

NO ESCAPE FROM GOD'S JUDGMENT

Commentary on the Book of Amos

by Paul G. Apple, January 2025

PEOPLE OF PRIVILEGE ARE NOT IMMUNE FROM GOD'S JUDGMENT AND MUST RETURN TO THE LORD IN REPENTANCE TO EXPERIENCE HIS BLESSING

Amos 3:2 *"You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."*

Amos 4:12 *"Therefore thus I will do to you; O Israel, because I will do this to you, Prepare to meet your God, O Israel."*

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF AMOS

GENERAL

People with an impressive spiritual pedigree or important ministry position or years of fruitful Christian service can imagine at times that they are exempt from God's standards. They excuse themselves when they sin – thinking they will not be held to the same high standard of righteousness or that they will somehow escape God's judgment. Here in Amos, God demonstrates that the same severity and justice that He applied to the surrounding nations will be applied to His own people as well. **God does not play favorites.** In fact privilege and accessibility to God's revelation bring greater accountability, not less.

“For to whom much has been given, much will be required.”

Ray Stedman: The message of this book is basically to declare the impartiality of God. God plays no favorites. He makes no allowances for one person that he will not make for others as well. There is no such thing as being God's fair-haired boy. He does not give any more to one than he does to another, in accordance with the promises that he makes. Any who are willing to fulfill the conditions of the promises will find his blessing poured out upon them, regardless of who they are; and any who presume upon these conditions will find him sitting in judgment upon them and his Word condemning them no matter who they are. This is the message of Amos.

Gary Cohen: Amos arrived on the scene of a prosperous nation that was growing in immorality and in indifference toward God and His laws. “Optimism in spite of distant dangers” might have been the headline on the editorial page of the Walls of Samaria Journal on the morning when Amos arrived in the capital city of the Northern Kingdom (Israel). The Southern Kingdom (Judah) was also amid a time of general prosperity, and therefore Amos's message was viewed with irritation by the contented, well-to-do crowds from both halves of the Land of Israel. With business barometers up, despite the usual complaining from the poor and the fanatically religious, warnings of coming, divinely sent troubles seemed almost irrelevant. Amos's yelling about the falling morals of the community appeared to be coming from a Chasid (“pious holy-person”), one out of tune with modern folkways and mores. His message was mere irrelevant chatter. . .

So, the land upon which Amos was about to unleash his message of final warning was one with ironclad military strength. Israel at last had arrived at her dream defensive configuration; she was stronger than her adjacent neighbors in every direction. Not only was Jeroboam II triumphant at last over Syria, Israel's traditional thorn to the north, but Syria was fully occupied with Assyria because she feared that that lion might someday awaken and devour her. Syria was thus Israel's buffer against Assyria; and to the south, Judah was Israel's buffer against Egypt. Then, with the endless Mediterranean Sea to the west and the seemingly impassable Golan mountains to the east, the perfect ring had been formed at last.

Robert Martin-Achard: Amos is not satisfied with merely proclaiming the judgment that God is pronouncing against the northern kingdom. He goes on to justify it by an indictment that

unmasks the hypocrisy of its inhabitants, the venality of its judges (5:10 f), the appetite that Samaria's privileged classes has for the pursuit of pleasure (4:1 f; 6:1 ff), the extent of social oppression in Israel that brought about the humiliation of the needy, the trampling down of the poor, the cheating of the hapless (2:6 ff; 8:4 ff). For a mere nothing, on the ground that *'business is business'*, for just a pair of sandals, see how they go about selling a man who has no resources (2:6; 8:6). The book of Amos is thus **one long accusation against the Israelites**, against the greed of the merchants, the indifference of the authorities (4 f; 6:1 ff; 8:4 ff), the hypocrisy of the public prayers. In short, the northern kingdom is condemned for having **repeatedly violated justice** in contempt for the rights of the most deprived; and so it has witnessed to the contempt in which it actually holds God himself.

