View PDF

Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom serves as Rosh Beit Midrash at the Shalhevet School in Los Angeles as well as Chair of the Tanakh Studies at Yeshiva University of Los Angeles High School for Boys. This article is excerpted from Rabbi Etshalom's forthcoming book, The Genius of Prophetic Rhetoric (Maggid, 2023), with permission from Koren Publishers Jerusalem. This article appears in issue 41 of Conversations, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

Preface

There are numerous ways in which a person can stand up for a principle. It can be through action or inaction, speech or silence, song or march, it can be overt or even an internal stand known only to the principled actor.

In our history, there is one character-type whose job is fundamentally to stand on principle, to "speak truth to power" (to use a tired and grossly misused current cliché) and to be ready to declare God's Truth to an unwilling and resistant audience. That is the "prophet," the *Navi* who is God's agent, sent with a message that no one ever wants to hear. There is no better place to find example after example of principled stands than in the books of our *Nevi'im*, books that have inspired generations of people to right wrongs, to insist on justice and to refuse to back down in the face of tyranny. I give you…Amos of Tekoa.

Introduction

The 14 books of literary prophecy (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and 11 of the "*Trei Asar*"[1]), in spite of their heavy emphasis on oratory, include numerous (auto)biographical narratives. While these are chiefly found in the three independent books, there are also mini narratives in a number of the smaller volumes included in *Trei Asar*. The nine-verse interaction between the prophet from Judean Tekoa' and Amaziah, the high priest of the royal sanctuary at northern (Samarian) Beit-El, makes up the one such passage in Amos.

Before tackling the text, it is important to note that this interaction at Beit-El bears some significant parallels with another interaction at Beit-El. Amos's adversarial dialogue is with a "*Kohen*" at the *bama* in Beit-El, and the king who is the focal point of Amos's diatribe is Jeroboam ben Joash. But we have previously encountered a similar prophetic interaction. Just after Jeroboam ben Nebat establishes his two "alternate" worship sites at Dan and Beit-El to serve as a local and more convenient substitute for Jerusalem, an enigmatic visitor arrives there:

> And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of Hashem to Beit-El; and Jeroboam was standing by the altar to offer. And he cried against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said: "O altar, altar, thus says the Lord: Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon you he will slaughter the priests of the high places that offer upon you, and men's bones shall they burn upon you" (I Kings 13:1–2).

Note the parallels—a "man of God" (i.e., a prophet) from Judea comes to the altar at Beit-El and prophesies destruction of the site. Jeroboam is seen as the direct target of the prophecy, and the priests of the high places ("*kohanei bamot*") are explicitly identified as targets of God's anger.

Is it possible that Amos deliberately chose Beit-El in order to reenact that earlier anonymous Judean prophet's appearance there? Is it significant that the king in Amos's time is the only one in the numerous dynasties that ruled Shomron to carry the pioneering king's name? Perhaps. In our study of this confrontation, we will see even more parallels that draw these two meetings together.

The Text

> Then Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying: "Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith: Jeroboam shall die by the sword, And Israel shall surely be led away captive put of his land." Also Amaziah said unto Amos: "O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there; but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house." Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees; and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me: Go, prophesy unto My people Israel. Now therefore hear thou the word of the Lord: Thou sayest: Prophesy not against Israel, And preach not against the house of Isaac; Therefore thus saith the Lord: Thy wife shall be a harlot in the city, And thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, And thy land shall be divided by line; And thou thyself shalt die in an unclean land, And Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land." (Amos 7:10–17)

Then Amazia the priest of Beth-El sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying: Jeroboam appointed non-Levites to act as his priests.[2]

We have no idea if the "priesthood" that Jeroboam established became dynastic, such that only the sons of his appointees could take over the position, or if it remained non-tribal. Although Jeroboam I established the sanctuaries as oriented to worship of Hashem, within a hundred years or so (Ahab's time), those same sanctuaries may have been devoted to Ba'al worship. That is why the Rishonim here, without identifying Amazia's tribal background, mark him as an idolatrous priest. If that is the case, then the priests would have been a whole new crop of devotees to Ba'al. Alternatively, with each change of dynasty (Jeroboam, Baasha, Omri, Yehu), there may have been a change in "religious leadership."

