

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

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Shiur #17: The Prophecies of Amos: Oracles Against the Nations

(continued)

In the last *shiur*, we saw the central segment of the hymn-praise which makes up the axis of the oracle against Israel. We discussed the plethora of mentions of the Exodus in the historic books of *Tanakh* (specifically the Earlier Prophets) as well as in *Tehillim*, and we contrasted that with the paucity of Exodus passages in the literary prophetic canon (Later Prophets). Amos is one of the earliest prophets with a written record of his literary output and, as we will see in one of the excurses at the end of the series, his spiritual descendants build liberally upon his rhetorical method. As such, we have taken the liberty of a brief tangent to explore the Exodus theme throughout the Later Prophets to see how it is used. All of this is part of an effort to understand the centrality of the Exodus to Amos's oracle against the Northern Kingdom.

In this *shiur*, we will summarize our findings from the last *shiur*, honing in on those rare passages that approximate Amos's use of the Exodus.

Yeshayahu, Hoshea, Mikha & Amos

In the 8th century BCE, we find four prophets whose prophecies are recorded in *Tanakh* and who make mention of the Exodus. Yeshayahu, whose output is by far the largest from the Assyrian era, invokes it only once (ch. 11), as a model for future redemption ("And there shall be a highway for the remnant of His people... as there was for Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt"). Hoshea, in his fourteen chapters, uses Exodus imagery and memory four times. The first occurrence is in chapter 2, as a nostalgic memory of divine romance ("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"). This same rhetorical usage appears in chapter 12 ("But I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt; I will yet again make you to dwell in tents...And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel up out of Egypt...").

Twice, Hoshea uses the Egyptian experience as a verbal springboard for chastising the people against their lack of loyalty to God. In chapter 11, a brief

mention (“Out of Egypt I called My son”) prefaces a rebuke; in chapter 13 (“I did know you in the wilderness... When they were fed, they became full... Therefore have they forgotten Me”), it is used to contrast God’s love for His people with their betrayal of Him.

Mikha invokes the Exodus twice: once for a similar “sting” as Hoshea does and once as Yeshayahu does. In chapter 6, he prefaces an accusation against the people’s injustice with the closest restatement of the opening of Decalogue in the literary-prophetic canon (“For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage”). Towards the end of his collection, Mikha uses the memory of the Exodus to outline a vision of the future redemption: “As in the days of your coming forth from Egypt, I will show him marvelous things.”

The *navi* whose works we are currently studying, Amos of Tekoa, utilizes Exodus imagery and Exodus memory a grand total of three times. The first time is in the context of our oracle, to which we will return. He also raises it as a marker of the special status of the Jewish people in chapter 3 (“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”). Finally, in an absolute turnaround in chapter 9, he lists the Exodus as one of a number of population movements He has effected, reducing the status of the Jewish people, as it were, to just another nation (“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”).

Yirmeyahu

The prophet who uses the Exodus most frequently and most liberally is Yirmeyahu. Not only does he use the Exodus nearly twice as much as the nearest runner-up, invoking it seven times, but he does it at length and with complexity unequalled in the work of any other *navi*.

In chapter 2, he quotes the people – or, rather, notes the absence of a quote from the people, who should be wondering where God is, Who took them out of Egypt (“Neither said they: ‘Where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt; that led us through the wilderness...’”).

Then, in one of his powerful oratories against idolatry in chapter 7, he twice uses the event of the Exodus as the foundational moment of the people’s relationship with Him. In a curious twist, he again references that which is unsaid – this time, by God (“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”). Further on in that same speech, he reminds the people of their stubbornness which has plagued them “even since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt to this day.”

Later on, in chapter 11, he inveighs against the nation's forgetting "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..." He then references the Exodus (again) as the opening moment of their soured relationship ("For I earnestly forewarned your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt...").

As did his predecessors Yeshayahu and Mikha, Yirmeyahu (twice) invokes the Exodus in reference to a future redemption. Unlike those 8th-century BCE prophets, however, he doesn't use the imagery as a prism through which to envision the grand, anticipated salvation. In a surprising turn, he prognosticates that the future redemption will leave the Exodus in the shadows ("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.")

The prophet from Anatot, in promising a new era in the relationship between the people and God in chapter 31, introduces the notion of a "new covenant" which will be different than the one at Sinai:

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...

Dramatically, in the following chapter, when he is in prison and approached by his cousin to purchase a field in Anatot, Yirmeyahu turns to God in prayer and addresses Him in the following manner:

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...

Finally, on the eve of destruction (ch. 34), he reminds the people of the law that they had accepted at Sinai obligating them to free their Hebrew slaves after six years – an obligation that they had flagrantly failed to fulfill. The association between this responsibility to fellow Jews who had fallen on hard times and sold themselves as slaves and the Exodus narrative speaks for itself:

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.

