

**BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE:
THE PROPHECIES OF HOSHEA AND AMOS**

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***Shiur* #16: The Prophecies of Amos: Oracles Against the Nations (continued)**

As we continue our study of Amos's ultimate prophecy in this series of oracles against the nations, we will devote much of our attention to understanding the background of the central thesis of the praise-section. In the previous *shiur*, we analyzed the simile in the first component of that paean — the comparison of the native Canaanite nations to cedars and oaks. We then briefly considered the second element, the destruction of fruit and root, as well as its implications for the success of the settlement enterprise.

In this lecture, we will move to the middle segment of praise, which comprises three items: first, the Exodus from Egypt; second, the sojourn in the wilderness; third, entering the Land (for the purpose of defeating the Amorites).

Note again how historiosophic retellings are not true to chronological sequence. The purpose of this praise is not to accurately recount a historic narrative. If it were, the Exodus-Wilderness-Entry unit would have come first, before the destruction of the enemy. This is not the structure we have before us, as the structure informs the purpose. The purpose of this hymn is to appreciate the great good that God did for the people and to appreciate the vast gulf between those kindnesses and the behavior of Israel, which is the broader aim of the oracle. As such, chronological sequence is not a consideration.

Here, again, is the text:

9 I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath. **10** Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorites. **11** And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not even thus, O you Israelites? says God.

12 But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying "Do not prophesy."

Or, as we saw in last week's *shiur*:

- 1) I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks
- 2) Indeed, I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath
- 3) Also, I brought you up out of the land of Egypt
- 4) And led you forty years in the wilderness
- 5) To possess the land of the Amorites
- 6) And I raised up of your sons to be prophets
- 7) And of your young men to be Nazirites

We proposed a structural definition of the passage; this division, we argued, is self-evident, not only due to the division of the verses and the syntax, but also thematically:

- a) Destruction of the Amorite nations
- b) (1) Exodus → (2) wanderings → (3) conquest
- c) Sanctification of the people

In this *shiur*, and the next, we will focus on the axis-segment of this praise, which, I argue, is central not only rhetorically but also thematically and informs its antecedent line as well as the subsequent line.

THE EXODUS IN PROPHETIC RHETORIC

Before addressing the broader theme of the Exodus as referenced by the literary prophets, an introductory word of definition is in order.

When we speak about “the Exodus”, the assumed meaning is the miraculous redemption of the Israelites from Egypt, which clearly begins in *Parashat Shemot*. Where it ends is an open question. The argument may certainly be made that the Exodus only concludes when Israel enters the Land — or, perhaps, if we wish to push it further, with the conquest and settlement of the Land. There is even reason to argue, based on a prophetic line¹ in the Song of the Sea, that it is the Temple’s construction which marks the endpoint of the Exodus; indeed, it is the last canonical event to be dated by it, nearly five centuries later (*I Melakhim* 6:1). Minimally, it is clear that the Torah regards part or all of the sojourn in the Wilderness as an extension of the Exodus; Sukkot commemorates “that in *sukkot* I made the Israelites dwell **when I took them out of Egypt**” (*Vayikra* 23:43), a situation which persisted throughout their time in the Wilderness.

However, Amos’s use seems to frame the “Exodus”, per se, much more narrowly, as he subsequently describes the wandering in the Wilderness for forty years. We are reckoning that second clause as a separate but related praise. As such, the Exodus in this context refers, apparently, to the miracles of the Plagues and the Splitting of the Sea. The argument may be made that the verb “I took out” could be applied throughout the forty years, whereas “I brought up” may be more limited. We will yet return to that first verb.

¹ “Sanctuary, Lord, have Your hands established,” *Shemot* 15:17.

Considering how central the Exodus is in the Torah to both the doxis as well as the praxis of our relationship with God, it has surprisingly infrequent references in the works of the Later Prophets.²

In Yeshayahu's vision of a future redemption, he invokes the Exodus:

And the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with His scorching wind will He shake His hand over the River, and will smite it into seven streams, and cause men to march over dry-shod. And there shall be a highway for the remnant of His people that shall remain from Assyria, as there was for Israel in the day that it came up out of the land of Egypt. (11:15-16)

Of all the literary prophets, Yirmeyahu invokes the Exodus significantly more frequently and in more varied contexts than anyone else.