Note that the end of the third vision (verse 9) and the first two verses of this narrative are the only places where Jeroboam is mentioned by name in the book.

Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel: Amazia sees Amos as more than a troublesome prophet from the south; he perceives him as a rabble-rouser, whose rebukes and visions of doom have the potential to generate a popular rebellion against the crown.

The message here is odd, considering the content of the book until this point. Nearly all of Amos's oratory is aimed at the aristocracy, the corrupt judiciary, and the royal house—hardly "in the midst of the House of Israel." We must consider the possibility that Amazia sees Amos as a personal threat. Remember that Amos already warned the people not to go to Beit-El (or Gilgal or Beer-Sheva) to worship. If the leadership heeds him, the populace is likely to follow suit. That may be a threat to (at least) the livelihood of the priests at Beit-El. Perhaps the message that Amazia sent to the king, tinged with some hysteria, was intended to spur the king to action against Amos and was itself an exaggeration.

It is also possible that Amos was delivering some of these prophecies—notably, the visions in this section—in Beit-El, at the site of the royal sanctuary. Amazia's words in the next few verses seem to support this back story. If so, celebrants and onlookers would have also heard him, and even if Amos did not intend his prophecies to speak directly to the people, they would have heard and been potentially inspired to rebel.

The word *kesher*, which appears approximately 20 times in the monarchic history,[3] appears only twice (with the meaning of "conspiracy") in the words of the literary prophets.[4] In other words, although it is a somewhat regular feature of the narrative, describing the fate of dynasties, it was not often used in rhetoric.[5]

***The land is not able to bear all his words*:** The image of the land having to "bear" words is a curious one. Radak reads "the land" as meaning "the people of the land," and he explains that the people (who are presumably loyal to the crown) cannot bear to hear so many bad things about their own nation. Hakham, on the other hand, sees the phrase *lo tukhal ha-aretz le-hakhil et kol devarav* as a metaphor. His words are like bubbling wine, which, when put into a barrel, will burst the barrel. In the same way, his words are likely to generate a rebellion among the people.[6] Abravanel, without resorting to the metaphor-explanation, sees it the same way—as a warning against the potential of Amos's words inciting rebellion against the king.

This approach presumes a significantly lowered sense of loyalty among the people. Their first response would not be to despise the "southern man of God" who threatens the king, but rather to side

with him!

It is significant to note that there is a history, specifically in the north, of prophets identifying and anointing kings (such as Elisha in the case of Hazael and Jehu, and Ahija in the case of Jeroboam ben Nevat). It is not unreasonable to think that Amazia saw Amos as yet another prophet aiming to unseat Jeroboam and the house of Yehu and replace him with another king (who might be, in their eyes, a Judean vassal).

Paul points to the alliteration in this phrase—*tukhal le-hakhil kol*. A subliminal message of this alliterative scheme would be *okhel ha-kol*—that his words will lead to (or prophesy) **everything** in the north being devoured.[7]

For thus said Amos: This short phrase is heavy with implication. The priest uses the same familiar introductory "messenger formula" with which Amos himself had delivered the first series of oracles. Remember that this formula is used when relaying or delivering the words of a liege to a vassal. Thus, "*Ko amar Balak*," "*Ko amar Par'oh*," and "*Ko amar Yosef*." The understated power of "*Ko amar Amos*" as a message to the king is clear—Amos presumes himself to be the lord over Jeroboam, his servant. That is, of course, not Amos's position, but that is how Amazia wants to portray the Judean prophet to his king.

