

OBSERVATIONS ON SOME CRUXES IN AMOS—PART IV

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אשא עיני אל ההרים - *To My Parents*

Parts I-III of the paper discussed some cruxes in the book of Amos. Part IV continues to present my insights on additional cruxes in this book.

CAREFREE AND CONFIDENT

הוי השאננים בציון והבטחים בהר שמרון נקבי ראשית הגוים ובאו להם בית
ישראל

*Ah, you who are at ease in Zion
and confident on the hill of Samaria,
You notables of the leading nation
On whom the House of Israel pin their hope*

Verse 6:1 strikes us as being well structured and thought out, yet it poses serious problems to commentators. The parallelism in the first part is structurally very solid and we expect a similarly strong bond in the second part. However, it is almost impossible to establish a reasonable parallelism if we assume, as all commentators do, that the second part of the verse is an elucidation on the carefree in Zion and the confident in Samaria. Particularly problematic is the establishment of a parallelism between *nekuvei* and *ubau lahem*.

The New Jewish Publication Society translation certainly destroys the parallelism of the verse's two parts and introduces a questionable interpretation of *ubau lahem* as "pin their hope on." Andersen and Freedman translate:

*Woe to you who luxuriate in Zion
and [woe] to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria;
the notables of the foremost of the nations
who have come for themselves to the house of Israel.¹*

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Though this translation is closer to the Hebrew text, it also preserves the ambiguity of this text.

Many of the difficulties with this verse are eliminated if we assume that "*nekuvei*" and "*ubau lahem*" are actions associated with Zion and Samaria respectively, and strictly adhere to the implied parallelism of the verse. The obvious parallels are:

<i>shaananim</i> (carefree)	---	<i>bothim</i> (confident)
Zion (Mount Zion)	---	<i>Har Shomron</i> (mount on which Samaria stood),

and the implied parallelism is

<i>nekuvei</i>	---	<i>bau lahem</i>
<i>reshit ha-goyim</i>	---	<i>beth Israel</i>

The problems with the parallelism of the second half stem from the fact that Amos overloaded the first component with double meanings. Thus, *nekuvei* [or, *nokvei*] serves in the role of naming Zion (Isa. 62:2) as *reshit ha-goyim* [the pinnacle of the two nations Judah and Israel]² and it serves in the role of those that enter *reshit ha-goyim* which is Zion, or the Temple on Zion.³ The use of *nekuvei* for entry to Zion probably reflects the fact that pilgrims had to pass through tunnels [*nikvot*] on the way to the Temple. The parallelism is based on *nekuvei* as those who enter rather than those who name Zion. Consequently, we suggest the following parallelism in the verse:

carefree	---	confident
Mount Zion	---	Mount Shomron
enterers	---	comers
Temple on Zion	---	house (temple) of Israel

If we are correct in our understanding of this verse, it should be interpreted as follows:

*Ah, those who are carefree in Zion
and confident on Mount Shomron,
who enter the pinnacle of the nations [temple on Zion]
and come to the House of Israel [temple in Samaria].*

The verse then describes the prevailing confidence in both kingdoms that is based on worship and ritual in the main sanctuaries. Weiss says:

In referring to Judah not by the name of its capital Jerusalem but as Zion is reflected the intent to recall by association the place where the Lord

dwells, who is considered, in peoples' belief, to be a warranty for its absolute security. The reference to the Kingdom of Israel as Mount Samaria is intended to hint at the topographic location of the capital, and to raise to the consciousness by means of the name and the metaphoric meaning of mount its stability.⁴

Our interpretation chiasmatically extends this observation to 6:1b. Judah is confident with its ability to block any comers from entry to Jerusalem, and the Israelites rely on the protection of their temple.

Amos' use of *nekuvei* is very clever, though it caused much anguish to commentators.⁵

STAVING OFF THE EVIL

הַפְּרִטִים עַל פִּי הַנְּבֵל כְּדוּיָד חֲשָׁבוּ לָהֶם כְּלֵי שִׁיר

They hum snatches of song

To the tune of the lute –

They account themselves musicians like David.

The New Jewish Publication Society translation notes that the meaning of *ke-david hashvu lahem klei shir* in Verse 6:5 is not clear. They translate thus: *They account themselves musicians like David*. Hammershaimb says this verse can only be translated: *Like David they invented musical instruments*.⁶ In Hakham's view: *They thought their musical instruments to be equivalent to those of David*.⁷ Weiss says: *They think that the musical instruments in their hands are used with the same skill as in David's hands*.⁸ Ibn Ezra suggests that their songs were spaced by the rhythm of the melody, not rhyme.

