

Notes on
Amos
2002 Edition
Dr. Thomas L. Constable

Introduction

TITLE AND WRITER

The title of the book comes from its writer. The prophet's name means "burden-bearer" or "load-carrier."

Amos was a shepherd (Heb. *noqed*; cf. 2 Kings 3:4) or sheep breeder, and he described himself as a herdsman (Heb. *boqer*; 7:14). He was more than a shepherd (Heb. *ro'ah*). He evidently owned or managed large herds of sheep and or goats and was probably in charge of shepherds. Amos also described himself as a grower of sycamore figs (7:14). Sycamore fig trees are not true fig trees but are a variety of the mulberry family, which produces fig-like fruit. Each fruit had to be scratched or pierced to let the juice flow out so the "fig" could ripen. These trees grew in the tropical Jordan Valley and around the Dead Sea to a height of 25 to 50 feet and bore fruit three or four times a year. They did not grow as well in the higher elevations such as Tekoa, Amos' hometown, so the prophet appears to have farmed at a distance from his home as well as ranching. Tekoa stood 10 miles south of Jerusalem in Judah. Thus Amos seems to have been a prosperous and influential Judahite, but there is no indication that he was a priest or had any connection with the royal family or the ruling classes in his land. Amos' natural surroundings had a profound effect on him and his writing (cf. 1:2; 2:9; 3:4-5; 5:19-20, 24; 6:12; 7:1-6; 8:1; 9:3-15).

DATE

Amos ministered during the reigns of King Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 B.C.) and King Uzziah (Azariah) of Judah (792-740 B.C.), specifically two years before "the earthquake" (1:1). Zechariah also referred to a notable earthquake during the reign of Uzziah (Zech. 14:5). Josephus wrote that an earthquake occurred when Uzziah entered the temple and was struck with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-20).¹ Archaeological excavations at Hazor and Samaria point to evidence of a violent earthquake in Israel about 760 B.C.² So perhaps Amos ministered about 760 B.C. This date may account for the omission of the name of King Jotham who ruled as coregent with Uzziah from 750-740 B.C. Thus Amos was a contemporary of the other eighth-century prophets: Hosea, Jonah, Micah, and Isaiah.

¹Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 9:10:4. This may be simply Jewish tradition.

²Y. Yadin, et al., *Hazor II: An Account of the Second Season of Excavations, 1956*, pp. 24, 26, 36-37.

PLACE OF COMPOSITION

Since Amos lived in the Judean town of Tekoa, he was a prophet from the Southern Kingdom.

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

Amos prophesied against the Northern Kingdom of Israel (1:1). Yahweh raised him up to announce judgment on Israel because of her covenant unfaithfulness and rebellion against His authority. Amos announced the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, but he also predicted that the Lord would preserve a remnant that was repentant. He would restore this remnant to political prominence and covenant blessing and, through them, draw all nations to Himself. Amos announced a warning to the residents of the Northern Kingdom, but he also held out hope.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

These were times of political stability, material prosperity, and geographical expansion for both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms (cf. 1:6; 6:2, 13; 2 Kings 14:23-29; 2 Chron. 26:1-15). Jeroboam II and Uzziah were two of the most competent and effective kings that their respective kingdoms enjoyed. They brought their nations to heights of success second only to those in Solomon's golden age.³ The Northern Kingdom was at the height of its power during Jeroboam II's reign. Aramea had not recovered from its defeat by Adad-Nirari III of Assyria in 802 B.C., and Assyria had not yet developed into the superpower that it became under Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.).

"Commerce thrived (8:5), an upper class emerged (4:1-3), and expensive homes were built (3:15; 5:11; 6:4, 11). The rich enjoyed an indolent, indulgent lifestyle (6:1-6), while the poor became targets for legal and economic exploitation (2:6-7; 5:7, 10-13; 6:12; 8:4-6). Slavery for debt was easily accepted (2:6; 8:6). Standards of morality had sunk to a low ebb (2:7)."⁴

Religion flourished too. The Hebrews participated in the yearly festivals (4:4; 5:5; 8:3, 10) and offered their sacrifices enthusiastically (4:5; 5:21-23). They believed God was with them and considered themselves immune to disaster (5:14, 18-20; 6:1-3; 9:10). Yet they worshipped the native Canaanite deities along with Yahweh.

UNITY

Almost all scholars agree that the Book of Amos was originally a single book that the prophet Amos wrote. Comparison with the writings of the other eighth-century prophets

³For proof of the Northern Kingdom's prosperity, as evidenced by hundreds of ivory inlays found in the excavations of Samaria, see the *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, 4:1044-46; and D. W. Thomas, ed., *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, pp. 69-70.

⁴Donald R. Sunukjian, "Amos," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1425.

and the consistently vivid and forthright style of Amos make this conclusion virtually inescapable.⁵

THEOLOGY

Amos stressed the sovereignty of Yahweh over history. He controls the movements of peoples (9:7) and the order of nature (4:13; 5:8). The prophet also affirmed the ability of people to submit to or reject the Lord's authority. He reminded his hearers of Yahweh's election of Israel (3:2) but repudiated the popular idea of his day that God would not punish His people.

"Amos, more than any other prophet, urged the responsibility of elective privilege."⁶

Like many of the other prophets, Amos spoke of the day of the Lord. He saw it as a time when God would judge sin, even in His own people (5:18-20). Another day would come, however, when David's kingdom would be restored and would include both Jews and Gentiles (9:13-15).⁷

OUTLINE

- I. Prologue 1:1-2
 - A. Introduction 1:1
 - B. Theme 1:2
- II. Prophetic messages that Amos delivered 1:3—6:14
 - A. Oracles against nations 1:3—2:5
 - 1. An oracle against Aram 1:3-5
 - 2. An oracle against Philistia 1:6-8
 - 3. An oracle against Phoenicia 1:9-10
 - 4. An oracle against Edom 1:11-12
 - 5. An oracle against Ammon 1:13-15
 - 6. An oracle against Moab 2:1-3
 - 7. An oracle against Judah 2:4-5
 - 8. An oracle against Israel 2:6-16

⁵For further discussion, see the commentaries, especially T. E. McComiskey, "Amos," in *Daniel-Minor Prophets*, vol. 7 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 270-74.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁷For further discussion of Amos' theological emphases, see Billy K. Smith, "Amos," in *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, pp. 31-33.

- B. Messages of judgment against Israel chs. 3—6
 - 1. The first message on sins against God and man ch. 3
 - 2. The second message on women, worship, and stubbornness ch. 4
 - 3. The third message on injustice 5:1-17
 - 4. The fourth message on unacceptable worship 5:18-27
 - 5. The fifth message on complacency and pride ch. 6

- III. Visions that Amos saw chs. 7—9
 - A. Three short visions of impending judgment 7:1-9
 - 1. The swarming locusts 7:1-3
 - 2. The devouring fire 7:4-6
 - 3. The plumb line 7:7-9

 - B. An intervening incident 7:10-17
 - 1. The challenge 7:10-13
 - 2. The response 7:14-17

 - C. Two more visions of impending judgment chs. 8—9
 - 1. The basket of summer fruit ch. 8
 - 2. The Lord standing by the altar ch. 9

Exposition

I. PROLOGUE 1:1-2

The first two verses of the book constitute a prologue. They contain an explanation of what follows, an identification of the writer, the time of his writing, and his theme.

A. INTRODUCTION 1:1

What follows are the words (i.e., collected messages, cf. Prov. 30:1; 31:1; Eccles. 1:1; Jer. 1:1) of Amos (lit. Burden), who was one of the shepherders who lived in the Judean town of Tekoa, 10 miles south of Jerusalem. This town stood on a comparatively high elevation from which its residents could see the Mount of Olives to the north as well as the surrounding countryside in every direction. Amos' words expressed what he saw in visions that came to him from the Lord. These visions concerned Israel, the Northern Kingdom at the time when he wrote, namely, during the reigns of King Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II (the son of Joash), king of Israel.⁸ Specifically, Amos wrote two years before "the earthquake," perhaps about 762 B.C.⁹ This introductory verse has been called "the most complete superscription to be found in all of prophetic literature."¹⁰

B. THEME 1:2

This verse summarizes the message that Amos received from the Lord. Amos reported that Yahweh roared from Zion, as a lion roars before it devours its prey or as thunder precedes a severe storm (cf. 3:4, 8; Jer. 25:30; Hos. 5:14; 11:10; 13:7). Yahweh was about to judge. "Yahweh" is the first word in the Hebrew sentence—usually a verb comes first—and so is emphatic by position. The Lord spoke from Zion (Jerusalem, also emphatic by position) because that is where He manifested Himself in a localized sense to the Israelites of Amos' day. In Israel, the primary worship centers were Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12—13). All the land would mourn, from the shepherds' pastures in the lowland to the summit of Mt. Carmel (a merism), because the Lord would dry up the land. This was one of the promises of judgment if God's people proved unfaithful to His covenant with them, the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:20-24; cf. Lev. 26:22; Deut. 32:24). "Yahweh" was God's covenant name, and it connotes holiness and power (cf. Exod. 3:5; 19:10-25). However, since oracles announcing judgment on neighbor nations, as well as on Israel, follow, the extent of God's judgment would go beyond Israel's territory and Israel's covenant (cf. Isa. 24:4-6; 26:20-21). The mention of Mt. Carmel, nevertheless, fixes the primary site in Israel. Most of this book records messages of judgment against Israel. So the theme of the book is practical righteousness (cf. James).

⁸Here "Israel" must mean the Northern Kingdom rather than the combined people of Israel and Judah, as it often means in the prophets, because of the many references to people and places in the Northern Kingdom that follow.

⁹See my comments above under "writer" and "date" in the Introduction section of these notes.

¹⁰S. Paul, *Amos*, p. 33.

II. PROPHETIC MESSAGES THAT AMOS DELIVERED 1:3—6:14

The Book of Amos consists of words (oracles, 1:3—6:14) and visions (chs. 7—9), though these sections also contain short sub-sections of other types of material.

A. ORACLES AGAINST NATIONS 1:3—2:16

An oracle is a message of judgment. Amos proceeded to deliver eight of these, seven against Israel's neighbors including Judah (1:3—2:5) and one against Israel (2:6—6:14).¹¹ The order is significant. The nations mentioned first were foreign, but those mentioned next were the blood relatives of the Israelites, and Judah was its closest kin. Upon hearing this list the Israelites would have felt "a noose of judgment about to tighten round their [the Israelites' own] throats."¹² This is the "rhetoric of entrapment."¹³

"The prophet began with the distant city of Damascus and, like a hawk circling its prey, moved in ever-tightening circles, from one country to another, till at last he pounced on Israel. One can imagine Amos's hearers approving the denunciation of these heathen nations. They could even applaud God's denunciation of Judah because of the deep-seated hostility between the two kingdoms that went as far back as the dissolution of the united kingdom after Solomon. But Amos played no favorites; he swooped down on the unsuspecting Israelites as well in the severest language and condemned them for their crimes."¹⁴

Each oracle follows the same basic pattern. First, Amos declared the judgment to come. Second, he defended the judgment by explaining the reason for it. Third, he described the coming judgment.¹⁵

Other collections of oracles against foreign neighbors appear in Isaiah (chs. 13—17, 19, 21, 23, 34), Jeremiah (chs. 46—51), and Ezekiel (chs. 25—32). One might also consider Obadiah and Nahum as oracles against foreign nations as well.

1. An oracle against Aram 1:3-5

1:3 The expression "for three transgressions [Heb. *pasha'im*, rebellions, i.e., against the universal Sovereign; cf. Gen. 9:5-17] and for four" is one of Amos' trademarks (cf. vv. 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). It means for numerous transgressions (cf. Job 5:19; 33:29; Ps. 62:11-12; Prov. 6:16; 30:15-16, 18-

¹¹For a map showing the location of these nations and key towns mentioned in Amos, see the end of these notes.

¹²J. A. Motyer, *The Day of the Lion: The Message of Amos*, p. 50.

¹³R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, p. 144.