Secondly, and of no less significance, is the very phrase *ko amar Amos*. Amos would not have said *ko omar* ("thus say I"), but rather *ko amar Hashem*. This central and determinant piece of Amos's prophecies is omitted. The conclusion that Jeroboam is intended to reach is that these are Amos's words—not God's! As such, corralling Amos as a rabble-rousing orator from the south is the right move—just as Jeroboam I sought to do to the anonymous Judean prophet at Beit El, two hundred years earlier (yet another parallel).

Jeroboam shall die by the sword: This paraphrased quote from Amos's last vision is inexactly presented. Amos had reported in God's name that the meaning of the *anakh* vision was

> the high places of Yishak will be made desolate and the sanctuaries of Israel will be destroyed, and *I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam by the sword*.

In other words, the threat of the sword hung over the "house of Jeroboam"—i.e., his children. Indeed, Jeroboam's son, Zachariah, was assassinated and killed by the sword. Amazia's deliberate blurring of the message was intended to spur immediate and drastic action on the part of the royal house against the Tekoite interloper.

***And Israel shall surely be led away captive put of his land*:** When we look back to Amazia's first warning—"the land will not be able to tolerate/contain all of his words"—we observe a nearly polar divide among the commentators as to the intent of the phrase. Some, such as ibn Ezra and R. Eliezer of Beaugency, understood that the people naturally sided with their king, and they would not tolerate the

threats uttered by Amos. However, we also saw the comments of others, notably Abravanel, who included the phrase as part of the threat. In other words, Amos is riling "the whole land" against the king. It is difficult to sustain this interpretation considering Amazia's brief message, however. The first half—that Jeroboam will die by the sword—fits this read comfortably. But the second half—that Israel will surely be exiled—does not comport, prima facie, with this interpretation. For if the threat is against all of the people of the Northern Kingdom, why would this lead to a rebellion? It would more likely lead to a popular lynching of Amos!

There is a way to salvage Abravanel's approach, and it may be contextually (and textually) appealing. If the message that Amos is broadcasting is specifically anti-Jeroboam and his intent (per Amazia's reporting) is to provoke a popular rebellion, then the second part of the message should be understood with a bit more nuance. Instead of reading the two clauses as sequential—first the king will be killed and **then** Israel will be exiled—read it as conditional. To wit—Jeroboam **must** die by the sword **or else** Israel will be exiled. These two verses comprise Amazia's excited and near-hysterical message to the court. The next few verses are the direct dialogue between "priest" and prophet.

***Then Amatzia said to Amos*:** Are we to understand that Amos was privy to Amatzia's message to the king? Did Amatzia state it aloud, or was it sent as a private message to the court? Nothing in the verses above provides any guidance, but this verse may be indicative. If we interpret *va-yomer* here as, "Also, Amatzia said," as numerous translations render it (KJV, JPS), then this would seem to be the second overt and public statement made by Amatzia. First he turned to a messenger, in the presence of those gathered *as well as Amos,* and sent his urgent message to the court. He then turned to Amos to confront him directly.

On the other hand, if we interpret *va-yomer* here as, "then Amatzia said" (as we have it here, per NET, CSB and numerous other translations), these may very well be the first words that Amos (or anyone else present) heard.

***Seer! Go, flee yourself away to the land of Judah*:** Amazia uses a seemingly archaic term for a prophet—*hozeh*, literally "seer." We will revisit this and the implication of Amos's response below, where he references the term *navi*.

***And there eat bread, and prophesy there*:** This is a most curious send-off. What does Amazia mean here? Why would Amos be eating bread "there" or "here"? Amazia sees Amos as an unwelcome southerner, out of his element and without the right to orate in the north.[8]

But prophesy not again any more at Beit-El: This phrase gives us the impression that Amos may have been at Beit-El for a while, presenting his prophecies. Why would he choose this location? Several answers come to mind. First of all, it was a royal sanctuary (*mikdash melekh*), where the king may have himself have come to participate in the cult practices. It was also a popular pilgrimage site.[9] In addition, it was originally chosen by Jeroboam (in addition to its storied past beginning with Yaakov) due to its proximity to Judah. It was, for a time, the southernmost city in the Israelite kingdom. This may have made it a "safer" place for Amos to preach, given that it was also quite a distance from the capitol in Shomron.