Yechezkel

Operating in the same era in Mesopotamia, Yechezkel use the Exodus two times — but both in broad strokes. In the famous, painful and searing message of chapter 16 ("Inform Jerusalem of her abominations"), the prophet apparently alludes to Egypt as the birthplace of the people:

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.

His other mention of the Egyptian Exodus (ch. 20) is a most unusual one. It posits a history with which we are unfamiliar from any other sources, a narrative that has the people wedded to Egyptian cultic practices so deeply that they are unwilling to abandon them even to be free. The prophet describes God's anger at the people, indicating that He "said I would pour out My fury upon them, to spend My anger upon them in the midst of the land of Egypt" but didn't do so in consideration of the desecration of His Name that would result.

Second Temple Era

There is only one mention of the Exodus in the prophetic writing from the Second Temple period. Chaggai encourages the people to engage in rebuilding the Temple, reminding them: "The word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt have I established, and My spirit abides among you; fear not." Malakhi, prophesizing 50 years later, does invoke the Convocation at Sinai, but not in the context of the Exodus.

ASSESSING WHAT WE'VE SEEN

The following chart presents the various mentions of the Exodus in the literary-prophetic canon and categorizes them based on context and assumed rhetorical motivation. Afterwards, we will discuss what we've discovered and use that to propose an approach to understanding these invocations of the seminal event, why there are so few such mentions in the canon and the rhetorical purposes for

which it is raised. The chart will be presented in chronological and canonical sequence, following the order of prophecies as presented in the Masoretic text. We will then re-evaluate and re-categorize them.

#	Passage	Frame of Reference	Rhetorical Motivation (?)
1	<i>Yesh.</i> 11	Model for future redemption	Inspiring hope
2	<i>Hoshea</i> 2	Nostalgia for romantic relationship with God	Threatening exile to purify the nation; with promise of renewed relationship
3	<i>Hoshea</i> 11	God's love for His children	Promise of renewed relationship
4	<i>Hoshea</i> 12	Simpler times – living in “tents of meeting”	Promise of <i>teshuva</i> – a renewed love
5	<i>Hoshea</i> 13	Reminder that God alone redeemed them	Threat of punishment for abandoning God
6	<i>Mikha</i> 6	<i>Riv</i> formula (accusation)	Inspiring loyalty and gratitude to God
7	<i>Mikha</i> 7	Descriptions of wondrous future redemption	Providing hope for brighter future
8	<i>Amos</i> 2	To be addressed below	Justifying accusation and punishment
9	<i>Amos</i> 3	History of special relationship with God	Justifying higher standards by which they are judged
10	<i>Amos</i> 9	Population movement as part of universal pattern	Reducing the Jewish people's sense of having special status
11	<i>Yirm.</i> 2	People have forgotten God's great kindnesses	Beginning of chastisement about abandoning God
12	<i>Yirm.</i> 7a	What was not commanded (offerings)	Ordering priorities (obedience to God over offerings)
13	<i>Yirm.</i> 7b	History of disobedience — dating back to Exodus	Part of <i>riv</i> formula
14	<i>Yirm.</i> 11	Reminder of the terms of the covenant made at Exodus	Part of <i>riv</i> formula
15	<i>Yirm.</i> 16 (=23)	Exodus as national memory against which the future redemption will be greater	Hope for brighter future
16	<i>Yirm.</i> 31	Context of covenant — new one will be greater	Hope for a better future and more everlasting relationship with God
17	<i>Yirm.</i> 32	Within prayer of thanksgiving	Putting gift of the Land into context
18	<i>Yirm.</i> 34	Accusation against the people for violating law of Hebrew slave	Motivating people to free their Hebrew slaves
19	<i>Yechezkel</i> 16	Description of the nascent nation	Contrasting God's love for the people with their abominable

			behavior
20	<i>Yechezkel</i> 20	“Narrative” of people’s obsession with Egyptian gods	Argument that they have been wedded to idolatry since their inception
21	<i>Chaggai</i> 2	Covenant given at Sinai	Inspire hope that God will reside in the (smaller and less impressive) rebuilt Temple

WHAT THE PROPHETS MEAN TO COMMUNICATE

As is evidenced by this chart, we see that there are several rhetorical uses of the Exodus narrative.

First of all, it is used as a reference point for the Jewish people’s starting point – from as incidental a mention as the implied location in *Yechezkel* 16 to the more frequent explicit mentions. Sources #12, 13, 19, 20 and 21 all seem to fit this category. The Exodus isn’t singled out a significant event *per se*, rather as a point of origin for the people or the historic context within which the covenant was given.

