

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

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**Shiur #20
The Prophecies of Amos: Oracles Against the Nations (continued)**

Now that we have completed our study of the “praise-hymn” which forms the core text of Amos’s oracle against Israel, we turn our attention to the “bridge-verse” which connects the praise to the threatened divine reprisal/ punishment that the Kingdom of Shomeron has earned. This bicolon doubles back to the last line of the hymn: “And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazirites.” The prophet then shifts from praise for God’s kindnesses to the people’s dastardly and vile responses: “But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink and commanded the prophets, saying: ‘Do not prophesy.’” The oracle then shifts directly to the seven punishments to be meted out against the kingdom and its warriors, as we will see in the upcoming weeks. This transitional verse, however, deserves more than a passing mention on two accounts. It is both singular in its content as well as unusual in its structure, contextually speaking.

Here, again, is the text of the hymn-section:

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.”

When we first presented a panoramic view of the oracle, I suggested that this verse was neither part of the accusations (vv. 6-8) nor part of the praise-hymn (vv. 9-11); it certainly could not be assumed to be part of the punishment (vv. 14-16); so what is its purpose and place within the oracle?

In order to answer this (or at least to propose a possible resolution), we must take a brief detour to consider the role of structure and its interplay with meaning in the biblical text. Since the oratory of the literary prophets (and, in some cases,

even those who aren't formally classed as such, including Moshe and Shemuel) is typically presented in poetic form with all (or most) of the definitional nuances of biblical poetry, sensitivity to structure should be heightened.

STRUCTURE AND MEANING: INTRODUCTION

A fundamental feature of biblical poetry is parallelism; i.e. that the composite parts of a line (usually a verse, but not always) "speak" to each other in either synonymous or antonymous ways.

Let us examine, for example, the opening line of *Ha'azinu* (*Devarim* 32):

Ha'azinu hashamayim va'adabera vetishma ha'aretz imrei fi
Give ear, o heavens and I will speak; Let the earth hear the words of my mouth

This is straight-up parallelism, where the words are aligned perfectly. "Give ear" is synonymous with "let... hear"; "heavens" stands in relation to "the earth" (more on this below); and "I will speak" is expressed in the nominal form, "the words of my mouth." This is a poetic introduction to Moshe's prophetic song, in which he invokes creation as witness to his words (see *Devarim* 31:28).

As mentioned above, the heaven-earth pair doesn't seem to be a synonymous parallel; indeed, the two are not the same. Nevertheless, in the poetic language of *Tanakh*, the two are often matched; sometimes, this is because they are perceived and depicted as a pair which comprises known creation (see, *inter alia*, *Bereishit* 1:1; 2:4). In other contexts, we read the heaven-earth pair as a *merismus*, a poetic device whereby the two extremes are invoked as if to include all points in between. Similarly, in *Tehillim* 148:12, "Young men as well as maidens, elders with the young" is a poetic way of referring to everyone, *including* men and women, *from* the old *to* the young. In this case, heaven and earth would be understood as "*from* the heavens *to* the earth" — i.e. all of creation. This is likely the meaning of Rachav's words in *Yehoshua* 2:11.

Synonymous parallelism, while enhancing beauty of the text and possibly expanding the imagery of the poem, generally does not per se enhance our understanding of the text.

A less common form is antithetical parallelism, wherein the two halves of the verse speak in contrast. For example, *Yeshayahu* 65:13:

Hinei avadai yokheilu v'atem tir'avu
Hinei avadai yishtu v'atem titzma'u
Hinei avadai yismahu v'atem tevoshu

Behold my servants will eat, yet you will be hungry;
Behold my servants will drink, yet you will be thirsty;

Behold my servants will rejoice, yet you will be shamed.

Whereas the stark differences serve to deepen our understanding of God's love for His loyalists, the structure does not, on its own, do anything to give us a deeper understanding of the intent of the text. While the structure makes us *feel* something, it doesn't help us *understand* anything more than its own words.

There are, on the other hand, several uniquely identifiable forms of parallelism, some of which have structural variations which (potentially) inform and enhance meaning. A common form is inverted parallelism (also known as a *chiasmus*) wherein the words paralleling each other are presented in reverse order. For instance, in the third verse of *Ha'azinu*, we find:

ki shem Hashem ekra, havu godel lelokeinu
When the name of the Lord I invoke, grant greatness to our God

(The translation is awkward, but I wanted to maintain the syntactical sequence of the original.)

Here, the parallel names for God are at the poles of the verse; the inside positions are taken by the verbs, "I invoke" and "[you] grant." Note that this places the interaction between the speaker and the audience at the core of this verse; God's name, as it were, serves to envelope them.

Reverse parallelism is commonly found, even in prose (e.g. *I Shemuel* 1:2):

...shem ha'ahat Hanna veshem hashenit Penina
uleHanna ein yeladim Vay'hi liPenina yeladim

The name of one was Chana, and the name of the second was Penina;
Penina had children,
But Chana did not have children.