***For it is the king's sanctuary*:** Is the proper translation "it is **the** king's sanctuary" or "it is a royal sanctuary"? The distinction makes quite a difference. In the first read, Amatzia is telling Amos to leave because this is the "property" of Jeroboam, and the king himself is liable to return at any point. In the second read (which I admit to favoring), it raises Amos's effrontery to an insult to the crown—coming into a royal sanctuary and preaching against the king.

The phrase *mikdash melekh* (which we know from a more positive context, as R. Shlomo Alkabetz integrated it into *Lekha Dodi*) appears only once in *Tanakh*. Indeed, the notion of a *mikdash melekh* is familiar to us, but from foreign, pagan nations, where the divinity and the royal house sit at proximate corners of a blurry divide. In a sense, Amazia's clumsy description of the altar at Beit-El says more than Amos could, although this is not a point that Amos ever directly attacks. The establishment of Beit-El was occasioned by Jeroboam's fear that the people's pilgrimage to Jerusalem would lead them to revert their allegiance to Rehoboam, and Jeroboam's kingdom (or his life) would not last long. Beit-El (and Dan) were set up to provide a "local and convenient" place to worship Hashem. Yet it wasn't long before Jeroboam turned the "off-site" sanctuary to God into a royal sanctuary, which it remained for at least two hundred years.

And it is a royal house: The concluding phrase here seals the point made above. The sanctuary is not a guarded place, off-limits to impurity and outsiders due to its connection with the divine. It is, instead, a royal precinct and, as such, someone coming with a message of doom against the kingdom is a true trespasser.

Then Amos answered, and said to Amazia: Again, we will assume that this interaction is public and that Amos is aiming his response at the assemblage, far more than at Amazia himself.

I am not a prophet, nor am I a prophet's son: At this point, we may note that Amos's claim is that he is not part of a professional guild of prophets, nor is he a prophet by vocation. Rather, he is…

For I am a herdsman: Amos is a rancher, who herds animals. In other words, he is not part of the scholastic or ascetic class, but rather a "regular person."

And a dresser of sycamore trees: The word *boleis* is a *hapax legomenon* (word unique in Tanakh), but the best hypothesis as to its meaning is the puncturing of sycamore figs; evidently this practice, which is still done in Egypt today, hastens the ripening of the fruit without exposing the fruit to worm infestation. This was only done during a short part of the season therefore it was possible for Amos to be both herder as well as a "sycamore dresser."

***And the Lord took me from behind the flock*:** This description is evocative, in no uncertain terms, of God's words to David.[10] The notion is that, like David, Amos was not someone who sought this office, nor did he relish the awesome responsibility that comes with it. He was tending his flock, dressing his sycamores, when God plucked him up and sent him on his mission for the benefit of the entire nation.

And Hashem said to me: Although this is a necessary cog in the oratory, it does seem to underscore that which Amazia deliberately omitted. The words that Amos is delivering are not his own; they are God's words and a divine message, ignored at one's own peril.

Go, prophesy unto My people Israel: This completes the picture. Amos was sent; he did not "go." When Amazia tells him to "go and flee yourself," he expresses an assumption that Amos chose to come and may now choose to go. This is not the case, as Amos spells out for him.

Before moving on, I'd like to address two oddities in Amazia's words. The priest speaks directly to Amos. Even though he referred to him by name in his message to the court, here he calls him *hozeh*—literally "visionary" or "seer." What does this term mean?

