

HAFTARAH EXHORTATIONS:

Haftarah VaYeshev

by Mark Huey posted 20 December, 2008 www.outreachisrael.net

Amos 2:6-3:8

“Visions, Dreams, Prophecies”

When you contemplate different aspects of the Scriptures beyond the basic historical accounts that have been conveyed, you realize that much of the revelation is a reiteration of various visions, dreams, and prophetic utterances that have been recorded for posterity's sake. *VaYeshev*, this week's Torah portion (Genesis 37:1-40:23), begins to concentrate on specific actions of the sons of Jacob. We see particular attention given to the consequences of Joseph's dreams and the activities of Judah. Increasingly as the balance of the Genesis text reveals, these two sons of Jacob become the dominant characters of their generation. However, it is the recollections of Joseph's various trials, and eventually how he was used to preserve the extended family of his father, that receives the most attention.

When the Sages searched for a complimentary Haftarah selection for this *parashah*, principally about Joseph, verses from the warning messages of Amos to the Northern Kingdom of Israel were chosen. Amos was a Southern Kingdom Israelite who tended sheep and dressed fig bearing sycamore trees in Tekoa (Amos 1:1; 7:14-15), a small village located some twelve miles south of Jerusalem. The fact that God raised him up like a roaring lion (Judah's tribal identification symbol) to declare impending judgment to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (also called by the name Ephraim, the dominant son of Joseph), has a certain degree of irony. After all, the two vile actions that Judah participated in—the selling of Joseph to the Ishmaelite traders (Genesis 37:26-28) and impregnating his daughter-in-law (Genesis 38:1-26), are described in this *parashah*. In Amos, we see the selling of the righteous for money (Amos 2:6) and a man and his father having relations with the same woman (Amos 2:7) both mentioned, which are obviously aspects of *VaYeshev*:

“Thus says the LORD, ‘For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its *punishment*, because they sell the righteous for money and the needy for a pair of sandals. These who pant after the *very* dust of the earth on the head of the helpless also turn aside the way of the humble; and a man and his father resort to the same girl in order to profane My holy name” (Amos 2:6-7).

Since this week is the only time that the prophecy of Amos is considered throughout the traditional annual Torah cycle, it is good for each of us to look beyond just the selection, and perhaps to read and contemplate the entire book. After all, the historical accuracies of the prophecies in Amos that have already been fulfilled, are so precise that those yet to be fulfilled can be confidently anticipated. Here, Amos makes an often-quoted statement that many self-proclaimed prophets throughout the ages have clinged to in order to justify their declarations:

“Surely the Lord GOD does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

There are great distinctions between the Biblical Prophets and those who flippantly and somewhat arrogantly claim a “prophet status” and authority today. (Much of this is based on a misunderstanding that the Prophets of the Tanach *solely* gave predictions of the future, whereas a prophet is also to call the people of his generation to repentance before God.)¹ Take a look at the context of this statement, from one of the obvious mouthpieces of the Lord, based on his proven track record of declaring His words to an ancient generation:

“Hear this word which the LORD has spoken against you, sons of Israel, against the entire family which He brought up from the land of Egypt: ‘You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.’ Do two men walk together

¹ Consult G.V. Smith, “Prophet: Message of the Prophets,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 3:997-1000.

unless they have made an appointment? Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured *something*? Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all? If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it? **Surely the Lord GOD does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?**" (Amos 3:1-8).

After declaring that the Lord "roars" from Zion (Amos 1:2) His irrevocable judgments on the transgressions of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and both Judah and Israel²—Amos says that a fear for the Lord has compelled him to prophesy. His analogy of roaring like a lion likely comes from his experience of shepherding and protecting sheep, but it is also reminiscent of the Spirit of God simply using a willing servant as a mouthpiece to proclaim His Word given the circumstances of blatant transgression.

The significant problem Amos confronts is that all of Israel—which then was divided into the two Kingdoms of Judah and Israel—is guilty of great sin before the Lord. **Among many transgressions, they were not walking together in agreement and must be punished for their iniquities.** As Amos asks, "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" (NIV). In His mercy, God chooses to send a spokesman to forewarn. In this case, the Northern Kingdom must be told that judgment due upon it is coming.

As you read the balance of Amos' prophecy, the accuracy of the iniquities is contrasted by the various punishments to come. Historically speaking, the judgment that God brought about via the Assyrian hordes upon the Northern Kingdom is not only foretold, but confirmed by accounts of what actually transpired. This roaring lion named Amos from Tekoa—while not turning the Northern Kingdom Israelites to repentance so they might avoid the explicit ravages of God's judgment—gives us today some thought provoking descriptions of why God is compelled to judge obvious transgressors. **The hope today is that those who are considering the punishment of Ancient Israel will recognize that prophetic words, sent visions, and induced dreams from God do eventually see fulfillment.**

We get a glimpse of such a reality in the story of Joseph's dreams, which God ultimately brought to fruition. Of course, the most famous dreams include Joseph's foreknowledge about ruling over his family as related in this week's *parashah*:

"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and *so* they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms. **Then Joseph had a dream**, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, 'Please listen to this dream which I have had; for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.' Then his brothers said to him, 'Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?' **So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.** Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, 'Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' He related *it* to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?' His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying *in mind*" (Genesis 37:3-11).