James Luther Mays: The message of Amos was: **Next time the fire!** Through him Yahweh said, *'I will send my fire on Damascus, Gaza, Rabbah, Moab – and Israel. The end has come for my people.'* In the last quarter of the eighth century the word became history. The kingdom of Israel passed through four decades of crises, defeats, and assassinations on the way to the abyss, and then was swallowed up by the Assyrian Empire. Amos spoke true. That was one cardinal reason why his sayings were collected and preserved. But that outcome alone does not explain the book. Amos' words were a compelling witness to the God of Israel. His prophecy inaugurated a new epoch of Yahweh's dealing with Israel, for Amos brought the first word of the time of judgment upon the entire nation.

Theo Laetsch: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, four great stars in the galaxy of Old Testament prophets, truly noble men of God, trying—alas, vainly—to stem the flood of iniquity engulfing God's people, and their inevitable ruin. Never has the holy Law of God been preached with greater earnestness and intensity than it was proclaimed by these men, who spared neither rich nor poor, neither young nor old, neither rebel nor hypocrite. And in no other period of the Old Testament era has the Gospel been heralded in language clearer and sweeter than these men spoke by inspiration of God. Yet all their faithful efforts, all their fervent appeals to their countrymen, could not hold back the overwhelming floodwaters of God's judgment sweeping away a people highly favored but unspeakably wicked and ungrateful. Still they continued in their call to repentance and salvation to a hardened generation, seeing but little success, yet faithful to their high calling. Their message is as timely today as it was more than 2,500 years ago. It is God's Word, enduring forever! (*The Minor Prophets*, (p. 136)

S. Lewis Johnson: The subject for today as we begin our series of studies in the Book of Amos is the Shepherd and the Lion. Amos lived in an age of some of the greatest of the Hebrew prophets. In fact, his age has been called the golden age of Hebrew prophecy. In Israel in the north, there was Amos and Hosea ministering there; and then in Judah, Isaiah, perhaps the greatest of the prophets, and Micah as well. That would be enough to justify the study of Amos but there are other reasons as well. An important one is the fact that Amos's society was characterized by -- I'd like for you to notice these words, affluence, exploitation, and religion.

Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible: The message of Amos is needed today as much as ever. In nations throughout the world, God's people are still being persecuted. Even so, every act of persecution against God's beloved people, Jew and Gentile alike, is known to God and will be severely judged. God will take vengeance against His enemies. But note: **judgment begins with**

the house of God. Far too many people who call themselves Christians, even true believers, ignore God's Word and commandments. Or, they seek God only for His blessings or to help in times of trouble. Like the Israelites of Amos's day, some live only to please themselves. Similarly, religion is still heartless and the religious still halfhearted. Wealthy nations and churches still hoard their wealth as much as ever. The rich still neglect, oppress, and exploit the poor. Injustice still dominates most nations and institutions. And most societies are more corrupt and ungodly than ever. God has judged nations and His own people for these sins in the past. And He will do so again. The great book of Amos has forewarned us. Let us all have ears to hear and hearts willing to obey his message. May God richly bless you as you study the timeless message of Amos.....The Christological or Christ-Centered Purpose: like the prophet Joel, Amos does not mention the Messiah or Jesus Christ directly. But the kingdom of Christ is clearly pictured in the **promise of Israel's restoration**. Christ is the One who will establish God's kingdom on earth, an eternal kingdom of peace and prosperity (**Amos 9:11–15**; see also **Mt. 13:41**; **Lu. 1:33**; **He. 1:8**; **Re. 11:15**).

Anthony Petterson: The book of Amos shows that God is much more concerned with how people treat one another than whether they stage elaborate worship and live affluent lives. God wanted his people, the Israelites, to reflect his character in the way they lived together as his people. They would do this by following his requirements set out in the national covenant, established at Mount Sinai. Toward the end of his life, Moses expressed concern that when the Israelites experienced prosperity in the promised land, they would forget the Lord and his ways (see **Dt 8**). In Amos's day (the middle of the 8th century BC), Israel was prosperous, and sadly, Moses' concern proved true. Amos argues that the Israelites were in many ways behaving worse than the nations around them. Amos highlights the way Israel had rejected the law of the Lord, particularly by their idolatry and religious hypocrisy. The book challenges readers about these issues today.

AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING, DATE

J. Vernon McGee: Amos' prophetic ministry took place during the reigns of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, and Uzziah, king of Judah. He was contemporary with Jonah and Hosea who were prophets in the northern kingdom of Israel and with Isaiah and Micah who were prophets in the southern kingdom of Judah.