This question becomes either clarified or intensified when we see that he tells Amos—seemingly in a derisive manner—*sham tinavei*, using the popular root for "prophecy" (from which *navi* derives). If we assume that the two words are synonymous and interchangeable—i.e., *hozeh=navi*—then the phrase is straightforward, and the differentiation in terms used is intended for rhetorical variety. If, on the other hand, the two words are distinct in meaning, then our question becomes exponentially more complex. Why did the priest call him by the unusual sobriquet *hozeh* and then tell him to no longer *tinavei*? This interpretive fork widens with Amos's answer in which he avers that he is neither a *navi* nor a *ben-navi*, avoiding the term *hozeh* altogether. This does not augur well for those who would read *hozeh* as equivalent in meaning to *navi*. For purposes of their dispute, it would have been more impactful for Amos to deny his prophetic vocation by responding to the word *hozeh* and say, *lo hozeh anokhi ve-lo ben hozeh*. That is, of course, not the case.

A brief but vital tangent is in place here. We have only one character in Tanakh who is identified as a *hozeh*. That is Gad ha-Hozeh, who operates as David's "court prophet" as early as his time on the run from Saul[11] and is most well-known for his role in the census punishment.[12] It is helpful to note that when he is first referenced in that story, the text uses seemingly redundant terms: "…and the word of Hashem was given to Gad the prophet (*ha-navi)*, the seer (*hozeh)* of David, saying."

Note that the term *navi* remains independent, but the *hozeh* belongs to David—*hozeh David*. Gad is also noted as one of the three authors of the chronicles of David's life:

> Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the words of Shemuel the seer (*ro'eh)*, and in the words of Natan the prophet (*navi)*, and in the words of Gad the seer (*hozeh)*.[13]

Other than the references to Gad, *hozeh* as a generic title is used disparagingly. When Ezekiel describes the false prophets,[14] he consistently returns to the word *hozim* and juxtaposes them with *kosmim* (wizards) several times. Indeed, the most famous *kosem* in Tanakh (Bilam) refers to himself as one who *mahazeh Shadai yehezeh* ("sees the visions of Shadai")—but never calls himself a *navi*.

The evidence here points to an essential difference between a *hozeh* and a *navi*. The *hozeh* is a court prophet, who works in the employ of the king and serves as his royal oracle. Gad is first introduced this way; his first "visionary act" is to direct David where to move in his wanderings, and his most famous prophetic task is to lead David in response to God's anger over the ill-conceived census and to identify the location of the altar. The court *hozim* referenced by Ezekiel would present prognostications favorable to the king. This is not to say that the members of such a group are never called *nevi'im*,[15] but overall the terms have an underlying difference.

Whereas a *hozeh* works for the king, the *navi* works for God; he brings God's word to the court, the leaders, and the people. (Some have suggested that the root of *navi* is *havei*, bringer, i.e., of the Word.)

All of which means that Amazia assumes that Amos works in the employ of the Judean king. He has been sent to Beit-El, goes the thinking, in order to stir up the local populace against their king and to potentially restore sovereignty of the north to the House of David.

Regarding Amazia's other odd phrase—"eat bread there," this seems to point to the crucial difference highlighted above. Is the prophet in the hire of the court—does he "eat bread at the king's table"? Or is he an independent person, carrying the unpolluted word of God?[16]

When Amos responds that he is not a *navi*, it is clear that he means that this vocation is not one he chose for himself. *Ben-navi* is a different story. We meet the *benei ha-nevi'im* in several contexts in Tanakh, chiefly in the company of Shemuel[17] and in the Elijah-Elisha circles.[18] They are a guild of students who, at least in Elisha's times, had adopted a life of penury in their quest to "study" prophecy. It appears that they had guided meditation-type experiences in which they became more sensitized to receiving prophetic inspiration. Amos is claiming that he not only is not a *navi* by vocation, but he was never in the *navi*-school; he never studied for it.

He is, rather, a "regular" person, fully occupied by his chosen vocations. Having a mission to speak to God's people was never his choice.

He is not a professional *navi* who "belongs" to a court; he represents one thing and one thing only—God's word to God's people. He is not about to return to Judea and eat bread there, for although he comes *from* there, he is not *supported* there. He is not in the employ of the southern king. It is possible that Amazia was not even aware of any other type of prophet, and Amos's words bring home the point of the type of agent that he truly is.