In this passage, the immature Joseph—not necessarily recognizing the jealous hearts of his older siblings—relates categorical statements about his dreams in which he will one day rule over them. By the time a second dream is related, which expands his rule to include even his parents, Joseph is rebuked by his father Jacob for inciting rage and fomenting bitterness in the family. However, centuries later as the Psalmist records some of Israel's history, Joseph is not only

² Amos 1:3-5 (Damascus), 6-8 (Gaza), 9-10 (Tyre), 11-12 (Edom), 13-15 (Ammon), 2:1-16 (Judah and Israel).

considered an anointed prophet along with the Patriarchs, but the very dreams or words he received are considered to be Divine revelations that he had to cling to during dire circumstances:

“Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm.’ And He called for a famine upon the land; He broke the whole staff of bread. He sent a man before them, Joseph, *who* was sold as a slave. **They afflicted his feet with fetters, He himself was laid in irons; until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the LORD tested him.** The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples, and set him free. He made him lord of his house and ruler over all his possessions, to imprison his princes at will, that he might teach his elders wisdom” (Psalm 105:15-22).

Here we can read in a positive and instructional way, that Joseph endured the afflictions of prison and confinement **waiting for the dreams from God that he knew were to be fulfilled.** He did not necessarily know how those words of ruling over his family were going to come to pass, but he was faithful to the Lord through the trials that came his way in the interim. We discover in a unique way that the Lord actually tested him by those words. Since Joseph knew in his heart that those words or dreams were from the Holy One, was he simply going to trust in Him through all the trials and tribulations of life to look for their completion?

How about you? Have you had any words, visions, or dreams that you (absolutely) know are from the Lord? Are you waiting for “the word” from Him to come to pass? Have you been, or are you being tested, by such a prophetic word, vision, or dream?

What about some of the final words given to Ancient Israel by the Prophet Amos, which have not been completely fulfilled? Are you confident—with Amos’ proven track record—that such words will be fulfilled? The prophetic words that await fulfillment speak specifically about raising up the fallen booth of David, something that the returning Jews to the Land of Israel in the past century have embraced with great faith:

“Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,’ declares the LORD. ‘For behold, I am commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among all nations as *grain* is shaken in a sieve, but not a kernel will fall to the ground. All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, those who say, “The calamity will not overtake or confront us.” **In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name,’ declares the LORD who does this. ‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘When the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; when the mountains will drip sweet wine and all the hills will be dissolved. Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live *in them*; they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit. I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them,’ says the LORD your God” (Amos 9:8-15).**

Clearly, the whole House of Israel has not been and will not be destroyed. Even though God has scattered Israel, either of the Northern or Southern Kingdoms, into the nations of the world—ultimately in the Last Days the fallen tabernacle will be restored. Israel will return to the Promised Land in fulfillment of prophecy.

One hint that this prophecy has been in the process of fulfillment is seen in the deliberations of James the Just at the Jerusalem Council. There was debate over what to do with the new, non-Jewish Believers turning to the God of Israel in Asia Minor. In Luke’s record of what takes place, James quotes passages from Amos (quoted from Luke in their Septuagint version) as the Lord was in the process of restoring Israel:

“All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, ‘Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, “AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS,

AND I WILL RESTORE IT, SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,” SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO [Amos 9:11-12, LXX].³ Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles...” (Acts 15:12-19).

Of course, James saw more than just Amos’ prophecies being fulfilled. His remarks also include allusions to other prophetic words seen in the Tanach (i.e., Deuteronomy 28:10; Isaiah 45:21; 63:19; Jeremiah 12:15; 14:9; Daniel 9:19). James was as convinced in his time—as we should be today—that God will ultimately fulfill His declared Word from His prophetic voices.

As we continue to approach the End of the Age and return of Messiah Yeshua—when “in that day” or the Day of the LORD is spoken of with increasing frequency—it is **incumbent upon each of us as followers of the Most High to study His Word and seek instruction from the indwelling Holy Spirit**. Remember that it is the Comforter or Helper that has been sent to bring us into understanding of all things spiritual by the Father of Lights:

“Yeshua answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. **But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.** Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:23-27).

If you encounter some visions, dreams, or prophecies that do not come from the ancient texts of Scripture, or are being distorted in order to manipulate an audience—be on guard! Some punishments for following after false gods, or serving your flesh rather than the Holy One of Israel, **are articulated by Amos for time in memoriam**. Those judgments have and will in the future take place according to Amos’ declarations.

Do you need to study various prophecies in Scripture again, being reminded that God will test each of us by His Word—whether we know it or not? It is better to know the Word so that we can avoid its judgments, than to be judged by it. Ignorance of the Word might be bliss, but the consequences of denial will not prevent the Word from testing all to whom it is directed!

Until the restoration of all things...

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.

³ The key difference here is how the Hebrew *shearit Edom* (שְׂאֵרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), was rendered by the Greek LXX as *hoi kataloipoi tōn anthrōpōn* (οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων), meaning “the rest of mankind/humanity.”