David Guzik: The name **Amos** means *burden* or *burden bearer*. Since most of the prophecies of Amos concern coming judgment on either the nations surrounding Israel or judgment on Israel itself, he was a man with a *burden*. . .

Mark Copeland:

NAME - Amos means "*burden-bearer*"

HOME - The village of Tekoa

- a. 12 miles south of Jerusalem, 18 miles west of the Dead Sea
- b. Near the wilderness of Judea, a very rugged area

-- So while he was in Judah, he primarily prophesied against Israel in the north

OCCUPATION - "a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit."

- a. An outdoorsman, accustomed to the wilds of nature, and of hard, honest toil
- b. It would be easy for him to have little sympathy for the lazy and materialistic conduct of his northern kinsman

CHARACTER

- a. Not known for his sympathy or warmth, but for his sense of justice and right
- b. "Not a sob is to be found in his book for the nation of wicked apostates, and there is only a sigh for the poor" (Hailey)

http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/mp/mp_06.htm

William Harper: His spirituality, which was intense, consisted in loyalty to the truth and in antagonism to error, in recognizing the character of Yahweh as spiritual, and as wholly inconsistent with that character the round of ritualistic routine which, in his day, constituted worship. The preacher who said, "*Seek me and live*," was a preacher, not only of righteousness, but also of the truest spirituality.

Thomas McComiskey: Above all, Amos was a prophet. The dark days in which he lived called for a man of sturdy moral fiber and fearlessness. Such a man was Amos. His character, molded in the harsh terrain of the wilderness of Tekoa, enabled him to stand before priests and people alike to proclaim the word God had given to him.

Douglas Smith: Background on the Prophet

(Adapted from: **Donald R. Sunukjian** -- *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

Before Amos began prophesying, he had been one of the "shepherds" of Tekoa, a town in the hill country of Judah about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. The word used for "shepherds" in **1:1** is not the usual Hebrew word *roeh*, but the rare word *noqe*, suggesting instead "sheep breeders." Amos evidently managed or owned large herds of sheep and goats, and was in charge of other shepherds.

In **Amos 7:14** the prophet further described himself as "*a shepherd*" and as one who "*took care of sycamore-fig trees*." This word for "shepherd," *bôqer*, occurs only here in the Old Testament, and describes a "herdsman" or "cattleman."

Besides overseeing his livestock operations, Amos was also occupied in growing sycamore fruit, presumably as a sideline. The sycamore-fig tree was a broad heavy tree, 25 to 50 feet high, which produced a fig-like fruit three or four times a year. The sycamore did not grow in the heights of Tekoa, but only in the warmer lowlands, as the Jordan Valley and the fertile oases by the Dead Sea. Both of these places were near enough to Tekoa for Amos to supervise the taking care of the trees (**7:14**)—a technical term that describes the process of slitting or scratching the forming fruit so that some juice runs out, allowing the rest of the fig to ripen into a sweeter, more edible fruit.

The three terms together indicate that Amos, as a breeder, rancher, and farmer, was a substantial and respected man in his community.

Anthony Petterson: Amos was not a professional prophet paid by the king; he was a shepherd and agriculturalist whom God called to proclaim his word to his people (**Am 1:1; 78:14-15**). Many of his prophetic images reflect knowledge of shepherding and farming (see **3:4-5, 8, 12; 4:9; 5:16-17; 7:1; 9:13-14**). He was from the small city of Tekoa in the region of Judah (**1:1**). In his day, the kingdom of Israel was divided, and Amos prophesied mainly against the northern kingdom of Israel, mentioning the sins of northern towns (e.g., Samaria, Bethel, Gilgal, Beersheba, Dan). A short narrative later in the book records the priest of Bethel telling Amos to go back to Judah (**7:12**). Tensions between the northern and southern kingdoms are not far from the surface in the book. Yet the book sets out God's priority for Judah. It begins with the Lord roaring from his dwelling in Zion/Jerusalem (**Amos 1:2**) and ends with the restoration of Davidic rule over Israel and all the nations who bear the name of the Lord (**9:11-13**).