As mentioned above, the effect of reverse parallelism is to highlight the middle; in this case, it is Penina's position as the mother of Elkana's children that determines her "favored status" (even though she is not, *de facto*, favored); hence, she gets the "middle" position in the verse describing Elkana's wives. Even in this bit of prose, the structure gives us an inside track on understanding the dynamics of Elkana's family which, in turn, gives us a greater appreciation for Chana's distress.

Returning (briefly) to our passage, we have a clear example of a chiasmus:

Va'akim mibeneikhem lenevi'im umibahureikhem lenezirim
Vatashku et hanezirim yayin

V'al henevi'im tzivitem leimor – lo tinavu

I raised from your sons to be prophets and from among your young men
to be Nazirites
But you gave the Nazirites wine
to drink;
And commanded the prophets, saying
“Do not prophesy!”

Within the context of these two verses alone, the Providential raising of Nazirites from among the young men and the disgraceful (coerced?) profaning of their sanctified status by the aristocracy of Shomeron sit at the core of this couplet. The raising of prophets from among their sons and their vile response (“Do not prophesy”) form the bookends of this couplet. Shocking as this behavior might be, it seems to take a backseat to the people’s actions towards their own Nazirite sons. Perhaps it is the act of having them take drink, seen as more forceful than merely directing a prophet to cease prophesying, which earns this gift and its spurning center stage.

However, we understand the relative greatness of becoming prophets versus becoming Nazirites — and the criminality of forcing or goading Nazirites to drink wine versus silencing prophets — the internal structure within these two verses is clear.

All of this brings us back to our original question: what is the role of v. 12 within the larger pericope?

Before answering that — and to do so more effectively — we will return (briefly) to our discussion of parallelism and add to our catalog Janus parallelism.

JANUS PARALLELISM

Cyrus Gordon, in a brief note added to the Naphtali Lewis *Festschrift* in 1978, proposes a name for a particular nuanced type of parallelism:

...One kind of parallelism is quite ingenious, for it hinges on the use of a single word with two entirely different meanings: one meaning paralleling what precedes, and the other meaning, what follows. *Song of Songs* 2:12 reads: “The blossoms appear in the land || the time of the *zamir* has arrived || and the song of the turtle-dove is heard on our land.” *Zamir* means either the “pruning season” or “music.” The commentators insist that while either meaning is conceivable, the author could have intended only one or the other. But this misses the point. The poet knew how to exploit the double meaning of *zamir*. Retrospectively it parallels the first member of the tristich pertaining to the growth of the soil; proleptically it parallels the final members pertaining to song. The skillful exploitation of

twin meanings, providing through a single word twofold parallelism, is artistry of a high order.¹

Since Gordon's modest but innovative categorization, other scholars have identified examples of Janus parallels, such that it seems to be a valid and particular type of parallelism which deliberately plays off of the equivocal meaning of words to generate multiple parallels. It is, if nothing else, a paragon of verbal efficiency, creating two separate and distinct parallels with only three (instead of four) words. Another delightful example, in Yaakov's deathbed blessing of Yosef (*Bereishit* 49:26), is proposed by Rendsburg.²

Birkot avikha

The blessings of your father

Gavru al birkot horai ad

Have overcome the blessings of my parents (*horai*), to
(*ad*)...

taavat giv'ot olam

...the delight of the eternal hills

Rendsburg suggests that the verse be read (against the Masoretic version) as *horai ad*, either "parents" or "eternal mountains". He cites Rishonim and other texts that come down on either side of the equation, demonstrating that the pregnant term *horai (ad)* is sufficiently equivocal as to serve as an excellent pivot for a Janus parallel.

JANUS STRUCTURE

Building off of Gordon's application of the "Janus" model of parallelism, I'd like to propose that on a broader level, the multi-faceted use of not only words, but even phrases and whole verses, may be identified in *Tanakh*. Gordon's starting point is noting that exegetes are divided over the meaning of an equivoque (such as *zahir*), thus impacting on whether to read it as anticipatory of the matching word in the next line or as itself being the answer to the antecedent. His find, so to speak, is that the equivoque is not an unfortunate accident that muddles meaning, but rather a deliberate (and brilliant) choice that enhances it twofold.

Is it possible that entire lines in the text are intended to be read as associated with an adjacent line in one manner and with a different line in another, creating two independent (but interrelated) structures and yielding multiple meanings?

THE EVIDENCE FROM *TEHILLIM* 48

¹ Cyrus Gordon, "New Directions," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 15; 1/2 (1978) pp. 59-66.

² Gary Rendsburg, "Janus Parallelism in Gen. 49:26," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99/2 (1980), pp. 291-293.

In *Tehillim* 48:2-3, the sons of Korach praise Jerusalem with a list of seven names or epithets:

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1) <i>(be)ir elokeinu</i> - | the city of our God |
| 2) <i>har kodsho</i> | His holy mountain |
| 3) <i>yefeh nof</i> | Beauty of <i>nof</i> |
| 4) <i>mesos kol ha'aretz</i> | Joy of all the land |
| 5) <i>har tziyon</i> | Mountain of Zion |
| 6) <i>yarketei tzafon</i> | Edges of <i>Tzafon</i> |
| 7) <i>kiryat melekhev</i> | City of the Great King |

A proper analysis of these seven terms is beyond the scope of this *shiur*; it is helpful to note, however, that *nof* is likely Memphis (*Mof*), a cultic center in Egypt, while *tzafon* is a mountain north of Ugarit revered by Ba'al worshippers. To wit, the grandeur of Jerusalem surpasses the majestic heights of Jebel Aqra and the elaborate buildings and shrines of Memphis.