¹⁴McComiskey, pp. 281-82.

¹⁵Smith, p. 44, described this pattern, which occurs with some variations in the oracles to follow, as a "messenger speech." It contains five elements: introductory formula, certainty of judgment, charge of guilt, announcement of punishment, and concluding formula. See also F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Amos*, pp. 341-69.

19, 21-23, 29-31; Eccles. 11:2; Mic. 5:5-6). Three transgressions represents fullness and the fourth overflow. Amos cited just the last transgression, the one that "broke the camel's back" and made judgment inevitable, or possibly the representative one, for Israel's enemies.¹⁶ The phrase may also be a poetic way of describing seven transgressions, symbolizing completeness.¹⁷ In the oracle against Israel, Amos cited seven sins (one in 2:6, two in 2:7, two in 2:8, and two in 2:12). Israel's panic would also be sevenfold (2:14-16).

Damascus was the capital city of Aram (Syria), and it stands for the whole nation by metonymy.¹⁸ Yahweh promised that He would not turn back the punishment due Aram because the Arameans had proved to be a scourge to the people of Israel. Threshing Gilead, a transjordanian part of Israel, with sharp iron implements pictures the plowing up of that part of the nation militarily (cf. Isa. 41:15; Mic. 4:13; Hab. 3:12).¹⁹ Israelite citizens and territory had suffered greatly during constant battles with the Arameans, especially in Transjordan (cf. 2 Kings 8:7-12; 10:32-33; 13:3-7).

- 1:4 The Lord promised to send a consuming fire (judgment) on the house (dynasty) and citadels (fortified towns) of the Arameans. Hazael and Ben-Hadad, dynastic names, probably represent all the Aramean kings.²⁰ The idea of sending fire on the walls of the main cities of the land recurs throughout these oracles (cf. vv. 4, 7, 10, 12, 14, 2:2, 5). It is a vivid metaphor for consuming destruction.
- 1:5 Yahweh would also break the bar that secured the gate of Damascus making it impossible to defend (cf. 1 Kings 4:13). He would cut off the people who lived in the Valley of Aven (Baalbek?) and Aram's ruler who lived in Beth Eden (Bit-Adini?). These names mean "valley of wickedness" and "house of pleasure," but since the other names mentioned in the oracles are real locations, these probably were as well. The Arameans would go into exile to Kir in Mesopotamia, from which they had originated (9:7). Thus God would send them back where they came from after obliterating all they had achieved. The fulfillment of this prophecy came when Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria took the Arameans captive in 732 B.C. (2 Kings 16:7-9).

¹⁶J. Mays, *Amos: A Commentary*, pp. 23-24.

¹⁷Meir Weiss, "The Pattern of Numerical Sequence in Amos 1—2, A Re-examination," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967):418. J. Limburg, "Sevenfold Structures in the Book of Amos," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987):217, observed that the number seven plays a significant role in the structure of the whole book and in the makeup of certain of the sayings. This may have been a way Amos certified that the whole book and each section in it was the word of the Lord (Ibid., pp. 222-23).

¹⁸Similarly the capitals Jerusalem and Samaria often represent their respective nations, Judah and Israel, by metonymy, in biblical literature.

¹⁹See D. A. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, p. 131.

²⁰H. W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, p. 156.

2. An oracle against Philistia 1:6-8

1:6 Gaza was the chief city of Philistia as Damascus was of Aram. The particular sin for which God would judge the Philistines was their capture and deportation of whole communities (or people at peace, Heb. *shelema*), possibly Israelites and or Judahites, to Edom as slaves (cf. Joel 3:4-8).

"The concern of Amos seems to have been the freedom and dignity of persons regardless of their national origin. Sale of such captives for use as slave laborers was to treat precious humans made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27) as mere commodities. The driving force behind these atrocities was nothing higher than the profit of the mighty.

"Broken treaties have marred the pages of history from ancient to modern times. God has a low tolerance level for those who break treaties, who take away human freedom and dignity, and whose motive is material profit. Such people should brace themselves for the destructive judgment of God."²¹

1:7-8 Fire (destruction) would overtake the cities of the Philistines and affect everyone from the ordinary citizens to the rulers. Amos mentioned four of the five major cities of Philistia, all except Gath, probably because it had already fallen to enemies (cf. 6:2; 2 Kings 12:17; 2 Chron. 26:6).²² Sovereign Yahweh promised to cut off even the remnant of Philistines that remained in Amos' day.²³ This prophecy was fulfilled during the Maccabean period (169-134 B.C.) when the Philistines passed out of existence.

3. An oracle against Phoenicia 1:9-10

Tyre was the leading city of Phoenicia. The sin of the Phoenicians was the same as that of the Philistines. They had sold whole communities of people to the Edomites as slaves.²⁴ They also broke a covenant of brothers.

"If Israel was the injured partner, the reference is probably to the pact between Solomon and Hiram (1 Kings 5) or perhaps to the later relations

²¹Smith, pp. 51-52.

²²H. Kassis, "Gath and the Structure of 'Philistine' Society," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965):259-71, argued that Gath had become more of a Canaanite city by this time than a Philistine city, and that is the reason Amos did not mention it. Another possibility is that Amos simply chose to refer to some but not all of the Philistine cities.

²³This title for God occurs 19 times in Amos but only five times in the other Minor Prophets. It stresses both His lordship and His covenant relationship with people.

²⁴See Paul, p. 59.

established through the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 16:29-31)."²⁵

Ironically many Tyrians became captives and were sold as slaves when Alexander the Great destroyed Tyre in 332 B.C. (cf. Ezek. 26—28). Phoenicia declined as a major power in the ancient Near East after that destruction and never revived.

4. An oracle against Edom 1:11-12

Amos next moved from addressing chief cities to addressing countries, specifically countries with closer ethnic ties to the Israelites. Perhaps their closer relationship to Israel is why he mentioned countries rather than cities in the introductions to the later oracles. Edom's overflowing sin that brought divine wrath down on its people was the way the Edomites had treated the Israelites. The Edomites had been very hostile to their "brother," Israel (cf. Gen. 25:29-30; Num. 20:14; Deut. 2:4; 23:7; Obad. 12). This hostility existed throughout the history of these two nations. This animosity even led the Edomites to attack the Israelites with the sword (cf. Obad. 10). Consequently God would send destruction on Edom's chief southern and northern cities (or districts), even on the whole land (a merism). The Assyrians subjugated Edom in the eighth century B.C., and the Nabateans, an Arabian tribe, took it over in the fourth century B.C.

5. An oracle against Ammon 1:13-15

The Ammonites were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew (cf. Gen. 19:30-38). Ammon was in trouble with Yahweh because its soldiers brutally attacked and slew the Israelites, even the pregnant women and their unborn children, who lived in Gilead to the west of Ammon. This brutal slaughter terrorized and decimated the attacked populace. The Ammonites did this to enlarge their territory to the west for materialistic advantage, not for self-preservation. Consequently Yahweh promised to destroy Rabbah, the capital, and Ammon's walled cities in battle. The Ammonites' king and royal officials would go into exile. This happened when Tiglath-Pileser III invaded Ammon in 734 B.C., but Ammon's final demise came when Nebuchadnezzar sacked Rabbah and took many of Ammon's citizens captive to Babylon around 586 B.C.

6. An oracle against Moab 2:1-3

Yahweh promised not to revoke His punishment of Moab, another nation descended from Lot (cf. Gen. 19:30-38), because of its brutal treatment of an Edomite king's corpse (cf. 2 Kings 3:26-27). Burning the bones of a dead person dishonored that individual since there was then nothing substantial left of him. This was a despicable crime in the ancient Near East where a peaceful burial was the hope of every person. This treatment of a dead corpse reflected a lack of respect for human life, life made in the image of God.

"Highly significant is the fact that Amos here pronounced the punishment of Yahweh on a social crime involving a non-Israelite. In his other oracles

²⁵Sunukjian, p. 1429.

the crimes were, for the most part, against the covenant people. Amos understood that an aspect of God's law transcended Israel."²⁶

"Crimes against humanity bring God's punishment. This observation is a powerful motivation for God's people to oppose the mistreatment and neglect of their fellow human beings."²⁷

Because of this sin Moab would perish in the tumult of battle, and its leaders would die. Kirioth was a major city in Moab (cf. Jer. 48:24). Nebuchadnezzar conquered Moab shortly after 598 B.C., which opened the way for Arab tribes to occupy its land.²⁸

7. An oracle against Judah 2:4-5

God would treat Judah with the same justice that He promised Israel's other neighbor nations. Judah's overflowing sin was her failure to live by the Torah, the instruction that Yahweh had given her, including the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Rom. 2:12-15). Listening to false prophets and worshipping idols (Heb. *kazib*, a lie, something deceptive) had been major evidences of this apostasy (cf. Deut. 6:14; 7:16; 8:19; 11:16, 28).²⁹ So Yahweh promised to destroy Judah and Jerusalem as He had promised to destroy her sinful neighbors. The fulfillment came with Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:1-12).

8. An oracle against Israel 2:6-16

The greater length of this oracle as well as its last position in the group of oracles points to its preeminent importance. Verse 10, by using the second person rather than the third, suggests that all these oracles were originally spoken to Israel.

There are four sections to this oracle: Israel's recent sins, God's past gracious activity on Israel's behalf, Israel's response, and Israel's punishment.

Israel's recent sins 2:6-8

Not all the sins that Amos identified appear in verses 6-8; two more appear in verse 12. Amos named seven sins of Israel all together rather than just one, as in the previous oracles, though he continued to use the "for three transgressions and for four" formula. Seven seems to be the full measure of Israel's sin. The idea of "the straw that broke the camel's back" carries over from the first seven oracles into the eighth with double force.

2:6 Israel's first sin was that the Israelites took advantage of righteous, needy people for their own personal, material advantage and sold them into slavery, perhaps into debt (cf. 2 Kings 4:1-7). They sold, for the price of

²⁶McComiskey, p. 291.

²⁷J. Niehaus, "Amos," in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, 1:358.

²⁸Josephus, 10:9:7.

²⁹See Andersen and Freedman, pp. 301-5, for defense of the false prophet interpretation.

what they owed, honest people who would have repaid their debts if given the opportunity. They would even sell into slavery someone who could not pay the small price of a pair of sandals. Another interpretation is that they would take as a bribe as little as what a pair of sandals cost. The Israelites should have been generous and openhanded toward the poor (Deut. 15:7-11). Sin often results in the devaluation of human life.

2:7 Second, the Israelites were perverting the legal system to exploit the poor. The courts were siding with creditors against their debtors; they were "stepping on" the poor. This was as painful and humiliating as having one trample on one's head as it lay in the dust. The oppressors longed to see the poor reduced to extreme anguish. They may have been so greedy that they craved even the dust that the poor threw on their heads in mourning. The Mosaic Covenant called for justice in Israel's courts (Exod. 23:4; Deut. 16:19).

Third, fathers and sons were having sexual intercourse with the same woman. The women in view may be temple prostitutes, servant girls taken as concubines, or female relatives (cf. Exod. 21:7-11; Lev. 18:8, 15). This showed contempt for Yahweh's holy character (cf. Exod. 3:13-15). The Law forbade fornication, including incest (Lev. 18:6-18; 20:11, 17-21).

2:8 Fourth, the Israelites failed to return garments taken as collateral for debts owed them. The Law specified that the Israelites could take a garment as a pledge, except the garment of a widow (Deut. 24:17), but they were to return it to the owner before nightfall (Exod. 22:26-27; Deut. 24:10-13; cf. Deut. 24:6; Job 22:6). The Israelites were even taking these garments with them and displaying them at the public feasts honoring whatever god they worshipped.

Fifth, the Israelites had worshipped other gods (cf. v. 4). They were using the wine that they had received as fines, or had extracted from the poor, to honor heathen gods. The proper course of action would have been to drink wine that the worshipper had paid for himself or present it in worship of the true God.