I think that Amos alludes in 6:5 to David's ability to stave off the evil. This possibility appears to have eluded commentators. In 6:3 we read that they slighted the day of evil and in I Samuel 16:16 David was able by playing the lyre to ease the evil spirit that obsessed Saul. The connective element is the word "r'a" [evil]. Amos' sarcasm is built on this connection. They play their music, and think that, like David, anyone could stave off the evil with his playing; i.e., instead of *klei-shir* we read *kol yashir* כָּל יִשְׁרֵי - כְּלֵי שִׁיר .

The advantage of this interpretation is that it continues the motif of excessive confidence and establishes the authenticity of David in the text. Moreover, this interpretation obviates the need to make various emendations to avoid the awkward possibility that they invented musical instruments at their feasts.

AN EARTHQUAKE SCENE

ונשא דודו ומסרפו להוציא עצמים מן הבית ואמר לאשר בירכתי הבית העוד
עמך ואמר אפס ואמר הס כי לא להזכיר בשם ה'.

And if someone's kinsman – who is to burn incense for him – comes to carry the remains out of the house, and he calls to the one at the rear of the house, "Are there any alive besides you?" he will answer, "No, none." And he will say, "Hush! – so that no one may utter the name of the Lord.

Verse 6:10 posed to the commentators more questions than answers. Weiss observes that the words *unsao dodo umsarfo lehotzi 'atzamim min habait*, used by the prophet for explaining the Lord's words, are not clear.⁹ The prevalent view is that this verse is corrupt. The Septuagint tried by various additions to smooth the text and since then an extensive literature has evolved on rewrites and emendations of 6:9-10.

I view 6:8-11 as belonging to the same thematic unit because all the verses deal with buildings. Each verse of 6:9-11 mentions "*bait*" [house] and 6:10 speaks of "*armenotav*" [palaces, or perhaps opulent houses]. While these verses appear to belong to the same unit their order is perhaps confused. A more logical arrangement could be: 6:8, 6:11, 6:9, 6:10. The logical flow of the prophecy would then be this:

- The Lord hates the opulent houses of Jacob, and He will hand over the city in its entirety;
- The Lord commands the destruction of all the houses, big or small;
- Even if many survive this destruction in any of the larger houses, they will eventually die;
- Sanitation operations following the disaster would encounter horrific situations in which the Lord's name cannot be mentioned.

Since no specific agent of destruction is mentioned, I tend to view it as a natural disaster, and the wholesale destruction of houses leads to the conjecture that the scene is one of an earthquake. Indeed, if it were a description of an attack by an enemy we may wonder how the ten survived and in particular in a mansion that would be a prime target for plunder and looting. Furthermore, having survived the onslaught, why would the ten in the house die while those collecting the corpses survive?

The picture painted by Amos had to be an image easy for his listeners to envision, and it becomes much clearer if we assume that it describes an earthquake. Indeed, Amos contains a number of references to earthquakes, which were quite frequent, particularly in the Sharon. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest prayed for the inhabitants of the Sharon that their houses do not become their graves. Israel, intersected by the Great Rift Valley of the Jordan River-Dead Sea-Arabah axis, has frequently earthquakes. These natural events were usually interpreted as signs of God's displeasure. Amos foresaw and predicted earthquakes in 1:1, 9:1, 8:8, and 9:5. It is thus likely that we have here a description of an earthquake.

A strong earthquake hitting an entire city would pose severe rescue problems. Survivors could be found in the innermost parts of a large house, even as many as ten. Yet, all would surely die because of the small number of rescue parties and the difficulty of access to a house. When eventually rescuers come to a house it is to pull out the corpses and quickly burn them to stave off epidemics. This was all "old hat" to Amos' listeners. Consequently, he describes the familiar rescue equipment and procedures with minimal elaboration and just intimates the awesomeness of the scenes encountered.

Verse 6:10 describes the belated arrival of the rescue party, to bring out the bodies, not to save. They come carrying a smoldering wooden poker [*ud*], a special basket [*dud* – II Kg. 10:7, Jer. 24:2, Ps. 81:7) and a hook [*vav*]. They use the smoldering poker to find their way in the darkness and explore various niches, the hook to extract the corpses in the remote corners of the house, and the basket to pull them out. Note that though the *ud* provides only a little light, it is more practical than a lamp or a torch for such an activity because it does not use up much oxygen.