Trent Butler: Amos [prophesied] during the reigns of King Uzziah of Judah (792–740 B.C.) and King Jeroboam II of Israel (793–753) (**Amos 1:1**). But that is the only information we have about the date of his ministry except that it was two years before the earthquake (**Amos 1:1**). Archaeologists have found evidence of an earthquake in the excavations at Hazor that could have happened about 750 B.C. Long years later Zechariah (**Zech. 14:4–5**) remembered this earthquake. The Jewish historian Josephus connects the quake with the illness of King Uzziah about 760. Amos apparently addressed the nation of Israel at the highest point of its political power, which would be shortly after Jeroboam II restored Israel's boundaries to those described by Amos in **6:14**. This also was around 760 B.C. (**2 Kgs. 13:23–25**).

Mark Kirkpatrick: During the time of Jeroboam 2nd the nation of Israel became **rich**. There were several reasons for this. In 805 BC, the Assyrians beat the Syrians in war. The Syrians became weak and so they were not able to fight against Israel's people. Also, the Assyrians did not try to take authority over Israel's people. Because of these things, Jeroboam took the chance to make his borders larger. The country became as big as it had been in the time of Solomon. Perhaps **Amos 6:13** shows that the Israelites became proud of their success in war. Because of this success, they could control the trade routes. The nation became rich by this. The people thought that they would always be wealthy.

Gary Cohen: In spite of all Amos's adverse characteristics—simple occupation, simple diet, no formal religious credentials, legally a foreigner to the Northern Kingdom—he was the man whom God called to rebuke Samaria, with her royalty, pomp, and false priestcraft.

Allen Guenther: The approach in this commentary will be to read Amos as a literary whole without proceeding through the exercise of sorting out what parts may be original, the creation of others, or the work of an editor. The assumption is that the received text is essentially the product of Amos's Israelite ministry in the mid-eighth century and that the editors are faithful to God's intent in their Spirit-guided task.

Allen Guenther: The country prospered: ivory was the stuff of status (**3:15; 6:4**). The citizens—at least the ones who counted—had time to enjoy the summer cottage (**3:15**), custom-built homes

(5:11), the best in dining pleasure (6:4, 6), rich moisturizing skin oils (6:6), and the fine arts (6:5). Vineyards flourished on the large estates (5:11). The grain exchange did a booming business; there were profits to be made (8:5-6).

Religious practice was at an all-time high. Regular services were held at all the main centers of worship (4:4-5; 5:21-22). The music was excellent, the liturgy expressive, and the people were generous with their offerings (4:4; 5:23; 8:3). Meanwhile, the priestly leadership kept close watch to ensure that the preaching built up the people's spirits and promoted the welfare of the nation (7:10-13).

Lloyd Ogilvie: The long reign of Jeroboam II (786–746 B.C.) was a time of prosperity for Israel, as it was for Judah during the contemporary reign of Uzziah (783-742 B.C.). Israel and Judah were able to subdue neighboring nations and extend their borders nearly to the outlines of Solomon's kingdom (2 Kin. 14:25; cf. 1 Kin. 8:65). The larger powers of Egypt and Assyria were preoccupied with problems closer to home, so that Palestine was free from foreign domination, though this was soon to change.

With the extended territory and conditions of peace, Israel and Judah enjoyed increased trade and the revenue generated by controlling major trade routes. Archaeological evidence confirms the wealth of Samaria during this period. Israel and Judah were at their economic and political peak.

Such a climate was bound to breed optimism and a confidence in the prospects for the future. The nation doubtless regarded its prosperity as a sign of God's favor and a confirmation of their policies and practices. The prophets Amos and Hosea gave a vastly different evaluation of the situation and predicted the catastrophe which would come with surprising quickness.