God's past grace 2:9-12

In this section Amos reminded the Israelites of Yahweh's past blessings on them. This made the heinousness of their sins even clearer. Israel's treatment of the poor had been destructive, but Yahweh's treatment of the poor Israelites had been constructive. The other nations that God pronounced judgment against in the previous oracles had not enjoyed these special blessings.

2:9 The Israelites had committed the previous breaches of covenant in spite of God's having driven the giant Amorites out of the Promised Land for them

(cf. Num. 13:22-33). These enemies had been as strong and tall as cedar or oak trees (cf. Num. 13:28-33; Deut. 1:26-28), but the Lord destroyed them completely, from fruit above to root below.

"Destruction of 'his fruit' left no possibility of future life from seed. Destruction of 'roots' left no possibility of future life from the tree. God is able to deal decisively with the enemies of his people."³⁰

Here the Amorites, the most formidable of the Canaanites, represent all the Canaanites, by metonymy (cf. Gen. 15:16). The defeat of these giants demonstrated Yahweh's superior power as well as His love for His people. By implication, if God drove the Amorites out of the land, He might also drive the Israelites out.

2:10 Going back even further in their history, Yahweh reminded His people that He had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt and had led them safely through the wilderness for 40 years. He had preserved them so they could take possession of the Promised Land, the land of the Amorites. By shifting to the second person, Amos strengthened the force of God's appeal.

2:11 In the land, God had raised up prophets and godly Nazirites from among the Israelites' sons. Prophets relayed God's messages to them, and Nazirites were examples of ordinary citizens who dedicated themselves completely to the Lord. These individuals were blessings to the nation because by their words and deeds they encouraged the people to follow the Lord faithfully. Yahweh asked rhetorically if this was not indeed what He had done.

The order of these blessings is not chronological. Evidently Amos arranged them in this order to highlight the Exodus, the central of the three blessings mentioned and the single most important event in Israel's history.

Israel's response to God's grace 2:12

Even though God gave His people prophets and Nazirites, the Israelites had encouraged the Nazirites to compromise their dedication to Yahweh and the prophets to stop prophesying. These were the sixth and seventh sins of the Israelites that Amos enumerated. The people were uncommitted to God and unwilling to hear and obey His Word.

³⁰Smith, pp. 65-66.

Israel's consequent punishment 2:13-16

In the previous oracles, Amos consistently likened God's judgment to fire (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5). In this one he did not use that figure but described the judgment coming on Israel with other images, especially images of panic in battle.

2:13 The Lord said He felt burdened by the sinfulness of His people, as heavy as a wagon filled to its capacity with grain.³¹ Another interpretation understands Amos picturing Israel being crushed like an object under the wheels of a heavily laden cart.³²

2:14-16 Running fast would not provide escape from His coming judgment, resisting would not enable the Israelites to withstand it, and outstanding leaders could not deliver them from it. Archers opposing God would not be able to prevent His advancing against them, quick runners would not be able to flee, and riding a horse could not remove them from the scene of judgment. When Yahweh would judge the Israelites even the bravest among them would prove fearful and ashamed. This sevenfold description of Israel's panic balances the earlier sevenfold description of Israel's sin.

The fulfillment of this threatened judgment came when the Assyrians besieged and destroyed Samaria, Israel's capital, in 722 B.C. and carried many of the people of that land into captivity.

These oracles teach the modern reader that God is sovereign over all nations and holds them accountable for their conduct toward other human beings and for their response to special revelation (cf. Gen. 9:5-6). They also teach that God is patient with sinners and will only punish when the measure of human sin has overflowed His predetermined capacity. They also teach that God is impartial in His judgment; He will punish sin in His own people as well as sin in those with whom He has established no special relationship.

B. MESSAGES OF JUDGMENT AGAINST ISRAEL CHS. 3—6

After announcing that God would judge Israel, Amos delivered five messages in which he explained more fully why God would judge the Northern Kingdom. Appeals for repentance and explanations of how to avoid judgment appear within these messages. The first three begin with the word, "Hear" (3:1; 4:1; 5:1; cf. Prov. 8:32), and the last two begin "Alas" (5:18) and "Woe" (6:1), both translations of the Hebrew word *hoy*.

1. The first message on sins against God and man ch. 3

Amos' first message explained that God would judge His people because they had oppressed others in spite of their uniquely privileged relationship with Yahweh. The

³¹ Andersen and Freedman, p. 334.

³² Sunukjian, p. 1432; McComiskey, p. 295; Smith, p. 68.

prophet addressed this message initially to both Israel and Judah (vv. 1-2), but he focused it mainly on Israel (vv. 9, 12).

Israel's unique relationship with Yahweh 3:1-2

Amos called all the Israelites to hear a message from their Lord. He referred to them as those whom Yahweh had redeemed from Egypt reminding them of the unique privilege they enjoyed. He also mentioned that the Israelites, among all the peoples of the world, had a special relationship to the Lord.³³ This is an allusion to the covenant that God has made with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai (cf. Exod. 19:3-6; Deut. 28:1-14).³⁴ He had also revealed Himself to the Israelites as He had done to no other people. God said He would punish His people for their iniquities because they were sins against His unusual blessings (cf. v. 14).³⁵ Greater privilege always results in greater responsibility.

Israel's inevitable judgment by Yahweh 3:3-8

Amos asked seven rhetorical questions in verses 3-6 to help the Israelites appreciate the inevitability of their judgment. In each one the prophet pointed out that a certain cause inevitably produces a certain effect. The five questions in verses 3-5 expect a negative answer, and the two in verse 6 expect a positive one. Verses 7-8 draw the conclusion.

- 3:3-6 Two people do not travel together unless they first agree to do so. By implication, God and Israel could not travel together toward God's intended destination for the nation unless the Israelites agreed to do so on His terms (cf. v. 2).
- 3:4 A lion does not roar in the forest unless it has found prey. Young lions do not growl in their dens unless they have captured something and are protecting it (cf. 1:2).
- 3:5 Birds do not get snared in traps unless there is bait in the traps that attracts them. Animal traps do not snap shut unless something triggers them.
- 3:6 People do not tremble at the news of some coming danger unless someone blows a trumpet to warn them. Calamities do not occur in cities unless God has either initiated or permitted them.

"The seven examples of related events began innocuously, but become increasingly foreboding. The first example (Amos 3:3) had no element of force or disaster about it.

³³"You only" is in the emphatic first position in the Hebrew sentence.

³⁴God had chosen (known, Heb. *yada'*; cf. Jer. 1:5) the Israelites in that He had made a commitment to them as His vassal in a covenant relationship. See H. B. Hoffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yada'*," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 181 (February 1966):31-37.

³⁵Verses 2 and 14 both contain promises that God would punish His people, forming an *inclusio* or literary envelope around the whole passage.

The next two (v. 4), however, concerned the overpowering of one animal by another, and the two after that (v. 5) pictured man as the vanquisher of animal prey. In the final two examples (v. 6), people themselves were overwhelmed, first by other human instruments, then by God Himself. This ominous progression, to the point where God Himself is seen as the initiator of human calamity, brought Amos to a climactic statement (vv. 7-8)."³⁶

- 3:7 A similar inevitable connection exists between two other events. God does nothing to His people unless He first warns them through one of His prophets (cf. Ps. 25:14; Jer. 23:18, 22).³⁷
- 3:8 Amos drew the final comparison with allusion to his previous illustrations. The message of judgment coming from the Lord that Amos now brought the Israelites was like the roaring of a lion. Who would not fear such a lion as the sovereign Yahweh? Indeed, how could the mouthpiece of the lion not prophesy since Yahweh had spoken?

Israel's unparalleled oppression from God 3:9-10

- 3:9 Amos called for announcements to be made to the large buildings (i.e., to the people living in them) of Ashdod in Philistia and to those in Egypt.³⁸ Amos may have chosen these nations because they had previously oppressed the Israelites. People who lived in citadels were the wealthy and the leaders of those areas.³⁹ They should come and stand on the mountains surrounding Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom. There they would witness great tumults, not the peace and order that should have prevailed, and oppressions within Samaria. The Israelites were assaulting and robbing one another; the rich were taking advantage of the poor.
- 3:10 Yahweh announced that the Israelites had plundered, looted, and terrorized each other so long that they no longer knew how to do right (Heb. *nekohah*, straightness). The Israelites were different from their aggressors because they plundered and looted their own fortresses rather than those of a foreign enemy. It was as though the Israelites hoarded up violence and devastation as others, and they, did material wealth. Now the

³⁶Sunukjian, p. 1433.

³⁷For a list of examples of God doing this, see *ibid.*, pp. 1433-34.

³⁸The Mosaic Law required two witnesses in cases involving the death penalty (Deut. 17:6). Here those witnesses were Ashdod and Egypt.

³⁹A "citadel" (Heb. *'armon*) was almost any fortified building higher than an ordinary house (cf. Ps. 48:3; Isa. 34:13; Jer. 9:21). They became part of a city's defense system because they were high and easier to defend than ordinary houses. Usually important people lived in these larger structures, and they were often part of the palaces of kings (cf. 1 Kings 16:18; 2 Kings 15:25). Here, because of the military terminology in the passage, their function as fortresses is particularly in view.

wealthy foreigners, infamous for their own similar sins, would see that the Israelites behaved even worse in their citadels.

Israel's coming catastrophe from Yahweh 3:11-15

Amos' announcement of Israel's coming judgment came in three waves (vv. 11, 12, and 13-15).

3:11 Sovereign Yahweh announced that an enemy that would surround the land of Israel would destroy and loot its impressive fortresses. That enemy proved to be Assyria, which besieged and destroyed Samaria and overran all Israel in 722 B.C.

3:12 Yahweh also predicted that only a small remnant of the people would survive. The situation would be similar to when a shepherd snatched a remaining fragment of a sheep, a couple of leg bones or a small piece of an ear, from the mouth of an attacking wild animal. It would be like when someone stole everything in a house and the owner could only hold onto a piece of his bed or a bedspread. Similarly an overpowering enemy would steal away the people of Samaria, and only a few would escape.

The figure of a shepherd represented Yahweh in Israel's literature (e.g., Ps. 23:1; et al.). The people would have seen Him as the one who would rescue the remnant as well as the one who would allow the enemy to overpower them.

3:13 Sovereign Yahweh almighty, the suzerain warrior who led the most vast and powerful of all armies, urged Amos to hear His word and to bear testimony against the house of Jacob. The reference to Jacob recalls the devious nature of this ancestor whose character the present generation of Israelites manifested. It also recalls God's gracious promises to Jacob. The Israelites, as bad as they were, were God's people, not just the people of King Jeroboam.

3:14 God now promised to destroy the pagan altars that Jeroboam I had erected at Bethel at the same time He destroyed the people of Israel (cf. 1 Kings 12:26-30). This altar, and the one in Dan, had taken the place of the one in Jerusalem for most of the Israelites. The one in Bethel was the most popular religious center in Israel. There the Israelites practiced apostate worship. The horns of this altar, symbolic of the strength of its deity, would be cut off and would fall to the ground showing its impotence. The horns of an altar were also places of asylum in the ancient Near East (1 Kings 1:50), so their cutting off pictures no asylum for the Israelites when God's judgment came.

3:15 God also promised to destroy the Israelites' winter and summer homes. The fact that many Israelite families could afford two houses and yet were oppressing their poorer brethren proved that they lived in selfish luxury. They had embellished their great houses with expensive ivory decorations (cf. 1 Kings. 21:1, 18; 22:39; Ps. 45:8). The two great sins of the Israelites, false religion (v. 14) and misuse of wealth and power (v. 15), would be the objects of God's judgment.

"The enduring principle here is that God will destroy elaborate altars, expensive houses, and other accoutrements of an extravagant lifestyle when these items are acquired through oppression, fraud, and strong-arm tactics. The idolatry of the people led to their opulent lifestyles. Life apart from God may yield temporary material gain, but it will surely result in eternal loss."⁴⁰

2. The second message on women, worship, and stubbornness ch. 4

This message consists of seven prophetic announcements each of which concludes, "declares the LORD" (vv. 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11). Verse 12 is a final conclusion and verse 13 a doxology.