How do we get the implements for extraction of corpses from the text? We read 6:9 thus: *ve-nasu ud, dud, ve-vav mesarfav lehotzi 'atzamim min ha-bait . . .* This reading requires addition of a single "*vav*." It is very likely that this "*vav*" was dropped in transcription because it created a situation in which three "*vavs*" occurred in succession. Addition of a single "*vav*" is a very minor emendation, and it removes the awkwardness of the text.

Verse 6:9 can now be translated thus: "The corpse burners of that house carried a smoldering poker, basket, and hook to bring out the bodies from the house. Said [one of the corpse burners] to the one in the innermost parts of the

house 'Any more [bodies] left?' and he replied 'None.' [Perhaps the person who asked the question is afraid that the one inside the house will follow up his response with 'Thanks God.' So he cuts him off saying.] 'Hush!' So that the Lord's name is not uttered." The speaker on the surface could mention God's name. The one inside could not, because he was in an unclean environment.

DOUBLE ENTENDRE

השמחים ללא דבר האמרים הלא חזקנו לקחנו לנו קרננים

[Ah,] *those who are so happy about Lo-dabar,*

Who exult, "By our might

We have captured Karnaim!"

Verse 6:13 presents a case of sarcasm built on a *double entendre*. The sarcasm addresses Jeroboam II's conquests in Transjordan (II Kg. 14:25), in which he restored the territory of Israel from near Hamath in the north to the Dead Sea in the south (Arabah). The national pride was perhaps at its peak following Jeroboam's conquests. Conquests always inspire a nation. The territorial expansion was indeed substantial, though its material value may have been questioned. The spurious nature of the achievement and the accompanying glee are the cause of Amos' sarcasm and the Lord's subsequent punishment (6:14).

The *double entendre* is implied as follows:

The people say

We are happy with the conquest
of Lo-Davar!

Didn't [*halo*] we take it with our
strength!?

With our strength we took
Karnaim!¹¹

Amos implies

But it is of no value [*lo davar*]¹⁰

Not [*lo*] with your strength

Yea. That's what you have, the useless
part of the animal -- its horns [*karnaim*].

The next verse is the splash of cold water, the face of reality; it is an empty conquest and empty boasting. The success is but a temporary respite as prophesied by Jonah. It came because:

. . . *the Lord saw the very bitter plight of Israel, with neither bond nor free left, and with none to help Israel. And the Lord resolved not to blot*

out the name of Israel from under heaven; and he delivered them through Jeroboam the son of Joash (II Kg. 14:26-27).

However, 41 years of Jeroboam II which did not differ from those of Jeroboam I, obviously required a punishment. No temporary success could have been a sign of the Lord's acquiescence to a record equal to that of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Thus, in 6:14 the borders of conquest become the borders of subjugation.

Andersen and Freedman hear in 6:13 an implied woe. They translate this verse thus: [Woe to] *you who are delighted over Lo-Dabar!* [Woe to] *you who say, 'Have we not captured Qarnaim for ourselves by our might?'* This tone of woe is in my view implied in the repeated use of the "lamed," which represents mournful ululation.¹² השמחים ללא דבר האמרים הלוא חזקנו לקחנו לנו קרנים

NOTES

1. Francis I. Andersen & David Noel Freedman, *Amos*, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. xxxv.
2. The link between *reshit* and the Temple is further strengthened in 6:6 where *reshit shmanim* is used, referring apparently to the holy oil in the Temple and not simply the choosiest of oil. Were it the later, Amos would have used probably *such* instead of *ymshahu*; *mashoah* being a term that is almost exclusively used for holy dedication.
3. Meir Weiss, *The Book of Amos, Vol I, Commentary* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1992) p. 190.
4. Note the regularity in use of words with the letter "shin" or of its equivalents "sin" and "samekh" in Verses 6:1-10, identifying it as one literary unit.
5. Erling Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos, A Commentary*, translated by John Sturdy (New York: Schocken Books, 1970) p.100.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Amos Hakham, *Amos* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1973) p. 50.
8. Weiss, p. 196.
9. Weiss, , p. 203.
10. Hakham, p. 54. Hakham says that "the prophet uses 'lo-davar' in a dual sense: you are happy with the conquest of 'lidvir' but your rejoicing is for naught." *Lo-davar* was a town in Gilead (II Sam 17:27). It has been also called *lo-dvar*, *lo* [with a "vav"], *-dvar*, and *lidvir* (Josh. 13:26).
11. Hammershaimb, p.105. Qarnaim is mentioned in I Maccabees 5:43. It is probably the same place as Ashteroth Qarnaim in Genesis 14:5.
12. Amos probably used the awkward *lanu* to increase the number of "lameds" in the verse.