (9:1-6), which completes the series of visions, in which God appears to Amos standing on the altar and tells the details of the disaster which will befall the people.

The book ends with two prophecies: the first prophecy (9:7-10) deals with the question of the choosing of the nation of Israel over the other nations, while the last prophecy (9:11-15), which is the only prophecy of consolation in the book of Amos, discusses the rebuilding of the tabernacle and dynasty of David and of the return of Israel to its land after the exile.

4.

In pesukim 8:11-14 an extraordinary prophecy of doom appears, which centers on a spiritual thirst for the words of God which cannot be quenched: “*Behold, days are coming, says the Lord God, and I will send famine into the land, not a famine for bread nor a thirst for water, but to hear the word of the Lord.*”(11)

For expanded content and answers to questions  perek.matan@gmail.com

Amos 7-9

- a** | What is the image of the world as described in the prophecy, and what is God's relationship with His creatures in this world? Concentrate on the meaning of the imagery of hunger and thirst in the description.
- b** | The prophecy of doom parallels a previous prophecy in 4:4-11 (see especially 4:8 in contrast to 8:12 and 4:10 in contrast to 8:13-14). Does the prophecy in our perek add a new aspect?
- c** | Why is this calamity befalling the people? See the description in pasuk 14, and remember what Amatzia said to Amos and Amos's first prophecy (2:11-12).
- d** | "Our Rabbis taught: When our Masters entered the vineyard at Yavneh, they said, The Torah is destined to be forgotten in Israel, as it is said, *Behold, the days come, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.* And it is said, *And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.* 'The word of the Lord' means halakhah,' 'the word of the Lord' means 'The End'; 'the word of the Lord' means prophecy." (Shabbat 138b) How is our prophecy interpreted in this midrash?

5.

"I saw the Lord standing beside the altar" (9:1)

- a** | What is the main characteristic of the fifth vision which distinguishes it from the previous four visions? In order to understand the vision, compare it to Tehillim 139:7-12. What is the nature of the interaction between man and God in these two sources?
- b** | The vision ends with: "*and I will place My eye upon them for evil and not for good.*" Examine the meaning of *placing one's eye* by comparing our pasuk to Bereshit 44:21. How is the usage reversed in our prophecy, and what is the nature of the relationship between God and His nation which is revealed by this reversal? For more on this topic, see Devarim 11:12 and Amos 3:1-2.

Appendix – "Seer, go flee away"

Chaim Nachman Bialik's poem "Seer, Begone" was inspired by Amos's debate with Amatzia the priest of Beit El. In it he describes his harsh experiences as a poet who despairs of the people and his disappointment because they refuse to listen to his words and visions. Through his use of allusions and biblical references in the poem, we see Bialik's unique interpretation of the words, the role and the background of Amos.

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Amos 7-9

Seer, Begone

'Seer, begone!' One of my kind flees not!
Slowly to walk, this I have learned from my herds.
Nor has my tongue learned phrases finely wrought:
Like the heavy blows of an axe, so fall my words.

And if my strength is spent – 'tis not mine the fault!
Yours is the guilt and you must bear the sin.
My hammer found no anvil to cry halt;
Wood that was rotten took my sharp axe in.

'Tis nothing. I make peace with this my fate.
I gird in my belt the rude tools of my art,
A day-laborer, unpaid his wage and rate,
Quietly as I came, I now depart.

Unto my valley and my tent I go.
I make a covenant with trees this day.
And as for you, who are corruption, know
To-morrow the storm carries you away.
(English translation by A. M. Klein)

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