Economic exploitation 4:1-3

- 4:1 Amos opened this second message as he did the first (ch. 3), with the cry, "Hear this word." He addressed the wealthy women of Samaria, calling them "cows of Bashan." Bashan was a very luxuriant region of Transjordan east and northeast of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee) where cattle had plenty to eat and grew fat (cf. Ps. 22:12; Jer. 50:19; Ezek. 39:18; Mic. 7:14). These women, along with their men, were oppressing (threatening) the poor and crushing (harassing) the needy. They were even ordering their husbands to wait on them and bring them drinks. The Hebrew word *'adonim*, translated "husbands," means "lords" or "masters." By using it Amos was stressing the role reversal that existed. The picture is of spoiled, lazy women ordering their husbands to provide them with luxuries that the men had to oppress the poor to obtain.
- 4:2-3 Sovereign Yahweh had not just said what He would do, but He had sworn that He would do it. When God swore He provided an external guarantee, in addition to His word, that He would indeed do something (cf. Isa. 62:8; Jer. 44:26; Heb. 6:16). He made this solemn declaration in harmony with His holiness. As surely as God is separate from humankind and cannot tolerate sin, these women would surely suffer His judgment one day.

⁴⁰Smith, p. 83. The eternal loss for a Christian will not be loss of salvation but loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ.

An enemy would cart them off as butchers carry beef with large meat hooks and as fishermen carry fish with hooks. This description may imply that the enemy would tie them in lines with ropes and lead them away since this is how fishermen strung their fish on lines. Carved reliefs that archaeologists have found show Assyrians leading people by a rope attached to a ring in the jaw or lip of their captives. Alternatively it may mean that their dead bodies would be disposed of as so much meat.⁴¹ The enemy would carry the bodies of these women (living or dead) off through breaches in Samaria's walls. The women would be carried off without any complications; each one would go straight ahead to captivity or to burial through any one of the many passageways made through the broken walls.

The enemy would take them to Harmon, perhaps an alternative spelling of Mt. Hermon.⁴² Mt. Hermon was to the north of Bashan, so these cows of Bashan would end up near Bashan. This is, in fact, the direction the Assyrians took the Israelite captives as they deported them to Assyria.

"Those who oppress the poor and crush the needy in order to support an extravagant lifestyle can expect God's harsh judgment to fall upon them."⁴³

Religious hypocrisy 4:4-5

4:4 Ironically the Lord told these sinful Israelites to go to Bethel but to transgress, not to worship. Such a call parodied the summons of Israel's priests to come to the sanctuary to worship (cf. Ps. 95:6; 96:8-9; 100:2-4). Bethel was the most popular religious site in Israel, but the Lord looked at what the people did there as transgressing His law rather than worshipping Him. Gilgal, another worship center, was evidently the Gilgal where the Israelites had entered the Promised Land and had erected memorial stones (Josh. 4:20-24). Other references to it indicate that it was a place pilgrims visited and where they sacrificed in Amos' day (cf. 5:5; Hos. 4:15; 9:15; 12:11). At Gilgal (from Heb. *galal*, to roll) God had rolled away the reproach of Egypt from His people (cf. Josh. 5:9), but now they were bringing reproach on themselves again by their behavior at Gilgal.

God hyperbolically urged the people to bring their sacrifices every morning and their tithes every three days (rather than every three years as the Law required, cf. Deut. 14:28-29). Even if they sacrificed every morning and tithed every three days they would only be rebelling against God. The people were careful to worship regularly, but it was a ritual contrary to God's will.

⁴¹J. H. Hayes, *Amos*, pp. 140-41.

⁴²Some scholars believe the meaning of "Harmon" is uncertain, though it appears to be the name of some site.

⁴³Smith, p. 86.

4:5 Thank offerings expressed gratitude for blessings and answers to prayer (Lev. 7:11-15). The Israelites made freewill offerings spontaneously out of gratitude to God (Lev. 7:16; 22:17-19). God permitted the people to present leavened bread in these offerings. The people loved to practice these acts of worship, but they did not love to obey sovereign Yahweh. The Lord wanted their loving obedience, not their acts of worship. Loving religious activities is not the same as loving God.

Refusal to repent 4:6-11

4:6 The Lord had brought famine throughout the land to warn His people about their disobedience and His displeasure, but this judgment did not move them to repent (cf. 1 Kings 8:37). Famine was one of the curses that God said He might bring if His people proved unfaithful to His covenant (Lev. 26:26, 29; Deut. 28:17, 48).

4:7-8 He had also sent drought when the people needed rain the most, three months before their harvest. He had let rain fall on one town but not another resulting in only spotty productivity (cf. 1 Kings 8:35). This too should have moved them to repent. Drought was also a punishment for covenant unfaithfulness (Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:22-24, 48).

4:9 The Lord sent plant diseases and insects to blight their gardens, vineyards, and fruit trees, yet they did not return to Him (cf. 1 Kings 8:37). These were also threatened judgments in the Mosaic Covenant (Lev. 26:20; Deut. 28:18, 22, 30, 38-40, 42).

4:10 Wars had brought various plagues on the Israelites, and many of their soldiers had died (cf. 1 Kings 8:33, 37). The plagues on the Israelites should have made them conclude that God was now judging them. God had plagued His people as He formerly had plagued the Egyptians. The stench of dead bodies should have led the people to repent, but it did not (cf. Lev. 26:16-17, 25, 31-39; Deut. 28:21-22, 25-27, 35, 49-52, 59-61; 29:23-28).

4:11 Even the overthrow of some Israelite cities did not move the Israelites to repent (cf. Deut. 28:62). Comparing these overthrown cities to Sodom and Gomorrah indicates their proverbial complete destruction (cf. Isa. 1:9; 13:19; Jer. 50:40; Zeph. 2:9), not necessarily the method of their destruction. God had rescued His people like burning sticks from a conflagration, as He had formerly extracted Lot and his daughters from Sodom (Gen. 19).

In all, Amos mentioned seven disciplinary judgments that God had brought on the Israelites: famine (v. 6), drought, (vv. 7-8), plant diseases

(v. 9), insects (v. 9), plague (v. 10), warfare (v. 10), and military defeat (v. 11). God sometimes permits His people to suffer so they will turn back to Him (cf. Heb. 12:6), but the Israelites had not done this.

The inevitable outcome 4:12-13

- 4:12 The Israelites should prepare to meet their God because they had failed to repent (cf. Exod. 19:10-19; 2 Cor. 5:10). He would confront them with even greater punishments (cf. 3:11-15). They should prepare to meet Him, not in a face-to-face sense, as they would encounter a powerful enemy in battle. The prophet's call was a summons to judgment, not a call to repentance or an invitation to covenant renewal.⁴⁴
- 4:13 Their enemy was the most formidable one imaginable. It was not another nation or army but sovereign Yahweh of armies. It was He who forms mountains, creates the wind, knows people's thoughts, turns dawn into darkness, and steps on the hills of Israel like a giant approaching Samaria. They could not escape His judgment, so they better prepare for it (cf. Mic. 1:3-4).

"In one bold sweep, this hymn shows the sovereignty of God—from his creation of the world to his daily summoning of the dawn, from his intervention in history to his revelation of mankind's thoughts. Every believer can take comfort in the fact that, while sometimes it seems that God does not interfere in human affairs, the world is never out of his control. His sovereignty extends to every aspect of human experience."⁴⁵

3. The third message on injustice 5:1-17

The structure of this message is chiasmic, which focuses attention and emphasis on the middle part.

- A** A description of certain judgment vv. 1-3
- B** A call for individual repentance vv. 4-6
- C** An accusation of legal injustice v. 7
- D** A portrayal of sovereign Yahweh vv. 8-9
- C'** An accusation of legal injustice vv. 10-13
- B'** A call for individual repentance vv. 14-15
- A'** A description of certain judgment vv. 16-17

⁴⁴Paul, p. 151.

⁴⁵McComiskey, p. 308.

Another structural feature stresses the solidarity between Yahweh and His prophet, namely, the alternation between of the words of Amos (vv. 1-2, 6-9, 14-15) and the words of God (vv. 3-5, 10-13, 16-17).

A description of certain judgment 5:1-3

5:1 This message begins as the previous two did, with a call to hear the Lord's word. However here Amos announced that what follows is a dirge (Heb. *qinah*) against the house of Israel. A dirge was a lament that was sung at the funeral of a friend, relative, or prominent person (e.g., 2 Sam. 1:17-27; 3:33-34; 2 Chron. 35:25). The prophets used the dirge genre to prophesy the death of a city, people, or nation (cf. Jer. 7:29; 9:10-11, 17-22; Lam.; Ezek. 19; 26:17-18; 27:2, 32; 28:12; 32:2). Amos announced Israel's death at the height of its prosperity under Jeroboam II.

"To his listeners, hearing this lament would be as jarring as reading one's own obituary in the newspaper."⁴⁶

5:2 Amos announced that the virgin Israel, in the prime of her beauty and vigor, had fallen fatally. "Fallen" in funeral songs usually means "fallen in battle" (cf. 2 Sam. 1:19, 25, 27; 3:34; Lam. 2:21). She would never rise to her former position again. No one came to her aid, even Yahweh (cf. Judg. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Isa. 2:6). She lay forsaken in her land.

5:3 Cities that had sent 1,000 soldiers against Israel's enemy saw only 100 survive, and smaller towns that sent out only 100 soldiers saw only 10 come home alive. No nation could survive such devastating defeat in war.

A call for individual repentance 5:4-6

This pericope is also chiasitic (Bethel, Gilgal, Beersheba, Gilgal, Bethel).

5:4-5 Yahweh invited the Israelites to seek Him so they might live. Even though national judgment and death were inevitable, individuals could still live. Announcements of impending judgment almost always allow for the possibility of individual repentance (cf. Jer. 18:1-10). The Israelites should not seek the Lord at the popular Israelite shrines at Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba in southern Judah, however. All these worship centers stood at sites that were important in Israel's earlier history, but God had commanded His people to worship Him at Jerusalem. There is a play on words regarding Bethel. "Bethel" means "house of God," but it would become "Beth Aven," meaning "house of nothing." "Aven" (nothing) often referred to the powerless spirits of wickedness (cf. Isa. 41:22-24, 28-29).

⁴⁶Sunukjian, p. 1438.

5:6 Amos, as well as the Lord (v. 4), invited the Israelites to seek the Lord by doing good and refraining from evil so they might live (cf. vv. 14-15). The alternative would be God's judgment breaking forth and unquenchably consuming the whole house of Joseph (i.e., the Northern Kingdom, whose main tribe was Ephraim, a son of Joseph).

An accusation of legal injustice 5:7

The reason for Yahweh's consuming judgment of Israel was that the Israelites were turning sweet justice into something bitter and were throwing righteousness to the ground with disrespect. These figures picture their total contempt for what was right (cf. Prov. 1:3; 2:9; 8:20; 21:3; Isa. 1:21; 5:7; 28:17). Right conduct was the proper action, and justice was the result, but the Israelites had despised both in their courts. Instead of the judicial system functioning like medicine, healing wrongs and soothing the oppressed, the Israelites had turned it into poison.

A portrayal of sovereign Yahweh 5:8-9

Since Yahweh made the Pleiades and Orion, constellations of stars, He could bring His will to pass on earth too. The rising of the Pleiades before daybreak heralded the arrival of spring and the rising of Orion after sunset signaled the onset of winter.⁴⁷ Since Yahweh brings light out of darkness in the morning and darkens the day at night He could change the fate of Israel from prosperity to adversity. Since He calls the waters of the sea to form clouds and then empties them on the land He can pour out judgment on the land as well. Yahweh is the name of this God, the covenant God of Israel. Israel's pagan neighbors attributed all these activities to their idols, and some of the Israelites worshipped them, but Yahweh was the only God who could do these things. The person who would flash forth like lightning from heaven, striking the strong oppressors with destruction and bringing an end to their fortresses on earth, was Yahweh.

Another accusation of legal injustice 5:10-13

This pericope is also chiasitic. Intimidation and abusive treatment flank an announcement of covenant violation.

