

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

Perek 5

Central to perek 5 is the call to “seek the Lord” through righteousness and judgment, contrary to what was happening among the people at that time. The first section of the perek uses the language of a lamentation for “the house of Israel” (1-17). The opening and closing pesukim of the lamentation describe the catastrophe which will befall Israel and the lamentation and mourning that will follow it (1-3, 16-17). In the central part of the lamentation Amos rebukes the people for focusing on the idolatrous rites in various temples instead of seeking God Himself through righteousness and judgment. In the second section of the perek Amos argues with the nation about the nature of the day of the Lord which they are longing for (18-20). In the final section of the perek Amos again condemns the sacrifices of the people and calls to them to seek righteousness and judgment (21-27).

1.

Throughout the lamentation there is a notable disagreement between the people’s words and religious outlook and the words of the prophet:

a | Discuss the way Amos expresses the fundamental difference between his perception of seeking God and the nation’s.

b | In pesukim 14-16 the prophet repeats the idea of seeking. Compare pasuk 6 to pasuk 14, and note the new angle which pasuk 14 adds to the correct way of seeking. Think about how pesukim 14-15 are a summary of the topic of seeking, in light of the content of the pesukim preceding them.

c | Examine the difference between the people’s attitude as represented in the second half of pasuk 14 and the “correction” and limitation which Amos adds in pesukim 14-15.

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2.

“Woe to you that desire the day of the Lord!” (18) In this prophecy Amos argues with the people of Israel about their attitude toward “the day of the Lord”, and shatters their illusions about the nature of the day.

a | Examine the people’s attitude toward the day of the Lord as compared to the paradoxical image with which Amos chooses to characterize it (18, 20). Compare to Bereshit 1:3-5.

b | Within the image of the darkness and light, in pasuk 19 there is a parable which describes the events of the day of the Lord. What does this parable add to the image framing it? Compare this to a similar description in Yishayahu 24:18. Note the unique aspect illustrated in Amos’s parable. Try to understand the historical basis for Amos’s prophecy, using this commentary by **M. Weiss**:

Amos’s motif expresses not only the idea that there is no escape from the danger of death, but more importantly the idea that precisely at the time when a person thinks that he is safe in his surroundings – that is his time of death...This description of the “man”, besides being an expression of the future of the nation, deals with the state of mind of the people of that generation, who in finding themselves in the glorious days of Yerovam ben Yoash, after the nightmare of the wars with Aram in the past, desire the day of the Lord.

Perek 6

In this perek Amos attacks the security and complacency which characterize the people in his time and which caused the deterioration of their moral condition. In the prophecy which begins the perek (1-7) the prophet turns to the complacent people of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, who sit comfortably in the cities of the kingdom and do not fear the future which awaits them. Instead, they are immersed in the life of pleasures and debauchery, ignoring the ills of society and its troubles. The absolute destruction of the cities of Israel and the palaces is then described (8-11). Central to the description is a horrifying image of the atrocities (9-10). The perek ends by rebuking the people for their arrogance in their military victories, and for their reversal of justice and charity (12-14).

3.

Trace the appearance of the words *Rosh/Reishit* (Head/Chief) and follow the cycle of sin and punishment which they create:

a | How does the phrase “*chief of the nations*” (1) serve as a source of security and complacency for the people?

b | Compare the use of the word “head” in pasuk 7 to the use of the word “chief” in pesukim

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1 and 6. Note the use of the phrase “*mirzach seruchim*” (banquet) to describe the revelry in pasuk 4. How does the punishment parallel the sin?

4.

a | Pasuk 13 describes the people’s reactions to the military victories in the North. “*Lo Davar*”, which means nought in Hebrew, and “*Karnaim*” which means horns in Hebrew, are also the names of places on the Aramean border (see Shmuel II 17:27 and Bereshit 14:5), so that the pasuk can be read as: “*Those who rejoice over a thing of nought, who say, “With our strength we have taken horns for ourselves.” Or “You who rejoice at Lo Davar, who say: Have we not taken Karnaim by our own strength?”* Explore the symbolic-ironic meaning that this gives to the pasuk. To better understand the significance of the word *Karnaim* look in Devarim 33:17 and Melachim I 22:11.

b | Compare the catastrophe mentioned in pasuk 14 to the prophecy in Melachim II 14:25-27, which was fulfilled in the time of Amos. Follow the spiritual process which took place in the nation during this period.