When Yirmeyahu bemoans how the people have forgotten God, he observes:

Neither said they: "Where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt; that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelled?" (2:6)

When he rails against the people's misunderstanding of the role of offerings, relative to the significance of maintaining obeisance, he recounts:

For I spoke not to your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices. (7:22)

He goes on to point out that the people's stubbornness has plagued them since:

But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in their own counsels, even in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward, even since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt to this day; and though I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, day after day, again and again, yet they hearkened not to Me, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff; they did worse than their fathers. (ibid. 24-26)

He berates them:

Say thus to them: So says the Lord, God of Israel: cursed is the man who does not hearken to this covenant, which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the iron furnace, saying: Hearken to My

² It is prominent in the "historical prophets" – i.e. Earlier Prophets, especially *Yehoshua*. We will limit our discussion to its use as a rhetorical reference and tool by the literary prophets.

voice, and do them, according to all which I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God. (11:3-4)

Failing to fulfill this covenant has consequences, of which the people have been warned:

For I earnestly forewarned your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even to this day, again and again, saying: Harken to My voice. (ibid. 7)

As does Yeshayahu, Yirmeyahu invokes the Exodus from Egypt when foretelling of a newer redemption:

Therefore, behold, the days come, says the Lord, that it shall no more be said: "As the Lord lives, that brought up the Israelites out of the land of Egypt," but: "As the Lord lives, that brought up the Israelites from the land of the north, and from all the countries where He had driven them;" and I will bring them back into their land that I gave to their fathers. (16:14-15, cf. 23:7-8)

Yirmeyahu prophesizes about a "new covenant", in contradistinction to the first covenant forged with His people:

Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; forasmuch as they broke My covenant, although I was a lord over them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying: "Know the Lord;" for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more. (31:30-33)

Perhaps the most significant mention of the Exodus in all the prophetic works, outside of *Yechezkel* (see below) is in Yirmeyahu's prayer after completing the purchase of the field in Anatot, testimony to God's promise that the people would return to the Land:

Ah Lord God! behold, You have made the heaven and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for You; who shows mercy to thousands, and recompenses the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them; the great, the mighty God, the Lord of hosts is His name; great in counsel, and mighty in work; whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings; **who did set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt**, even to this day, and in Israel and among other men; and made You a name, as at this day; **and did bring forth Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with**

signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terror; and gave them this land, which You did swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; and they came in, and possessed it; but they hearkened not to Your voice, neither walked in Your law; they have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do; therefore You have caused all this evil to befall them; behold the mounds, they are come to the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence; and what You have spoken is come to pass; and, behold, You see it. Yet You have said to me, O Lord God: Buy the field for money, and call witnesses; whereas the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans. (32:17-25)

The final mention comes as a prelude to his warning the people about their violation of the law of letting Hebrew slaves go free after six years:

Thus says the Lord, God of Israel: I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying: "At the end of seven years you shall let go every man his brother that is a Hebrew, that has been sold to you, and has served you six years, you shall let him go free from you;" but your fathers hearkened not to Me, neither inclined their ear. (34:13-14)

Concurrent with Yirmeyahu, Yechezkel (in Bavel), uses the Exodus narrative twice, expansively. In Chapter 16, the famous "abominations of Jerusalem"³ prophecy, he describes the birth and "swaddling" of the Jewish people in Egypt, as well as God's romancing the "young maiden" – all as prelude to the whoring she engages in once in the Land:

...Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: Your origin and your nativity is of the land of the Canaanite; an Amorite was your father, and your mother was a Hittite. And as for your nativity, in the day you were born your navel was not cut, neither were you washed in water for cleansing; you were not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. No eye pitied you, to do any of these to you, to have compassion upon you; but you were cast out in the open field in the loathsomeness of your person, in the day that you were born. And when I passed by you, and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you: In your blood, live; yes, I said to you: In your blood, live; I cause you to increase, even as the growth of the field. And you did increase and grow up, and you came to excellent beauty: your breasts were fashioned, and your hair was grown; yet you were naked and bare. Now when I passed by you, and looked upon you, and, behold, your time was the time of love, I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness; yes, I swore to you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became Mine. Then washed I you with water; yes, I cleansed away your blood from you, and I anointed you with oil. I

³ See Mishna *Megilla* 4:8.

clothed you also with richly woven work, and shod you with sealskin, and I wound fine linen about your head, and covered you with silk. I decked you also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon your hands, and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring upon your nose, and earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. Thus were you decked with gold and silver; and your raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and richly woven work; you did eat fine flour, and honey, and oil; and you did wax exceeding beautiful, and you were meet for royal estate. And your renown went forth among the nations for your beauty; for it was perfect, through My splendor which I had put upon you, says the Lord God. (vv. 3-14)

Even though Egypt is not explicitly mentioned here, the context of the Divine protection and subsequent covenant and enrichment all speak to the Exodus epoch. These verses are conventionally understood as referencing this period (hence some of these verses are invoked within the traditional text of the Haggada). As we will see, this lengthy description seems to be built on the brief mention of the Wilderness experience in *Hoshea*, which we will present below (and analyze in detail when we turn our attention to his prophecies later in this series).