5:10 Amos cited other reasons for the coming judgment. The Israelites hated judges who reproved evildoers in the city gate, where the court convened, and witnesses who spoke the truth.

5:11 They imposed high rents and taxes of grain on the poor to keep them tenants on the land (cf. Exod. 23:2, 6).

"The small farmer no longer owns his own land; he is a tenant of an urban class to whom he must pay a rental for

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 1439.

the use of the land, a rental that was often a lion's share of the grain which the land had produced."⁴⁸

The oppressors used this illegally obtained income to build themselves luxurious homes. The Lord promised that He would make it impossible for these evil people to live in their fancy houses and enjoy the fruits of their vineyards.

- 5:12 Yahweh knew the many transgressions of His covenant and the great sins that these perverters of justice committed. They had distressed the righteous by their unrighteous conduct, accepted bribes from the wealthy, and made it impossible for the poor to get fair treatment in the courts. God was looking for justice (in their relationships to one another) and for righteousness (in their relationship to Him). This dual emphasis on justice and righteousness runs throughout the Book of Amos.
- 5:13 Life had become so corrupt that keeping quiet about these abuses of power had become the only prudent thing to do. If a person spoke out against them, he could count on feeling the wrath of the powerful.

Another call for individual repentance 5:14-15

- 5:14 Again the prophet urged the Israelites to seek good rather than evil so they could live (cf. vv. 4-6). Then the sovereign, almighty Yahweh would truly be with them, as they professed He was even as they practiced their injustice (cf. Num. 23:21; Deut. 20:4; 31:8; Judg. 6:12; Isa. 8:10; Zeph. 3:15, 17). He would become their defender rather than their prosecutor.
- 5:15 They should hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate (a metonym for the courts). Perhaps then sovereign, almighty Yahweh would be gracious to the faithful remnant in the Northern Kingdom and deliver them.

Another description of certain judgment 5:16-17

This message concludes by returning to a further description of conditions when Yahweh would judge Israel (cf. vv. 1-3). The sovereign Yahweh of armies, Israel's master, announced wailing in all the open plazas of the Israelite towns and in their streets. There would be many funerals. Everyone would bewail the conditions of divine judgment, not just the professional mourners but even the poor farmers who would have to bury their oppressors. The vineyards, often places of joy and merriment, would be full of mourning, as would the streets. Yahweh promised to pass through the midst of His people, not to bless them but to blast them with punishment. Earlier God had passed through Egypt with similar devastating results (cf. Exod. 11:4-7; 12:12-13).

⁴⁸Mays, p. 94.

4. The fourth message on unacceptable worship 5:18-27

This lament also has a chiasmic structure. It centers on a call for individual repentance.

- A A description of inevitable judgment vv. 18-20
- B An accusation of religious hypocrisy vv. 21-22
- C A call for individual repentance vv. 23-24
- B' An accusation of religious hypocrisy vv. 25-26
- A' A description of inevitable judgment v. 27

A description of inevitable judgment 5:18-20

- 5:18 The prophet began his message by crying, "Alas" (Heb., *hoy*, woe, oh). This word announced coming doom, another funeral lament (cf. v. 1). Many Israelites in Amos' day were looking forward to a coming day of the Lord. Former prophets had spoken of a day in which Yahweh would conquer His enemies and the enemies of His people and establish His sovereign rule over the world (e.g., Joel 3:18-21, and perhaps Isa. 24:21-23; 34:1-3, 8). The Israelites knew that this was going to be a time of great divine blessing, but Amos informed them that it would also be a time of divine chastisement. It would be a time of darkness rather than light (cf.; Jer. 46:10; Joel 3:1-17; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 14:1-3). God would judge His people before He blessed them.
- 5:19 The coming day of the Lord would mean inescapable tragedy for Israel. The Israelites may have thought they had escaped one enemy, but they would have to face another. They might think they were secure and safe in their homeland, but deadly judgment would overtake them in that secure environment. There would be no safe haven from God's coming judgment.
- 5:20 Rhetorically Amos stated that the coming day of the Lord would be a day characterized by darkness and gloom (despair) rather than by bright light (joy; cf. Joel 2:1-2, 10-11; Zeph. 1:14-15).

A brighter day of the Lord was also coming (cf. 9:11-15; Jer. 30:8-11; Hos. 2:16-23; Mic. 4:6-7; Zeph. 3:11-20), but first a dark one would appear. The Israelites wanted to hasten the good day of the Lord, but they wanted to forget about the bad one. This prophecy found fulfillment when the Assyrians overran Israel and took most of the people into exile in 722 B.C. The later Tribulation period for Israel, which will precede her millennial day of blessing, will be similar to what Amos predicted here, but I think it was not what God was foretelling here.

An accusation of religious hypocrisy 5:21-22

- 5:21 The Israelites enjoyed participating in the religious festivals and assemblies in which they professed to worship Yahweh. God had

commanded the Israelites to observe several feasts and one fast each year, and these are probably the festivals in view.⁴⁹ Yahweh hated the Israelites' worship assemblies, however, because the people were not worshipping Him from their hearts (cf. v. 15). They were only going through the motions of worship. The repetition of "I hate," "I reject," and "Nor do I delight," stresses how much He detested this type of worship.⁵⁰

5:22 Burnt and grain (meal) offerings were voluntary and expressed the worshipper's personal dedication to Yahweh and the dedication of his or her works to the Lord (Lev. 1—2). Peace offerings were also voluntary and expressed appreciation for the fellowship that God had made possible for His redeemed people with Himself and with one another (Lev. 3). All three of these offerings were sweet-smelling to the Lord and were primarily offerings of worship rather than offerings to secure atonement for sins committed. These three offerings also represent all the worship offerings in another sense. The burnt offering was totally consumed on the altar. The grain offering was partly burned up and partly eaten by the offerer. And the offerer, the priest, and God shared the peace offering. God said He would not accept (lit. smell) or take any notice of any of these offerings, which represent all the others (cf. 4:4-5). In verses 21 and 22 the plural pronouns "you" and "your" appear indicating that God was addressing the whole nation.

A call for individual repentance 5:23-24

5:23 In verses 23 and 24 the singular pronoun "your" appears indicating that the call is for individuals to repent. God told His people to take away the songs that they sang in worshipping Him because they were only so much noise in His ears. He would not even listen to the musical accompaniment. He would shut His ears as well as His nostrils (v. 21).

5:24 Instead of feasts and fasts, instead of offerings and sacrifices, instead of singing and playing musical instruments, the Lord said He wanted justice and righteousness (cf. v. 7). Instead of a constant stream of blood flowing from sacrifices, and an endless stream of verbal and ritual praise from His people, He wanted these ethical qualities to flow without ceasing from them. The Israelites were inundating Him with rivers of religiosity, but He wanted rivers of righteousness.

⁴⁹The feasts were Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost (also called Harvest or Weeks), Trumpets, and Tabernacles (also called Booths or Ingathering). The fast was the Day of Atonement. The first four feasts took place in the spring, and the last two and the Day of Atonement were fall festivals. It is not certain, however, how faithfully residents of the apostate Northern Kingdom observed these special days.

⁵⁰Notice also, "I will not accept," "I will not look," and "I will not listen," in verses 22 and 23.

"Only when the personal concern of the law is incorporated into their social structure and 'rightness' characterizes their dealings with others will their worship be acceptable. A token practice of justice and righteousness will not do."⁵¹

This is the key verse in the book since it expresses so clearly what God wanted from His people. It is a clear statement of the importance of moral and ethical righteousness over mere ritual worship.

"With Hos 6:6 and Mic 6:8 this text stands as one of the great themes in prophetic literature with regard to the nature of sacrifices and true religion. God is not pleased by acts of pomp and grandeur but by wholehearted devotion and complete loyalty."⁵²

Another accusation of religious hypocrisy 5:25-26

5:25 The Lord now returned to explain further what He did not want (vv. 21-23). With another rhetorical question (cf. v. 20) the Lord asked if His people really worshipped Him with their animal sacrifices and grain offerings when they were in the wilderness for 40 years.⁵³ As He clarified in the next verse, they had not. Their hypocritical worship was not something new; it had marked them from the beginning of their nation (e.g., the golden calf incident, Exod. 32).

5:26 During the wilderness wanderings the Israelites had also carried shrines of their king. This may refer to unauthorized shrines honoring Yahweh or, more probably, shrines honoring other deities (cf. Acts 7:42-43). "Sikkuth, your king," probably refers to Sakkut, the Assyrian war god also known as Adar. "Kiyyun, your images," probably refers to the Assyrian astral deity also known as Kaiwan or Saturn. Amos evidently ridiculed these gods by substituting the vowels of the Hebrew word for "abomination," (*shiqqus*) in their names.⁵⁴ "The star of your gods [or god]" probably refers to the planet Saturn that represented Kiyyun.⁵⁵ They may have carried pedestals for their images of various idols including astral deities. Many scholars believe the Israelites conceived of the golden calf as a representation of that on which Yahweh rode, a visible support for their invisible God.⁵⁶ The bull in Egyptian iconography was a symbol of strength and power. Jeroboam I had erected bulls at Dan and Bethel in Israel and had revived this idolatrous form of worship. Amos pointed out that Israel had always

⁵¹McComiskey, p. 316.

⁵²Smith, p. 115.

⁵³Animal sacrifices and grain offerings represent the totality of Israel's Levitical offerings.

⁵⁴Andersen and Freedman, p. 533.

⁵⁵Mays, p. 112. Stephen's quotation of verse 26 in Acts 7:42-43 was from the Septuagint, which interpreted these names as references to pagan idols.

⁵⁶Another view is that the golden calf represented Yahweh Himself.

mixed idolatry with the worship of Yahweh, so Israel's worship of Him had been hypocritical throughout her history.⁵⁷

Another description of inevitable judgment 5:27

Because of this hypocritical worship, Yahweh, the God of armies, promised that the Israelites would go into exile beyond Damascus. They did go into exile in Assyria, to the northeast of Damascus, after 722 B.C. (cf. 4:3).

"The horror of 'exile' was more than the ruin of defeat and the shame of capture. For Israel, it meant being removed from the land of promise, the land of God's presence. Exile, in effect, was excommunication."⁵⁸

5. The fifth message on complacency and pride ch. 6

In this lament Amos announced again that Israel would fall under God's judgment.

The boastful complacency of Israel's leaders 6:1-3

6:1 The prophet began this message by announcing coming woe (Heb. *hoy*, cf. 5:18). Those who felt at ease in Zion (Jerusalem) and secure in Samaria were the subjects of his message. Those who felt at ease in Samaria, partially because it stood on a high hill that was easily defensible, were the distinguished men. They regarded Israel, and Judah, as the foremost of the nations of their day. They were the men to whom the rest of the house of Israel (the people of the Northern Kingdom) came for advice and or justice.

"With masterly irony, Amos addressed the self-satisfied rich, secure in their affluence (v. 1; cf. Luke 6:24-25; 12:13-21)."⁵⁹

This is the last reference to the people of Zion in this message; from now on Amos spoke only of the Northern Kingdom. Perhaps he referred to the Judean leaders because they were also guilty of the same sins (cf. Isa. 32:9-11), but judgment was not decreed against them yet.

6:2 Amos challenged these proud leaders to visit other cities that had once considered themselves great. Calneh (or Calno, Isa. 10:9) and Hamath were city-states in northern Aram. Shalmaneser III of Assyria had overrun them in 854-846 B.C., but Israel controlled them in Amos' day. Gath had been a notable city in Philistia, but it had fallen before King Hazael of

⁵⁷Certainly at times the Israelites worshipped God exclusively and wholeheartedly, but throughout their history there had been these instances of syncretistic hypocrisy.

⁵⁸Sunukjian, p. 1442.

⁵⁹McComiskey, p. 317.

Aram in 815 B.C. and again to King Uzziah of Judah in 760 B.C. Presently Judah controlled it. Samaria was no better than those city-states, and their territories were larger than Samaria's. Yet they had fallen to foreign invaders. What had happened to them could happen to Samaria even though the people of Israel believed that Yahweh would protect it.