To our point, this seven-fold list of names for our city is organized in a seemingly confusing fashion. Is the opening line, "the city of our God" modified or matched by the last one, "the city of the Great King"? If so, we would expect a chiasmus and, indeed – we can easily identify an inverted parallelism here:

The city of our God
 His holy mountain
 Beauty of Nof
 Joy of all the land
 Mountain of Zion
 Edges of Tzafon
 City of the Great King

In this structural proposal, the pericope begins and ends by identifying Jerusalem as God's capital, which is the true divine mountain, defying the Phoenician veneration of Tzafon. The simple, parched mountain of Tziyon (from the root *tzadi-yud-hei*, denoting parched soil) is equal to, if not greater than, the lush beauty of Memphis. All of this coalesces around the site that is the "joy of all the land."³

On the other hand, a cursory look at the list (without indentations) presents a clear pair of matched tristichs:

The city of our God		
His holy mountain	Beauty of Nof	Joy of all the land
Mountain of Zion	Edges of Tzafon	City of the Great King

³ Cf. *Eikha* 2:15

His holy mountain is defined as the mountain of Zion, the two foreign worship sites are structurally aligned and the grandeur of the city — “joy of all the land” and “city of the Great King” (or “the great king,” if the reference is to a human) — are matched.

Which is the proper reading of the text? What is the intent of the author in this ode to Jerusalem?

I would like to suggest that the poet cleverly intends both and builds a literary structure that, prism-like, may be viewed from multiple perspectives, each yielding a different message. From the chiasmic view, the city as source of joy of all the land (and, of course, the potential for losing that joy with the loss of the city; see *Tehillim* 137:5-6) is the core message of the praise of Jerusalem. From the double-tristich view, the city competes, successfully to be sure, against the pagan centers in the north and the south; this mountain stands taller, as it were, than the mighty Tzafon, while joy of the land outshines, so to speak, the glory of Memphis.

This structural complexity, which we will provisionally call “Janus structure,” may be operating in our oracle as well and may hold the key to resolving our opening question as to the purpose and place of v. 12.

On the one hand, as already shown, v. 12 is a direct response, in chiasmic fashion, to v. 11. On the other hand, the tone of v. 12 fits the mood of vv. 6-8, the accusations against the people. If we were to read vv. 6-8 and then 12, without the praise-hymn, what would we have? Being ever mindful of the consistent use of the typological number seven throughout, we will recast the seven accusations as follows:

- 1) Because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes.
- 2) That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the indigent,
- 3) And turn aside the way of the humble.
- 4) And a man and his father go unto the same maiden to profane My holy name.
- 5) And they lay themselves down beside every altar upon clothes taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of them that have been fined.
- 6) But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink
- 7) And commanded the prophets, saying “Do not prophesy.”

In this reckoning (which, admittedly, involves a reevaluation of some of the divisions suggested earlier), the sins of the aristocracy move in a curious (and as-yet unconsidered) direction. First, those in power (slave-owners) sell the poor because they have the power over them. They then act arrogantly towards those who are below them (“on the head of the indigent”), who are, nonetheless, not

fully subjugated to them. They then “turn aside the way of the humble,” seemingly taking those whose financial status does not put them at any disadvantage, but whose station in life may make them subject to some power of the judges or of the wealthy. We have already considered the middle passage and its implications for taking advantage of slaves who are (in a limited sense) part of the household. Moving away from personal abuse, they take items legally — but wrongfully — seized from the poor and use them to enhance their own pagan worship. Finally, in a turnabout, they intoxicate and poison the pure young men of the society. They have moved from pushing down on those beneath them to pulling those above them, the spiritually elite and morally sensitive, down to be as polluted as they are.

This is a familiar emotional strategy of the prurient when faced with their morally superior and sensitive peers. Instead of taking the lofty spirit and strong will of the enlightened to heart and using it to inspire *teshuva*, the morally bankrupt citizens of the north endeavored to bring them down so that there would be no embarrassing model of holiness among them, allowing them to continue their spiritually defective lives without the hindrance of conscience.

We have considered vv. 6-8 as an independent indictment, but our Janus structure suggests that a second look may be worthwhile, perhaps inspiring a reevaluation of the entire line of accusation.

Now, we may ask the following question: which of these is the intended meaning of the diatribe? Is v. 12 to be read in concert with and in apposition to v. 11, or as the direct continuation of v. 8? I would like to suggest that Amos deliberately and brilliantly intends both, enhancing his message and giving it greater impact for all generations.

For Further Study:

James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998

Cyrus Gordon, “Asymmetric Janus Parallelism,” *Eretz Yisrael* 16 (1982), pp. 80-81

Michael Barre, “The Seven Epithets of Zion in Ps. 48.2-3,” *Biblica* 69.4 (1988) pp. 557-563