Again, when reproving Israelites for their attachment to idolatry, Yechezkel invokes Egypt, but from a different perspective. He attacks the attachment that the people (per this historiosophic take) have to the idols of Egypt:

Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them: Thus says the Lord God: Are you come to inquire of Me? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you. Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Cause them to know the abominations of their fathers; and say to them: Thus says the Lord God: In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up My hand to the seed of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up My hand to them, saying: I am the Lord your God; in that day I lifted up My hand to them, to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had sought out for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the beauty of all lands; and I said to them: Cast you away every man the detestable things of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled against Me, and would not hearken to Me; they did not every man cast away the detestable things of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt; then I said I would pour out My fury upon them, to spend My anger upon them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, among whom they were, in whose sight I made Myself known to them, so as to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt. So I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes, and taught them My ordinances, which if a man do, he shall live by them. Moreover also I gave them My sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord Who sanctifies them. But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they walked not in My statutes, and they rejected My ordinances, which if a man do, he shall live by them, and My sabbaths they greatly profaned; then I said I would pour

out My fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them out. Yet also I lifted up My hand to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the beauty of all lands; because they rejected My ordinances, and walked not in My statutes, and profaned My sabbaths — for their heart went after their idols. Nevertheless My eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make a full end of them in the wilderness. And I said to their children in the wilderness: Walk you not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols; I am the Lord your God; walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and do them; and hallow My sabbaths, and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God. But the children rebelled against Me; they walked not in My statutes, neither kept My ordinances to do them, which if a man do, he shall live by them; they profaned My sabbaths; then I said I would pour out My fury upon them, to spend My anger upon them in the wilderness. Nevertheless I withdrew My hand, and acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them forth. I lifted up My hand to them also in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the nations, and disperse them through the countries; because they had not executed My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes, and had profaned My sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and ordinances whereby they should not live; and I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they set apart all that opens the womb, that I might destroy them, to the end that they might know that I am the Lord. (20:3-26)

In this presentation, which deviates in some significant fashion from the Exodus and Wilderness narratives of the Torah, idolatry and rebellion have been the habitual behavior of Israel from its infancy – and this continues to his day.

Hoshea, a contemporary of Amos, Yeshayahu and Mikha (all of whom invoke the Exodus), references that glorious era in four places. In his description of God's desire to rekindle the early romance with Israelites, after punishing her for whoring after other gods, he says:

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And to her I will give her vineyards from thence, and the Valley of Disturbance for an Opening of Hope (*Petach Tikva*); and she shall respond there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. (2:16-17)

As indicated above, this seems to be the model for Yechezkel's lengthy description of the "love affair" in the Wilderness (also invoked in *Yirmeyahu* 2:1-2). This same idyll, the return to the wholesome romance of the Wilderness, is again invoked by Hoshea:

But I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt; I will yet again make you to dwell in tents, as in the days of the appointed season. I have also spoken to the prophets, and I have multiplied visions; and by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes. If Gilead be given to iniquity becoming altogether vanity, in Gilgal they sacrifice to bullocks; yes, their altars shall be as heaps in the furrows of the field. And Jacob fled into the field of Aram, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep. And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel up out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he kept. (12:10-14)

Hoshea briefly references the Exodus later on, when contrasting God's love for His people with their waywardness:

When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. (11:1)

Yet I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt; and you know no God but Me, and beside Me there is no savior. I did know you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. When they were fed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten Me. (13:4-6)

Aside from the prominent role he gives the Exodus in this hymn, Amos refers to it twice more: first, invoking the special status of the nation and the higher standard to which it is held:

Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, Israelites, against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt, saying: You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities. (3:1)

In what seems to be a contradictory move to the previous reference, Amos lists nations that have been led from one land to another:

God says: "Are you not like the sons of Cushites to me, Israelites? I brought Israel up out of Egypt and the Philistines from Kaftor and Aram from Kir." (9:7)

Mikha of Moreshet, contemporary of Amos, comes closest to the use of the Exodus in our passage when chastising the people for the injustices carried out in the kingdom:

My people, what have I done to you? And wherein have I wearied you? Testify against Me. For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam. O My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Be'or answered him, from Shitim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord. (6:3-5)

This is a much more detailed retelling of the Exodus and Wilderness stories than Amos's approximating Yehoshua's final words (ch. 24).

Like his contemporary Yeshayahu, Mikha also invokes the Exodus as a model of the future redemption:

As in the days of your coming forth out of the land of Egypt will I show to him marvels. (7:15)

There is only one more mention of the Exodus in the prophetic canon. In encouraging the people to complete the rebuilding of the Temple c. 516 BCE,⁴ Chaggai reminds them of the covenant:

The word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt have I established, and My spirit abides among you; fear you not. (2:5)

Chaggai seems to be referencing the command and promise regarding the construction of the *Mishkan*: “They shall build me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them” (*Shemot* 25:8).

In the next *shiur*, we will analyze these variegated passage to understand how the *nevi'im* use the Exodus and Wilderness narratives in their rhetoric in order to understand the context for Amos.

For Further Study:

Yair Hoffman, “A North Israelite Typological Myth and a Judean Historical Tradition: The Exodus in Hosea and Amos,” *Vetus Testamentum*, 39:1, pp. 169-182.

⁴ See *Ezra* 5:1-2.