APPENDIX - “He Who made the Pleiades and Orion”

The lamentation in perek 5 contains praise of God’s strength: “*He Who made the Pleiades (khima) and Orion (ksil) and turns darkness into morning, and day He darkens as night; He Who calls the water of the sea and pours it out on the face of the earth, the Lord is His Name.*” (5:8) The Pleiades are a group of seven stars which are grouped as a cluster. In Hebrew it is called *khima*, probably from the Arabic word “*khum*” which means stack. *Ksil* is generally identified as one of the two bright stars in the Orion group. Why were these two stars specifically chosen to represent God’s strength?

The word *khima* appears two other times in the Tanakh – both in the book of Iyov, where it appears in combination with *ksil* as well. In perek 9:8-10: “*He Who alone stretched out the heavens and treads on the high places of the sea; He Who made the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south; He Who performs great deeds without limit, and wonders until they have no number*” And in Perek 38:31-33 in God’s answer to Iyov from the storm: “*Can you tie the chains of the Pleiades or loose the straps of Orion? Can you take out the constellations each in its time, and can you console Ayish for her children? Do you know the ordinances of heaven; can you place his dominion upon the earth?*” All three places have in common that they are descriptions of God’s strength in creation, in the laws of nature and its boundaries, in the heavens – light and darkness, and on the earth – sea and land.

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In the Babylonian Talmud we find Shmuel, who was known as an astronomer, discussing the pesukim in Amos and Iyov (Berachot 58b):

Shmuel contrasted two texts. It is written, "Who makes the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades." And it is written elsewhere, "That makes Pleiades and Orion." How do we reconcile these? Were it not for the heat of Orion the world could not endure the cold of Pleiades; and were it not for the cold of Pleiades the world could not endure the heat of Orion.

From Shmuel's statement we can see the astronomical theory of his time, according to which the Pleiades were the stars responsible for rain in the winter and Orion was responsible for the heat in the summer. Another interesting description of these stars is found in Massechet Rosh Hashana (11b)

In the sixth hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month. R. Yehoshua said: That day was the seventeenth day of Iyar, when the constellation of Pleiades sets at daybreak and the fountains begin to dry up, and because they [mankind] perverted their ways, the Holy One, blessed be He, changed for them the work of creation and made the constellation of Pleiades rise at daybreak and took two stars from the Pleiades and brought a flood on the world.

According to Rabbi Yehoshua's description, the flood came to the world because of a reversal in the natural laws of the Pleiades. This fits with the pesukim in Amos in their full context. In the previous pasuk Amos rebukes the people for reversing the ways of justice and charity: "*Those who turn justice to wormwood, and who leave righteousness on the ground.*" Immediately after this comes the description of God's strength, using similar language: "*He Who made the Pleiades and Orion and turns darkness into morning, and day He darkens as night; He Who calls the water of the sea and pours it out on the face of the earth, the Lord is His Name.*" It seems that this is the meaning: when the people are careful about justice and charity that guarantees that the laws of nature will be kept. Just as the people of the generation of the flood "changed their ways" and caused a change in the laws of nature and the destruction of the world, so too the people of the kingdom of Israel who are disrupting the ways of justice may cause the laws of nature to reverse and bring destruction upon themselves. The separation between light and darkness which is the foundation of creation will reverse, as well as the separation between sea and land, as in the days of the flood: "*He Who calls the water of the sea and pours it out on the face of the earth, the Lord is His Name.*" He who spoke and the world was created, who renews the creation every day in His grace, can also cancel the natural order which is part of creation and reverse it, and thus return the world to *Tohu vaVohu* (a formless void).


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From Wikipedia



► An image of Pleiades and the Moon

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