6:3 The leaders of Samaria dismissed the possibility that calamity would overtake their city. But they were really hastening the day of terror (or seat of violence) by refusing to acknowledge and repent of their sins. Amos raised the possibilities as questions, but the answers were obvious to any honest person.

The 31 years following King Jeroboam II's reign saw increasingly worse conditions for Israel (cf. 2 Kings 15:8—17:6). Six kings reigned, three of whom seized power by political coup and assassination. Fear and violence marked this period (cf. 2 Kings 15:16).

The luxurious indulgence of the Samaritans 6:4-7

6:4-6 Amos described the luxury and self-indulgence that characterized the leaders of Samaria during his day. They reclined on very expensive beds inlaid with ivory. They sprawled, implying laziness or drunkenness, on couches. They ate the best, most tender meat obtainable.

"Ordinary citizens probably ate meat only three times a year, at the annual festivals."⁶⁰

They imitated great King David by composing and improvising songs and inventing musical instruments with which they entertained themselves. They consumed wine by the bowlful rather than in cups. And they spent much time and money anointing their bodies with oils and lotions to preserve and enhance their beauty. Instead they should have been mourning over the moral weakness and decadence of their nation that would lead to its ruin.

6:7 Amos announced that these luxuriant leaders would go into captivity at the head of the people of Israel. Their banquets would cease, and they would lounge on their soft couches no longer.

Money and material possessions are not wrong in themselves, but the love of them leads to all types of evil (1 Tim. 6:9-10; James 5:1-6).

⁶⁰Smith, p. 118.

The complete devastation of Samaria 6:8-14

6:8 The prophet announced further that the sovereign Yahweh of hosts, even He, had sworn by Himself (cf. 4:2; 8:7). He loathed the pride of Jacob. "Jacob" refers to the Northern Kingdom (cf. 3:13), and "the pride of Jacob" is probably the city of Samaria.⁶¹ In their self-confidence, these leaders resembled their forefather Jacob. The Lord also hated their fortified mansions from which they oppressed the poor and needy (cf. 3:9-10).

"The mighty fortress is their god. Its security and power make God's protection and blessing irrelevant crutches in the real world of economic and political influence."⁶²

Therefore Yahweh would fight against them and deliver up Samaria and all it contained to an enemy.

6:9-10 So thorough would be the overthrow that even if 10 men took refuge in one house they could not preserve their own lives. If the uncle of one of the dead rulers came to bury his nephew, or if a less interested undertaker did so, those still alive and hiding in the house would beg him not to reveal their presence.⁶³ They would beg him not even to mention the name of Yahweh in anger, lament, or praise, because to do so might draw His attention to them and result in their deaths.

6:11 Yahweh was going to command the utter destruction of all houses in Samaria, small and great. Not only would the people of the city die (vv. 9-10), but the houses of the rich and poor would also perish.

6:12 It was as unnatural for Israel's leaders to live as they did as it was for horses to run on rocky crags or oxen to plow rocks. Horses normally ran on rock-free ground, and oxen plowed fields from which farmers had removed the rocks. Yet these leaders had replaced justice with corrupt courtroom decisions that had killed the defendants just as though they had taken poison. Righteousness in the rulers should have resulted in grace for the dependent that would have been sweet to their taste, but the treatment they received instead was bitter to their souls.

6:13 The leaders felt very proud and confident because under Jeroboam II Israel had recaptured some territory that it had formerly lost to Aram (cf. 2 Kings 14:25). This included the town of Lo-debar in Transjordan (cf. 2 Sam. 9:4; 17:27). Amos, however, cleverly made light of this feat by

⁶¹See Hayes, p. 188.

⁶²G. Smith, *Amos: A Commentary*, p. 207.

⁶³"Undertaker" is literally "one who burns him." Since cremation was not acceptable in ancient Israel, the reference may be to burning corpses during a plague that would accompany the destruction of Samaria.

mispronouncing the city "Lo-dabar," which means "not a thing." They had taken nothing of much value. The people were also claiming that they had taken the town of Karnaim (lit. a pair of horns, symbols of strength) by their own strength. It was not they but Yahweh, however, who had strengthened them to achieve this victory over a symbolically strong town. Really Karnaim was quite insignificant.

6:14 The almighty, sovereign Yahweh announced that He would raise up a nation against the Northern Kingdom. He was the really strong one. Once again God's people would fall under the control of a foreign oppressor, as they had done in the past (cf. Exod. 3:9; Judg. 2:18; 4:3; 6:9; 10:11-12; 1 Sam. 10:17-18). This enemy would afflict the Israelites throughout the length and breadth of their nation, from Hamath in the north to the brook (or sea, cf. 2 Kings 14:25) of the Arabah in the south (the Dead Sea). This nation, of course, proved to be Assyria.

In summary, the reasons for Israel's coming judgment that Amos identified in these five messages were legal injustice, economic exploitation, religious hypocrisy, luxurious self-indulgence, and boastful complacency. These sins involved unfaithfulness to Yahweh, the sovereign, almighty Lord of Israel with whom the Israelites lived in covenant relationship. Though national judgment was inevitable, individuals who repented could escape punishment.

III. VISIONS THAT AMOS SAW CHS. 7—9

Amos next recorded five visions that he received from the Lord that described the results of the coming judgment of Israel, plus one historical incident (7:10-17). Throughout this section of the book two phrases stand out: "sovereign Yahweh" (7:1-2, 4 [twice], 5-6; 8:1, 3, 9, 11; 9:8) and "my people" (7:8, 15; 8:2; 9:10). They are constant reminders that Yahweh has authority over all nations and individuals and that He recognized Israel's special covenant relationship with Himself. The whole section builds to a terrifying climax of inevitable judgment for Israel.

A. THREE SHORT VISIONS OF IMPENDING JUDGMENT 7:1-9

The three visions in this section are similar and evidently followed one another in quick succession. The first two describe methods of divine judgment from which Amos persuaded God to turn aside, and the last one the method He chose to use to judge Israel.

1. The swarming locusts 7:1-3

7:1 Sovereign Yahweh showed Amos a mass of locusts swarming in the springtime after the first harvest and before the second. The Lord was forming this swarm of locusts. The very first crops harvested in the spring went to feed the king's household and animals (cf. 1 Kings 18:5). The crops that the people harvested later in the spring fed their animals and

themselves. If anything happened to prevent that second harvesting, the people would have little to eat until the next harvest in the fall. The summer months were very dry and the Israelites had nothing to harvest during that season of the year.

Locusts swarming indicated that they were about to sweep through an area and destroy all the crops. There was no way to prevent this in Amos' day. Locust invasions were a perennial threat, and they were a method of discipline that God had said He might use if His people proved unfaithful to His covenant with them (Deut. 28:38, 42; cf. Joel 1:1-7; Amos 4:9).

7:2 Amos witnessed the locusts strip the land of its vegetation. Then he prayed and asked the sovereign Lord to pardon Jacob (Israel) for its covenant unfaithfulness. Jacob was only a small nation and could not survive such a devastating judgment if the Lord allowed it to happen as he had seen it in his vision.

Amos' view of Israel as small and weak stands in contrast to that of Israel's leaders who believed it was strong and invincible (cf. 6:1-3, 8, 13; 9:10). Israel occupied a large territory under Jeroboam II, second only to what Solomon controlled, but it was still small in relation to the larger empires of the ancient Near East. Amos may have meant that Israel was small in the sense of helpless. God had promised to take care of Jacob when that patriarch encountered Yahweh at Bethel, now a center of apostate worship in Israel (cf. Gen. 28:10-22). Perhaps that is why Amos appealed to God with the name of Jacob (cf. 3:13; 6:8; 7:5; 8:7; 9:8).

7:3 In response to Amos' prayer, the Lord relented and said He would not bring a completely devastating judgment on Israel, at least then. He would be merciful and patient and would grant Israel more grace (cf. Exod. 32:14).

The fervent prayers of righteous individuals, like Amos, can alter the events of history (cf. James 5:16-18). Some things that God intends to do are not firmly determined by Him; He is open to changing His mind about these things. However, He has decreed other things and no amount of praying will change His mind about those things (cf. Acts 1:11; Rev. 22:20). It is, therefore, important that we understand, from Scripture, what aspects of His will are fixed and which are negotiable.⁶⁴

⁶⁴The same distinction between determined choices and optional choices is observable in human interpersonal relations. Parents, for example, will not permit their children to do certain things no matter how much the children may beg, but they do allow their children to influence their decisions in other matters. For further discussion of this issue, see Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*, pp. 149-52; idem, "What Prayer Will and Will Not Change," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 99-113; John Munro, "Prayer to a Sovereign God," *Interest* 56:2 (February 1990):20-21; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Does God 'Change His Mind'?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):387-99.

2. The devouring fire 7:4-6

7:4 Sovereign Yahweh also showed Amos a vision of a great fire that was burning up everything. Like a great drought it consumed all the water and all the farmland (or people) in Israel (cf. 1:19-20). What he saw may have been a scorching heat wave that resulted in a drought.

The "great deep" is a phrase that refers to subterranean waters that feed springs (cf. Gen. 1:2; 7:11; 8:2; 49:25; Deut. 8:7; Ezek. 31:4). So intense was the fire that Amos saw that it dried up even these underground water reservoirs. Great heat with consequent drought was one of the punishments that the Lord warned of for covenant unfaithfulness (Deut. 28:22).

7:5-6 Amos prayed virtually the same prayer again asking the sovereign Lord not to send such a judgment because Jacob was small (cf. v. 2). Again the Lord relented and determined that it would not come then (cf. v. 3). He would not discipline Israel with a locust plague or with a raging "fire."

3. The plumb line 7:7-9

7:7 Amos saw a third vision. The Lord was standing beside a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand. A plumb line was a string with a weight on the end. People used it, and still use it, to determine if a vertical structure is completely straight. God was testing something by a true standard; His judgment is not arbitrary.

7:8 The Lord asked the prophet what he saw, and Amos replied that he saw a plumb line. Then the Lord explained that He was about to test Israel as a builder uses a plumb line. The true standard by which He would judge Israel was undoubtedly the Mosaic Law, the covenant that He had given her by which God measured her uprightness (cf. Exod. 19:6). The Lord further announced that He would not spare the Israelites His judgment any longer; Amos' prayers for Israel would not turn away His punishment as earlier (vv. 3, 6). The nation was so far out of plumb that God would tear it down.

7:9 The method of judgment God would use would not be locust invasion or fire but the sword. An enemy would invade Israel (cf. Deut. 28:49-50). This enemy, as Yahweh's agent, would destroy the outdoor high places on hilltops and the temple sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel where the people worshipped God and idols, namely, all their worship centers.

Amos probably used "Isaac" simply as a synonym for "Jacob" and "Israel."

"Amos seems to have in mind the special veneration for Isaac which members of the Northern Kingdom displayed in making pilgrimages south to Beersheba (cf. 5:5; 8:14), Isaac's birthplace."⁶⁵

The "house of Jeroboam" probably refers to the dynasty of Jeroboam II, but it could refer to the nation of Israel as headed by Jeroboam I. Jeroboam II's dynasty came to an end with the assassination of his son and successor Zechariah (2 Kings 15:8-10).

These three visions appear to have come to Amos in close succession. They are obviously similar and together present a picture of judgment deferred twice but finally brought on Israel. They clarify the method of Israel's punishment, namely, defeat by an enemy's invading army, and they show that judgment would come after God's patience with the nation had been exhausted.

B. AN INTERVENING INCIDENT 7:10-17

The event described in this pericope evidently followed and grew out of the preceding visions that Amos announced (vv. 1-9). Certain key words occur in both sections of the book but not elsewhere in it: Isaac (vv. 9, 16) and sanctuary (vv. 9-11). Also the historical incident is a concrete example of God's plumb line in operation, but here it judged individuals. The prophet Amos passed the test, but one of the priest of Bethel, Amaziah, failed the test.