A slightly more forceful but related category is the use of the Exodus-era covenant (Sinai) as evidence of disobedience. Sources #14 and 18 speak to this category.

A very different feeling emerges from Hoshea (and, we might argue, from *Yirmeyahu* 2:1-2) — the period of the Exodus is seen as the honeymoon period in the relationship with God, who ‘yearns’ to return to those simple days and will either woo or force His people to return to the desert to renew the relationship. Sources #2, 3 and 4 all fit neatly within this category. In addition, several prophets use the Exodus as a model for some future greatness, either a similar redemption (or a better one) or an improved covenant. Sources #1, 7, 15 and 16 all fit within this grouping.

The most aggrieved mention of the Exodus is when that great and wondrous beneficence is placed in opposition to the people’s obstinacy, disobedience or ingratitude. Sources #5, 6 and 11, in one manner or another, fit this rhetorical model.

Source #17 is really not part of our study, properly speaking. *Yirmeyahu* invokes the Exodus as part of his prayer to God. It is not within the strict parameters of prophetic rhetoric; rather, it is liturgical poetry.

The other three mentions belong to our prophet, Amos of Tekoa. Source #9 directly responds to an anticipated response to the oracle against Israel, especially against the backdrop of the oracles against its neighbors. Samaria, like Jerusalem, is held to a higher standard and its punishment is both swifter and more exacting, due to the special relationship that the people have with God.

Source #10 seems to be an inverted type of chastisement – instead of defending the higher standards against which they are judged, the Jewish people are told that their history is no different than that of other nations. Everyone has moved, everyone has been exiled. Lest the people think that they are protected by a special relationship with God (akin to the repeated cries of “The Sanctuary of the Lord!” in *Yirmeyahu* 7), they are reminded that “the eyes of God are upon the sinning kingdom” regardless of ethnic identity.

Before returning to our key passage in chapter 2, a word of summation.

The prophets whom we have surveyed had a range of tasks, which all fall within one mission: to deliver the word of God to the people. That word may be one of consolation, hope, threat, exhortation or even gentle (?) reminders of a better life, well-lived and accessible if the people would just return.

The Exodus from Egypt, that great moment in our history, appears many times and is prominent in the historical books of the *Tanakh*, from *Devarim* to *Ezra-Nechemya*. Within the purview of a historic narrative, the Exodus is not only the starting point for Israelite history, it is the great act (or historic sequence) which binds the people to God, to the Law and to the Land. Within the rhetorical goals of the prophets, however, it recedes in importance and, as a result, in frequency. The broad concerns of the prophets are immediate; by and large, invoking the distant past would not further their goals. If Achav and Izevel’s idolatrous practices threaten the nation, it isn’t due to any perverse relationship to a past event – but due to a crooked perception of the present.

The few exceptional times that the Exodus is utilized by the prophets speak to one of very few concerns. When identifying that the people have a long history of idolatrous leanings or of stubborn disobedience, the Exodus is a perfect starting place. That sentiment, however, is of dubious efficacy; it sounds more like an expression of frustration than anything else. As such, it is used rarely – and only to remind the people of their long-standing behavior. This may, counterintuitively, allow for some rays of hope to shine through the accusations. If the people have always had these tendencies, yet the *berit* continues to stand and the people are still here, perhaps there is a future in spite of the people’s failings. In addition, this may serve as a mild cushion of comfort, a sort of divine shrug of the shoulders: “What can I expect of them?”

AND BACK TO AMOS 2

Perhaps the closest parallel to our passage is *Mikha* 6. The Exodus is mentioned there as evidence of God’s great kindness towards His people and love for them. This kindness stands in stark contrast to the behavior of the people, specifically within the realm of interpersonal relationships and, most directly, the treatment of the poor. In this way, *Yirmeyahu*’s last mention of the Exodus (ch. 34) in the context of freeing Hebrew slaves may also be considered part of the same

rhetorical tradition. As we have suggested over the past few *shiurim*, the oracle against Israel speaks to the failure of leadership, of the aristocracy and judiciary, to protect the disenfranchised. Invoking the memory of the Exodus, when the whole nation was brought out of servitude to begin a glorious, regal relationship with God, to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” carries a sharper barb when the specific failing of the people is in the realm of treatment of present-day slaves and the underclass.

We have taken a significant detour from our examination of Amos’ oracles and we will return to that text in the next *shiur*. Hopefully, this tangential analysis has shed some new light on the relatively quiet role of the Exodus in the rhetoric of the literary prophets and will serve to highlight the significance of Amos’s utilization of it as the core of the oracle against Shomeron.