

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

Perek 3-4:3

In the beginning of the perek Amos warns the nation that being the chosen people will not prevent them from being punished. In fact, the opposite is true – the choice imposes on them a responsibility which, if ignored, will bring harsh punishment. In the continuation of the perek there is a series of rhetorical questions with similar structures (3-8). The purpose of this series is to emphasize the fact that prophesying is compulsory for the prophet. After the series of questions, Amos begins to give prophecies of rebuke against the upper classes in Samaria – the rich of Samaria who sit in palaces and houses of ivory (3:9-15), and their wives who are compared to the cows of the Bashan (4:1-3). Their wealth is derived from exploitation of the poor and trampling of the indigent, and therefore their punishment will be meted out with a heavy hand.

1.

Amos describes the choice of Israel using the phrase *“Only you did I know of all the families of the earth”* which mimics the words used in the stories of the choosing of the forefathers. See the parallel phrases to *“the families of the earth”* in Bereshit 12:3 and 28:14. See the parallel to God’s knowledge (*‘I know’*) in Bereshit 18:19. Pay attention to the context in which each of the phrases is brought and to the meaning in the story of the forefathers and in the prophecy of Amos.

2.

Read the list of questions which appear in pesukim 3-8.

- a** | Discuss the way the questions highlight the natural laws which are inherent in creation, and the common topic of the allegories, except for the first one.
- b** | The series of rhetorical questions ends with a question with a twist – *“Shall evil befall a city and the Lord has not done it?”* (6). How is the nature of this question different than the natural laws shown in the rest of the questions? How does this question serve as a springboard to pesukim 7-8?

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c | Explain Amos's claim about prophets and prophecy in pesukim 7-8 in light of the people's attitude toward prophets in that time (see 2:12)

3.

a | Compare the two destructions described in pesukim 14-15. How are they different and what sins caused each of them?

b | Examine the double role of the horns (corners) of the altar in the Tanakh: Vayikra 4:7, 18, and 25 and Melachim I 1:50, 2:28. What is the symbolic meaning of cutting them?

Perek 4:4-13

This section opens with rebuke for the idol worship in Beit El and Gilgal. Central to the prophecy is a series of punishments in five stages, each of which ends with – *“but you have not returned to Me, says the Lord”*. The nation absorbs blow after blow, but remains rebellious and does not return to God. The prophecy ends with the preparation for the harshest punishment, which will come directly from God.

4.

“Come to Beit El and transgress, to Gilgal and multiply transgression.” In pesukim 4-5 Amos lists a series of actions which are part of the ritual of idol worship: sacrifices and tithes, thanksgiving offerings and free-will offerings. What is the transgression which is mentioned here, and why is it particularly severe? Use the **Metzudot**:

Transgress – to sacrifice to Baal... they come to Gilgal and there they multiply transgression, for sacrificing there to idols is a greater sin to God, because that is where the Tabernacle first stood.

Can we understand the severity of these sins in another way based on the fact that this prophecy was placed directly after the previous prophecy?

5.

The first (6) and second (7-8) stages in the series begin with similar language *“And I also”*. What is comparable about these two punishments, and how is the second more severe than the first? While the first stage is described as a general punishment, *“in all your cities”* and *“in all your places”*, the punishment in the second stage is partial – *“and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city.”* Why do you think that specifically in this punishment, which is the more severe one, there seems to be a limitation of the punishment?

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


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APPENDIX – “And the houses of ivory shall perish”

Throughout the period of the kings the kingdoms of Israel and Judah had different political and economic strengths. The kingdom of Israel, which spread from Dan in the North until Beit El in the South, and from the Mediterranean Sea until the Eastern Gilad, had more favorable geographical conditions allowing for better development. Most of the fertile portions of the land were included in their territory, and two international merchant routes passed through their land – the sea route and the king’s route. The kingdom of Israel also had access to the Mediterranean Sea and therefore could trade with the Phoenicians and Neo-Hittite centers, giving it more exposure to foreign cultures. Evidence of the strength of the kingdom of Israel is found both in the biblical texts and in the archeological findings. The textual evidence tells in great detail of the wealth of the inhabitants of the kingdom of Israel, “*Those who lie on couches of ivory and stretch out on their beds, and eat lambs of the flock and calves out of the stall.*” (Amos 6:4)

(Free translation of Chaya Katz, Eretz Dagan ve Tirosh pp. 91, 106-107)

In the twentieth century several archeological digs took place in the city of Samaria, which revealed the size and wealth of the kingdom of Israel. Among the finds discovered in the digs were the palace of Achav and the kings of Israel, a double wall which enclosed the area, the city gates, the remains of towers and more. An administration building was discovered next to the palace containing 102 pottery sherds dated to the period of Yerovam the second, the period in which Amos lived. These sherds had ink writing in Hebrew that documented shipments of oil and wine. Some remains of an additional palace were found in the north of the acropolis. In this second palace, ivory decorations and clay seals of royal documents were found. This palace has been named the “house of ivory”, in light of what is found in the book of Melachim, where it is described that King Achav built a house of ivory. In the “house of ivory” which is in the citadel artworks made of ivory were found from the period between King Achav and King Yerovam. The discovery of this collection of ivory is evidence of the wealth and flamboyance of the kings of Samaria. Chaya Katz writes: “About 500 carved pieces of ivory which were decorations for the furniture of the kings of Israel were found in the archeological digs in Samaria... In the deep relief carved panels we see a mixture of Syrian and Egyptian influences. The figures in these pieces are sphinxes, predatory lions, bulls and the ivory of the Woman at the Window. In the more shallowly carved ivories we see the Egyptian style and figures from Egyptian mythology... In comparison, in the kingdom of Judah very few ivory pieces were found.”

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Translated from: <http://lib.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=5649>



► **The Woman at the Window** – Ivory panel, apparently from Arslan-Tash (Syria), 8th Century BCE. This panel is displayed at the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem, and shows a woman looking out of a window with a low bannister beneath her. Surrounding her is a frame of three receding lintels which form a window. The woman's head has a hairdo or wig that reaches her shoulders and there is a decorative piece on her forehead. This composition has been titled "The Woman at the Window" and similar compositions have been found at other sites, including the ivory finding in Samaria. The generally accepted theory is that it is a decoration connected to the rites of the goddess Astarte.

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מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רעננערט

The Sadie Rennert Women's Institute for Torah Studies

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