And Hashem took me from behind the flock and the Lord said to me: Go, prophesy unto My people Israel: With this short phrase, Amos makes it clear that he was "plucked" from a hard-working but serene and pastoral life and thrown directly into the crucible of conflict with kings, priests, and judges.

Now therefore hear the word of the Lord: The causal *ve-ata* appears over 250 times in Tanakh, with 55 appearances in the literary prophetic canon, but it only appears this one time in *Amos*. The meaning—"and now"—is always presented as the back half of a causal relationship and is usually found in the middle of a passage.[19] In other words, "such-and-such has happened" or "God has done such-and-such for you," *ve-ata* here is the appropriate response.

Amos's use of *ve-ata* here is a bit curious. We would expect it to follow a rebuke or detailing of the crimes of the kingdom (or judiciary or aristocracy). Instead, it follows Amos's autobiographic sketch of his call to divine agency.

Paul understands that *ve-ata* indicates a transition. Amos has concluded justifying his agency and now shifts (*ve-ata*) to the pronouncement. Hakham, on the other hand, interprets the use of *ve-ata* as causal: "Now that I've been tapped as a prophet, I have prophecy regarding you, Amazia…" This seems to be the most likely meaning of *ve-ata*, as it fits the usual usage in Tanakh.

What is unusual about this opening clause is that Amos punctuates his prophecy with the words "hear the word of Hashem"—but then, before actually stating the prophecy of impending doom, he recalls Amazia's call for Amos to cease prophesizing to Israel. We would have expected the line *shema devar Hashem* to **follow** his repeat of Amazia's attempt to throw him out, as follows:

> *Ve-ata ata omer lo tinavei al Israel, ve-lo tatif al beit Yishak*
>
> *Lakhen ko amar…*

In other words, the clause *shema devar Hashem* appears to be superfluous and somewhat clumsy.

We apparently must conclude that the line *ata omer…Yishak* is **part** of the words of Hashem. In other words, Amos is not speaking on his own behalf when he rebuffs Amazia's attempt to have him silenced.

> *Ve-ata*—and now, here is the prophecy that God has sent me to deliver: "You tell me (or Me) not to deliver prophecy against Israel and not to rebuke the house of Yishak. Therefore, this is what Hashem says…"

Amos's paraphrase of Amazia's words are not his own personal response; they are prophetic and part of God's response to the attempt to silence God's words at Beit-El.

You say: Prophesy not against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Yishak: Note that Amos uses *tinavei* in parallel with *tatif*. The root *natof* means "drip," as it is used in most of its infrequent appearances in Tanakh (there are 18 in total). For instance, in the opening lines of Devora's song, poetically describing the cosmological reaction to God's appearance at Sinai.[20]

This original meaning is then borrowed to describe, metaphorically, prophetic words of rebuke, which "drop down" from heaven.[21]This root is used with this meaning in Micah[22] and Job.[23]

The only other time that Amos uses the root *natof* is at the restoration prophecy of consolation at the epilogue of the book. There it takes the original meaning of "dropping" and inheres great blessing and grace. Why does Amos, whose prophecies are filled with rebuke, choose to use this word so sparingly and only here?

Keep in mind that Amos is standing at Beit-El, looking, as it were, "up" to the priest who is officiating at the altar. The difference between their perspectives on the prophet's words could not be more diametric, as outlined above. The application of *natof* to prophecy implies a directional orientation—the words are coming **down** like dew (if comforting) or like harsh rain or hail (if threatening). It is specifically here, where Amos's role and agency is directly challenged, that he stresses that his words are coming "down," i.e., from above.