1. The challenge 7:10-13

7:10 Amaziah, who was one of the apostate priests who served at the Bethel sanctuary (cf. 1 Kings 12:26-33), felt that Amos was being unpatriotic in what he was prophesying. So Amaziah sent a message to King Jeroboam II charging Amos with conspiring against the king within the land. He felt that Israel could not afford to endure Amos' prophesying any longer. Previously internal revolt against a king had sometimes followed a prophet's pronouncements (cf. 1 Sam. 16:1-13; 1 Kings 11:29-39; 16:1-13; 19:15-17; 2 Kings 8:7-15; 9:1-28; 10:9).

7:11 Amaziah reported that Amos was saying that the king would die by the sword and that the Israelites would definitely go into exile. While we have no record that Amos said these exact words, they do represent fairly the message that Amos was announcing (cf. vv. 8-9). By claiming that Amos was predicting Jeroboam's death, the priest was personalizing the danger of Amos' ministry to the king and was emotionally inciting him to take action against the prophet. Note, too, that Amaziah regarded Amos' prophecies as simply the prophet's own words. He had no respect for them

⁶⁵Hubbard, p. 210.

as messages from Israel's God but viewed them only as a challenge to the status quo.

7:12-13 Amaziah then approached Amos and told him to move back to Judah and to earn his living in his own country (cf. 1:1). By referring to Amos as a seer (another term for a prophet, cf. 1 Sam. 9:9; 2 Sam. 24:11; Isa. 29:10), Amaziah was probably disparaging the visions that Amos said he saw (vv. 1-9).⁶⁶ By telling him to eat (earn) his bread in Judah, he was hinting that Amos needed to get a "legitimate" job rather than living off the contributions he received for prophesying (cf. Gen. 3:19; 2 Kings 4:8; Ezek. 13:17-20; Mic. 3:5, 11). Ahaziah told Amos to stop prophesying in Bethel (emphatic in the Hebrew text) because it was one of the king's sanctuaries (places of worship) as well as one of the king's residences (places of living). Bethel, of all places, was an inappropriate town in which Amos should utter messages of doom against Israel, from Amaziah's perspective. Amos had become an embarrassment to the political and religious establishment in Israel.

2. The response 7:14-17

7:14 Amos replied that he was not a prophet by his own choosing; he did not decide to pursue prophesying as a career. Neither had he become a prophet because his father had been one. In Amos' culture it was common and expected for sons to follow in their father's line of work. It is possible that Amos meant that he was not the son of a prophet in the sense that he had not been trained in one of the schools of the prophets under the tutelage of a fatherly mentor (cf. 2 Kings 2:1-15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1-7; 9:1).⁶⁷ Rather Amos had earned his living in a totally unrelated form of employment. He had been a herdsman and a nipper of sycamore figs. The term "herdsman" refers to someone who bred livestock, not just a shepherd who looked after animals. A nipper of sycamore figs was one who pruned sycamore fig trees so they would produce more fruit. Thus Amos had a respectable agricultural business background before he moved to Israel to prophesy. He had not been a professional prophet; he did not occupy the office of prophet but only functioned as a prophet. Therefore, Amaziah should not think that Amos came to Israel to prophesy because that was the only work that he could do.

7:15 Amos had come to Israel having been sent there by Yahweh to prophesy (cf. Num. 18:6; 2 Sam. 7:8; Ps. 78:70). The Hebrew text repeated the words "the LORD" for emphasis. God had given him a definite commission, and Amos had left his former occupation to obey that divine calling (cf. Acts 5:27-29). Amos' ministry and his location were God's choosing.

⁶⁶See D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, p. 376; E. Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, p. 116.

⁶⁷B. Smith, p. 139, n. 56.

7:16-17 Amos then announced a prophecy from the Lord for Amaziah. Because the priest had told the prophet to stop doing what Yahweh had commanded him to do (cf. 2:12), Amaziah's wife would become a harlot in Bethel. She would have to stoop to this to earn a living because she would have no husband or sons to support her. His children would die by the sword. This may also imply the end of Amaziah's family line. His land would become the property of others, presumably the Assyrians, and he himself would die in a foreign, pagan land. All these things would evidently happen when the foreign enemy destroyed Israel. Stifling the word of God proved disastrous for Amaziah, as it still does today. Finally, Amos repeated that Israel would indeed go into exile, the message that Amaziah had reported that Amos was preaching (cf. v. 11).

Amaziah had told Amos to stop prophesying and to stop preaching (v. 16). "Preaching" is from a verbal root meaning "drip" (Heb. *natap*), as the heavens drip rain (Judg. 5:4; cf. Amos 9:13). The idea is that Amos should stop raining down messages from heaven on his hearers.

"Amaziah's loyalty was to Jeroboam, who probably appointed him as priest at Bethel. Amos's loyalty was to God, who sent him to prophesy against Israel. Conflict between Amaziah and Amos was inevitable since their loyalties were in conflict. Primary loyalty to God in their service to Israel would have eliminated conflict between the king, the priest, and the prophet. The answer to conflict among God's people is always to place loyalty to God above all else."⁶⁸

C. TWO MORE VISIONS OF IMPENDING JUDGMENT CHS. 8—9

1. The basket of summer fruit ch. 8

The vision with which this chapter opens (vv. 1-3) gave rise to several prophetic oracles that follow and expound it (vv. 4-6, 7-10, 11-14).

The vision proper 8:1-3

8:1-2 The sovereign Lord showed Amos a basket of summer fruit. Amos saw what God enabled him to see. The Lord asked him what he saw (cf., 7:8), and the prophet replied that he saw a basket of ripe summer fruit (Heb. *qayis*). Normally this would have been a pleasant sight associated with the joys and provisions of harvest. Then Yahweh told him that Israel was also ripe (Heb. *qes*), but ripe for judgment. The Lord would spare the Israelites no longer. Like the fruit in the basket, Israel also needed to be consumed soon.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 136.

"Just as the final fruit of the summer signaled the end of the harvest season, so God's 'end' for Israel was now at hand. God would judge the religious hypocrisy and greed of the people."⁶⁹

8:3 When judgment came the singing in the royal palace would turn to wailing and lamenting. There would be many dead bodies lying around from the enemy's slaughter, and those left alive would dispose of them in silence because it would be such a terrible sight. Like so much rotten fruit, the dead Israelites would be thrown out.

The sins of the people 8:4-6

Non-visionary material followed the third vision (7:7-9), and non-visionary material follows the fourth vision (8:1-3).

8:4 Amos called those who oppressed the needy and tried to exterminate them to hear him (cf. 5:11). Israel's law called God's people to extend an open hand of generosity to the poor (Deut. 15:7-11; cf. Ps. 72:12-13), but the guilty Israelites were trying to eliminate them.

8:5-6 These oppressors were eager for the monthly festivals and the weekly Sabbaths to end so they could get back to work cheating their fellow countrymen to make big profits. These holidays were days of rest and worship, but the Israelite workaholics did not enjoy them, though they observed them as good religious people. They were anxious to enslave the needy in their debt so they could control them and use them for their own selfish ends (cf. 2:6).

"These people regarded cereals and human beings equally as stock for sale. Their practices were both dishonest and inhumane."⁷⁰

Merchandising was their priority, not worshipping. Profit was their god, and they willingly sacrificed more important things for it. People who focus intently on what they will do after worship is over do not engage in true worship or enter into the spirit of worship.⁷¹

The wailing of the sufferers 8:7-10

The following two passages (vv. 7-10 and 11-14) describe more fully the two results of God's judgment mentioned earlier, namely, wailing and silence (cf. v. 3).

⁶⁹Charles H. Dyer, in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 760.

⁷⁰Andersen and Freedman, p. 804.

⁷¹Wolff, p. 326.

- 8:7 For the third time in this book Amos said that Yahweh took an oath (cf. 4:2; 6:8). This time He swore by the pride of Jacob. This may be a reference to Samaria (cf. 6:8), but it is probably a reference to God Himself (cf. 1 Sam. 15:29).⁷² He vowed never to forget any of the sinful Israelites' unrighteous deeds.
- 8:8 Because of the sins just described the land would quake from the approach of the Lord and the large enemy army that He would lead against Israel. Perhaps a literal earthquake did occur, but probably trembling with fear is in view (cf. 2 Sam. 7:10). All the inhabitants would mourn over the coming destruction. The waves of terror and destruction would be like the rising and falling of the Nile River.
- "Since the rise and fall of the Nile usually extended over a few months, some national upheaval lasting a considerable period of time is implied by the analogy. Sometimes the flooding of the Nile was highly destructive. Amos may have been comparing the destructiveness of social injustice, civil strife, economic exploitation, and religious shallowness in Israel to the destruction caused by the inundation of the Nile. The flooding of the Nile occurred repeatedly, as did the social, civil, economic, and religious problems of society."⁷³
- 8:9 On the day of judgment sovereign Yahweh would send darkness over the land. This may refer to an eclipse of the sun, or it may be a figurative description of the coming judgment as an unnaturally bad day. I prefer the metaphorical interpretation since this whole chapter contains many metaphors. The figure of the sun going down at noon was particularly appropriate since Jeroboam's reign was the zenith of Israel's prosperity, power, and glory.
- 8:10 Then Yahweh would turn their festivals into funerals and their melodious singing into mourning. The people would wear sackcloth and shave their heads as signs of their grief. Mourning would come because judgment had come. It would be as sad a time as the death of an only son. The death of an only son meant the extinguishing of hope for the future and the losing of provision for one's old age. The end of that day would be bitter indeed.

The silence of Yahweh 8:11-14

The few remaining Israelites would be silent as they disposed of the corpses of their fellows (v. 3), but God would also be silent in that day of judgment.

⁷²See Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, pp. 302-3.

⁷³B. Smith, p. 148.

8:11 As part of His judgment, God would withhold His words from His people. This would be like a famine, not of physical food and drink but of spiritual food. God's words provide spiritual nourishment and refreshment, so when they are not available people suffer spiritually (cf. Matt. 4:4).

The Israelites had rejected the Lord's words to them (2:11-12; 7:10-13), so He would not send them to them any longer (cf. 1 Sam. 3:1; 28:6). This is a fearful prospect. If we do not listen to the Word of God, we may not be able to hear the Word of God (cf. Luke 17:22; John 7:34). This does not mean that God would remove all copies of His Word from them but that when they sought a word of help, advice, or comfort from Him they would not get it.

8:12-13 The Israelites would grope all over the land for some word from Yahweh, a word of explanation, forgiveness, or hope, but they would not be able to find one. Even beautiful virgins and strong young men would faint from lack of spiritual refreshment. These types of individuals would have the greatest strength and could look the hardest and longest, but even they would find nothing. Their deaths would also mean the cutting back of the nation since they could not provide children.

8:14 The apostate Israelites who swore in the name of their favorite pagan deities would fall never to rise again because their idols would not uplift them. Amos described the prominent idol in Samaria as Samaria's guilt or shame. One of the idols they worshipped in Samaria was Ashimah (cf. 2 Kings 17:29-30), which Amos apparently alluded to here. From Dan to Beersheba, throughout the whole Promised Land, the Israelites would seek some word from Yahweh, but they would find none to meet their need. In view of other prophecies of Israel's restoration, the prediction that the Israelites would fall and not rise again must have a limited scope. That generation as a whole would not survive the coming judgment, but individuals could repent and escape.

2. The Lord standing by the altar ch. 9

This final vision differs from the preceding four in some significant ways. First, there is no introductory formula that explains the divine enablement of the prophet. Second, in the first pair of visions Amos spoke more than the Lord, in the second pair he spoke only a few words, and in the last one he said nothing. However, as in the preceding two visions, oracles follow the brief vision.

Yahweh's inescapable punishment 9:1-4

9:1 In the final vision that Amos recorded, he saw Yahweh standing beside an altar. The altar at Bethel is probably in view since Bethel was the worship site in view in most of this book and since Amos' encounter with Amaziah

occurred there (7:10-17). The Lord gave a command that someone (an angel?) would strike the capitals that supported the roof of the temple there with such force that its foundation stones would shake and the whole structure would fall down (cf. Judg. 16:29-30; Isa. 6:4; Ezek. 40:6). The Lord also said He would slay with the sword the rest of the priests and worshippers who survived being killed by the collapse of the temple. No one would escape with his or her life.