The alignment of *hinavei* with "Israel" and *tatif* with "Beit Yishak" is deliberate and elegant. The classic and familiar word *navi* is associated with Israel, beginning from the promise of prophetic continuation of Moshe's leadership.[24] On the other hand, the "put-down" implied by *tatif* specifically targets "Beit Yishak." The one other mention of "Yishak" in Amos's prophecies, delivered just before Amazia's angry reaction, made mention of *bamot Yishak*—the "high places" of Yishak.[25] As we discussed in analyzing this uncommon spelling in the prophecy of the *anakh*, this was a deliberate play on the name Yishak, turning it from a name of divine favor and joy to a name of licentiousness and frivolity. For Amos's words to "drop down" on the "high places," it would have to be a word that emanates from on high—exactly the point of Amos's response to Amazia throughout.

Therefore thus says Hashem: Amos is already delivering God's words. Why add this introductory phrase?

One possible explanation is that Amos's words are made up of two segments. The first one, introduced with *ve-ata shema devar Hashem*, is God's response to Amazia's attempts to silence God's prophet. The second is the prophecy that had already been given to Amos and for which he was sent to Beit-El in the first place.

This is a bit difficult, however. Amos reported three visions and, in the case of two, his own attempts at intercession. These presentations were presumably made at Beit-El, before being stopped by the priest. He continues with a fourth vision and it is commonly assumed that this takes place at the same setting of the first three—at Beit-El. In other words, the fourth vision was the final intended prophecy for Beit-El—not the harsh five-fold curse here.

Holding onto the notion that Amos's words are to be understood as segmented into two, we might propose that they are both divine responses to Amazia. The first is a strong-arm rebuff of Amazia's attempts to silence God's prophet. The second is the concomitant punishment that will **now** befall Amazia and, presumably, his sovereign due to their attempts to silence Amos.[26]

In what may be an ironic twist, it is possible that this harsh pronouncement was originally intended for the king only. This is implied in the denouement of the curse—that Israel will be exiled. Perhaps since the priest tried to prevent the prophet from announcing God's words to the king, these words now *also* apply to his minion at Beit-El.

As pointed out above, this curse has five prongs to it. This is a rhetorical pattern that Amos has used several times. There are five instances of punishment listed in 4:6–11, each of which concludes with "and still you have not returned to Me." There is also the list of five cosmic wonders in chapter 4:13, as well as the curse of Amazia and/or Jeroboam in our verse.

Your wife will act the harlot in the city: R. Eliezer of Beaugency understands that this means that his (whose? Amazia's? Jeroboam's?) wife will **voluntarily** go out into the city and commit harlotry/adultery. The excess here is that, as he points out, a person violating a marital bond will typically do so discreetly, whereas, to heighten the shame, she will do so publicly.

Paul suggests that this is directed exclusively at Amatzia and that it is his wife who will act the harlot, heightening the shame (as it will be public knowledge), as the real *Kohanim* were banned from marrying a *zona*.[27]

Both of these commentators, one medieval and the other modern, assume that the act of *tizneh* is voluntary and brazen. This does not, however, fit the context. The rest of the curse is about an enemy conquering the land, killing their children, dividing up the land, and exiling the people.

I believe that the wife in question (again, whose wife? Perhaps everyone's?) will be so desperate for food that she will turn to whoring. She will do so in the city, publicly, as she will be so far gone in her tragic circumstances that she will just focus on finding sustenance for herself and her family.[28]

This interpretation also fits the form of the verse. This is not a simple curse of five horrible things. It is a sequence, concluding (as these sequences often do) with exile. First, there will be such dire hunger that women (including wives of previously notable people) will offer their sexual favors for food. This suggests a siege—something that the people in Samaria were all too familiar with from their own history.[29] This is followed by an incursion in which the young people (fighters?) will be slaughtered, after which the land of the vanquished will be divided up by the victors. This progresses to the exile of the leaders, who have seen their own wives, children, and land taken from them. Now they will be led away from Israel to die "on impure land." The curse concludes with and a complete exile of the people.

And your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword: Admittedly, the mention of daughters here seems to belie the proposal above that these are soldiers. There are two possibilities here. It is possible that the enemy referenced here is excessively brutal (and operating against their own long-range interests to boot), and they massacre everyone. But if that is the case, then why stop at the children? Why exile the leaders instead of killing them? We would expect the leaders to be killed first.

The other possibility—which is, I believe, more likely here—is that even in biblical times, young women would join young men at war when every person was needed. This is evidenced—again in *Yoel*—when he describes, *yeitzei chatan mei-chedro ve-kalla mi-chuppata*, "let the bridegroom go out from his room and the bride from her wedding canopy."[30] Even though contextually this seems to be about joining the community in prayer during times of plague, *Hazal* read it as a call to conscription.[31]

And your land will be divided by the surveyor's rope: The image of the conquering enemy dividing the spoils of the vanquished is fairly common in Tanakh.[32]

And you yourself will die in an impure land: Is this "impure land" implying that all lands outside of Eretz Israel are impure? Or does it reflect specifically on dying in the land of the enemy? Prima facie, we would assume the former.[33] Yet, from the perspective of Israelite sovereignty and a recognition that conquest and exile represent an essential breach in the covenant, one might argue that it is specifically dying in the captor's land as an eternal exile that constitutes the impurity.

And Israel will surely be led away captive out of his land: This is where all biblical downward spirals end—in Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, and throughout prophetic literature. The end of the relationship that the Torah confirms, and that Jewish history consistently reaffirms is shattered with exile.

Afterword

We have explored one of numerous interactions between prophet and politician, the one representing the eternal voice of God and the other—the established aristocracy's mewling for the status quo. Generations of students of the Tanakh, from all walks and across cultural borders, have drawn inspiration from the prophetic oratory of Amos and his colleagues; yet the words deserve—nay, they demand—much more attention than use as convenient slogans. If we are to take Amos seriously, we ought to take **every word** seriously and constantly deepen our connection with the text to discern ever greater depths to the eternal messages his words convey.

Notes

[1] Yonah is the exception, as, besides five words of prophetic message, the book is chiefly narrative.

[2] 1 Kings 12:28–29, 31.

[3] Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

[4] Here and Isaiah 8:12.

[5] See, however, Saul's words in 1 Samuel 22.

[6] *Da'at Mikra*, p. 59.

[7] *Mikra Le-Yisrael*, p. 122.

[8] I will address the significance of "eating bread" later in this article.

[9] See Shoftim 19:18 and 1 Samuel 10:3.

[10] 2 Samuel 7:8.

[11] 1 Samuel 22:5.

[12] 2 Samuel 24 = 1 Chronicles 21.

[13] 1 Chronicles 29:29.

[14] Chiefly in Ez. 12–13.

[15] See, e.g., 1 Kings 22:6.

[16] Samet, Nili: "Between 'Eat Bread There' and 'Do Not Eat Bread': The Motif of Eating Bread In Two Stories in the Prophets and Its Relationship to the Perception of Prophecy in the Bible," [Heb] in *Masekhet: Say To Wisdom: You Are My Sister*, vol. 2 (2004), pp. 167–181.

[17] 1 Samuel 10 and 19.

[18] 2 Kings 2 and 4.

[19] Notable exceptions are Deut. 4:1, 10:12.

[20] Shofetim 5:4; see also Psalms 68:9.

[21] Ezekiel 21:2, 9.

[22] 2:6, 11—five times in these two verses.

[23] 29:22.

[24] Deut. 18.

[25] 7:9.

[26] Whether this curse is aimed at the king or his priest—or both—depends on how we read the pronominal suffixes in this curse.

[27] Lev. 21:7.

[28] See Deut. 28:54–55; see, of interest, the comment of R. Eliezer of Beaugency on Joel 4:3.

[29] 2 Kings 6:25ff.

[30] Joel 2:16.

[31] m. *Sotah* 8:7.

[32] Joel 4:3.

[33] Per Ezekiel 36:20.