"The temple was not a literal temple, for the collapse of such a building would affect only a few. Rather it represents the religion of the northern kingdom, which, in the end, brought about the destruction of its adherents. The decay of the social structure that resulted from their cold externalism could lead only to national ruin. The gross sin of idolatry could lead only to judgment."⁷⁴

9:2-3 It would be impossible for those whom the Lord chose to slay to escape even if they tried to dig into the earth or climb into the sky (cf. Ps. 139:7-8; Jon. 1—2).

"If neither heights nor depths can separate people from the love of God (cf. Rom. 8:38-39), they are also unable to hide them from the wrath of God."⁷⁵

The ancients conceived of Sheol as under the surface of the earth, so digging into Sheol meant hiding in the ground. Neither would hiding in the forests and caves of Mt. Carmel, one of the highest elevations in Israel, or trying to conceal oneself on the floor of the sea be effective. The Lord would seek the guilty out and command His agents to execute them, even if that agent had to be a serpent in the sea (cf. 5:19; Job 26:12-13; Ps. 74:13-14; 89:9-10; Isa. 27:1; 51:9-10). Note the chiasmic structure of these verses going from down to up and back down, signifying all places.

9:4 The Lord would even slay the Israelites whom their enemy led away into captivity. Yahweh would order the sword to slay them even there, though there they would be under the protection of a strong foreign power. They would not be able to hide from His all-seeing eye. Normally God watched over His people for their good, but here He promised to set His eyes on them for evil. His purpose and intention for them was evil from their viewpoint.

⁷⁴McComiskey, p. 327.

⁷⁵G. Smith, p. 268.

The God who would punish 9:5-6

These verses describe the great God who would judge the Israelites. The section closes, "Yahweh is His name" (v. 6). What precedes that clause is a revelation of His person (name).

- 9:5 The judge is sovereign Yahweh who controls and leads armies, both heavenly armies of angels and earthly armies of soldiers. As sovereign, He is the one to whom all people and nations are responsible, not just Israel. He is the one who simply with a touch can cause the earth to melt, a figure that recalls the effect on ice when a human finger presses on it. He has the power to alter the course of human affairs as well so everyone mourns, if that is His choice. He causes the earth and human affairs to rise and fall, to ebb and flow, like the waters of the mighty Nile River.
- 9:6 He built His dwelling place in the heavens as a vaulted dome over the earth. He calls for the waters to leave the seas, rise up and form clouds, and pour down on the land. Since He has this control over the whole planet it is impossible to hide from Him or to escape His powerful hand. His name is Yahweh, the covenant keeping God whose sovereignty covers the universe (cf. 5:8).

The justice of His punishment 9:7-10

- 9:7 Rhetorically Yahweh asked if Israel was not just like other nations. It was in the sense that it was only one nation among many in the world that lived under His sovereign authority. The Ethiopians (Cushites) were a remote people in Amos' day, on the edge of the earth from an ancient Near Easterner's perspective, yet God watched over them. He had separated the Philistines from Caphtor (Crete; cf. Deut. 2:23) and the Syrians (Arameans) from Kir in Mesopotamia (cf. 1:5) just as He had led Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. The Philistines and Syrians were Israel's enemies, but God had done for them what He had done for Israel. He could justly send the Israelites into another part of the world since He had formerly relocated these other nations. The Israelites considered themselves superior because of their election, but really they were no better or less accountable than any other nation.
- 9:8 As the sovereign Lord looked over all the kingdoms of the earth, He noticed those of them that were sinful and determined to destroy them because of their wickedness. He would do to Israel what He would do to any other sinful nation (cf. 3:1-2). Yet He promised not to destroy completely the house of Jacob (the Northern Kingdom, because of the covenant He had made with Israel; cf. 5:4-6, 14-15, 23-24).

- 9:9 God would sift all the Israelites, among the other nations, to separate the people deserving judgment from the righteous few. He would allow the righteous person (true wheat) to slip through but would retain the unrighteous (a kernel, pebble, anything compacted, Heb. *seror*) for judgment.⁷⁶ He would separate the righteous from the sinful as He sifted through the Israelites. God determines just how much sinfulness makes His punishment inevitable; He determines the mesh of the sifting screen.
- 9:10 All the guilty Israelites would die by the sword, the Lord promised. None of them who claimed that they would escape that calamity would get away.

The restoration of the Davidic kingdom 9:11-12

The rest of the book is quite different from what has preceded because of its positive message. As is true of other eighth-century prophets to Israel and Judah, Amos included hope in his prophecy (cf. Isa. 40—66; Hos. 1:10—2:1, 14-23; Mic. 2:12-13; 4:1-5).

- 9:11 In "that day" Yahweh would also restore the fallen booth of David that had suffered some destruction (cf. v. 1; Lev. 23:33-42; 2 Sam. 11:11; 1 Kings 20:12-16; Jon. 4:5). The booth (tent) of David is a reference to the dynasty of David, which acted as a shelter over the Israelites. When Amos prophesied, the tent of David had suffered major damage due to the division of the kingdom into two parts, though it had not yet collapsed completely. In the future God would restore the Davidic house and rebuild it as in former days, when it was a united kingdom with a descendant of David ruling over all Israel (cf. Jer. 30:3-10; Ezek. 37:15-28; Hos. 3:4-5). That day, still future from our point in history, would be a day of restoration as well as a day of judgment. The restoration will follow in the Millennium after the judgments of the Tribulation.
- 9:12 When the house of David was again intact, Israel would exercise authority over all the nations of the world and would be a source of blessing to them. This would include even the small number of Edomites alive then, people who had formerly been implacable enemies of the Israelites (cf. Obad. 19). Israel's blessing would extend even to them, representing all Israel's former enemies. All the nations would become associated with the name of Yahweh then and would enjoy His lordship and protection (cf. Gen. 12:3; Isa. 9:1-7; 11:1-13; 42:1-7; 45:22-25; 49:5-7; 55:1-5).

At the Jerusalem Council, the Apostle James quoted verses 11 and 12 to support his view that the Gentiles of his day did not need to submit to circumcision and the Mosaic Law to obtain salvation or to live as Christians (Acts 15:13-21). He knew that the judgments of Israel were not

⁷⁶Another possibility is that those who do not pass through the screen represent the righteous remnant and all others are the sinful Israelites.

yet over (cf. Matt. 24:1-22; Luke 21:5-24; Acts 1:6-7). He also knew, from this passage and others (Isa. 42:6; 60:3; Mal. 1:11), that when God restored the house of David Gentiles would have a share in that rule as Gentiles. James concluded, therefore, that Gentiles did not need to become Jews to enter into these (millennial) blessings. He did not mean that the church fulfills the promises to Israel but that since Gentiles will experience millennial blessings as Gentiles they do not need to become Jews in the church.

The blessings of the restored kingdom 9:13-15

9:13 In contrast to the images of judgment that Amos had painted throughout this book, days were coming when these terrible conditions would be reversed. The land would become so productive that farmers planting seed for the next harvest would push reapers of the same fields to finish their work so they could plant the next crop. Normally the Israelites plowed their fields in October and the reaping ended in May, but in the future reaping would still be going on in October because of the huge harvests. Wine-makers would similarly push the farmers to sow more seed. The grape harvest took place in August, and farmers planted new vines in November. Harvests would be so abundant that the gathering of one crop would not end before it was time to begin the new crop.

The mountains would be so full of fruitful grapevines that they could be described as dripping with sweet (the best) wine. All the hills would be dissolved in the sense of flowing down with produce, perhaps even washing the soil away with grape juice. This verse pictures the reversing of the curse that God pronounced on the earth at the Fall (Gen. 3:17-19). Instead of drought and famine (1:2; 4:6-8) there would be abundant harvests (cf. Lev. 26:3-5; Deut. 28:4-5, 8, 11-12).

9:14 Yahweh also promised to restore the Israelites to the Promised Land following their captivity and exile from it. They would return to their land and establish life marked by security and joy, abundant food and drink, and beauty and blessing. Such conditions could not occur during wartime (vv. 1, 10; 2:13-16; 3:11, 15; 4:10-11; 5:2-3; 6:9-10; 7:17) but would be possible in peacetime (cf. Lev. 26:6; Deut. 28:6).

9:15 Furthermore the Israelites would put roots down in the Promised Land and never have to leave it again (cf. Gen. 13:14-15; 17:7-8; Deut. 30:1-5; 2 Sam. 7:10; Jer. 30:10-11; Ezek. 37:25; Joel 3:17-21; Mic. 4:4-7; Zech. 14:11). They would not fear exile (4:2-3; 5:5, 27; 6:7; 7:11, 17; 9:4) but would be secure from every foe (cf. Lev. 26:7-8; Deut. 28:7, 10). Yahweh, Israel's true God, promised this.

The end of the Exile saw only a dim foreview of the blessings Amos announced here. Blessings in the church age do not compare either.⁷⁷ Fulfillment has yet to come when God restores the tent of David in Jesus Christ's millennial reign.

"God's promises for the future are anchor points to keep us stable, and to give us hope in times of personal distress and difficulty. The more we understand what God has promised for the future, the more we can endure our problems today."⁷⁸

⁷⁷Amillennialists see the fulfillment in the church age or in heaven.

⁷⁸Dyer, p. 763.

Bibliography

- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic, 1985.
- Andersen, F. I., and D. N. Freedman. *Amos*. Anchor Bible series. New York: Doubleday, 1989.
- Chisholm, Robert B., Jr. "Does God 'Change His Mind'?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):387-99.
- _____. "A Theology of the Minor Prophets." In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 397-433. Edited by Roy B. Zuck. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991.
- Constable, Thomas L. *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995.
- _____. "What Prayer Will and Will Not Change." In *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*. Edited by Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.
- Dyer, Charles H., and Eugene H. Merrill. *The Old Testament Explorer*. Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001.
- Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. Edited by Michael Avi-Yonah and E. Stern. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978.
- Finley, Thomas J. *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*. The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary series. Chicago: Moody Press, 1990.
- Hammershaimb, E. *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1970.
- Hayes, J. H. *Amos*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988.
- Hoffmon, Herbert B. "The Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yada'*." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 181 (February 1966):31-37.
- Hubbard, David A. *Joel and Amos*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries series. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989.
- Josephus, Flavius. *The Works of Flavius Josephus*. Translated by William Whiston. *Antiquities of the Jews*. London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1866.
- Kassis, H. "Gath and the Structure of 'Philistine' Society." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965):259-71.

- Limburg, J. "Sevenfold Structures in the Book of Amos." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987):217-22.
- Mays, J. *Amos: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library series. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969.
- McComiskey, Thomas Edward. "Amos." In *Daniel-Minor Prophets*. Vol. 7 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. 12 vols. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin and Richard P. Polcyn. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985.
- Motyer, J. A. *The Day of the Lion: The Message of Amos*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1974.
- Munro, John "Prayer to a Sovereign God." *Interest* 56:2 (February 1990):20-21.
- Niehaus, Jeff. "Amos." In *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*. 3 vols. Edited by Thomas Edward McComiskey. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992.
- Paul, S. *Amos*. Hermeneia series. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Smith, Billy K., and Frank S. Page. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*. The New American Commentary series. N.c.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.
- Smith, G. *Amos: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989.
- Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah*. Word Biblical Commentary series. Waco: Word Books, 1987.
- Sunukjian, Donald R. "Amos." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, pp. 1425-52. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: Scripture Press Publications, Victor Books, 1985.
- Thomas, D. W., ed. *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.
- Weiss, Meir. "The Pattern of Numerical Sequence in Amos 1—2, A Re-examination." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967):416-23.
- Wolff, H. W. *Joel and Amos*. Hermeneia series. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.
- Yadin, Y., et al. *Hazor II: An Account of the Second Season of Excavations, 1956*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960.