Bob Utley: Social Setting:

1. It was a time of economic prosperity and military expansion for both Israel and Judah. However, this prosperity was beneficial only to the wealthy class. The poor and middle classes were exploited and abused. It almost seems that "the buck and the gun" became additional idols!
2. The social stability and property of both Israel and Judah are related to several causes:
 1. the long and prosperous reigns of Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.) in the north and Uzziah (783-742 B.C.) in the south
 2. the temporary decline of Egypt and Mesopotamia
 3. Assyrians' defeat of Syria by Adad-Nirari III in 805 B.C.
 4. the lack of conflict between Israel and Judah
 5. the taxation and exploitation of the trade routes from north to south through the land bridge of Palestine caused rapid economic growth, even extravagance for the wealthy class
3. The "Ostraca of Samaria," which are dated during the reign of Jeroboam II seem to indicate an administrative organization much like Solomon's. This seems to confirm the widening gap between the haves and have nots.
4. The dishonesty of the wealthy is clearly depicted in Amos, who is called "the prophet of social justice." The bribery of the judiciary and the falsification of commercial weights

are two clear examples of the abuse that was common, apparently in both Israel and Judah.

Religious Setting:

1. It was a time of much outward religious activity, but very little true faith. The fertility cults of Canaan had been amalgamated into Israel's religion. The people were idolaters, but they called it YHWHism. The trend of God's people toward political alliances had involved them in pagan worship and practices.
2. The idolatry of Israel is spelled out in **2 Kgs. 17:7-18**.
 1. **v. 8**, they followed the worship practices of the Canaanites
 - (1) fertility worship
 - (a) high places, **2 Kgs. 17:9,10,11**
 - (b) sacred pillars (Ba'al), **2 Kgs. 17:10,16**
 - (c) Asherim, **2 Kgs. 17:16**, these were wooden symbols of the female consort of Ba'al. They were either curved stakes or live trees.
 - (2) divination, **2 Kgs. 17:17**, this is discussed in detail in **Lev. 19-20** and **Deut. 18**.
 2. **2 Kgs. 17:16**, they continued the worship of the two golden calves, symbolizing YHWH, set up at Dan and Bethel by Jeroboam I (**1 Kgs. 12:28-29**).
 3. **2 Kgs. 17:16**, they worshiped the astral deities of Babylon: sun, moon, stars, and constellations.
 4. **2 Kgs. 17:18**, they worshiped the Phoenician fertility fire god, Molech (cf. **Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5**).
3. Ba'alism (cf. **W. F. Albright's** *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 82ff).
 1. Our best source is "Ba'al Epic of Ugarit."
 - (1) Depicts *Ba'al* as a seasonal dying and rising god. He was defeated by *Mot* and confined to the underworld.

All life on earth ceased. But, helped by the female goddess, he rises and defeats *Mot* each spring. He is a fertility deity who was worshiped by imitation magic.
 - (2) He was also known as Hadad (name of Syrian rulers). Many Syrian kings were called by this name.
 2. *El* is the chief deity of the Canaanite pantheon, but *Ba'al's* popularity usurped his place.
 3. Israel was most influenced by Tyrian Ba'alism through Jezebel, who was the daughter of the King of Tyre. She was chosen by Omri for his son Ahab.
 4. In Israel Ba'al was worshiped at local high places. He was symbolized by an uplifted stone. His consort is *Asherah*, symbolized by a carved stake symbolizing the tree of life.
4. Several sources and types of idolatry are mentioned:
 1. the golden calves at Bethel and Dan set up by Jeroboam I to worship YHWH
 2. the worship of the Tyrian fertility god and goddess at local high places
 3. the necessary idolatry involved in political alliances of that day. . .
5. Israel was falsely trusting in:
 1. her religion, **Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-23**

2. her economic prosperity, **Amos 6:1ff**
3. her military power, **Amos 2:14-16; 6:1b, 13**

LITERARY STYLE:

Allen Guenther: The book of Amos is **stylistically rich and creative**. It includes judgment speeches (**1:3—2:15**), hymn fragments (**4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6**), historical recital (**4:6-11**), vision reports (**7:1-9**), a lament (**5:2**), wisdom sayings (**5:13; 6:12**), a parable (**6:9-11**), and disputations (**2:9-11; 3:3-8; 5:18-20; 9:7**). An artful use of rhetorical devices include irony (**4:4-5**), understatement (**4:12**), play on words (**8:1-2**), quotation of the hearer's words for dramatic effect (**4:1**), and repetition in the form of chiasmus to center the reader's attention (**5:1-17**).

Strength and beauty merge in the **sensory imagery** of **Amos 3-9**. The four chapters (3-6) punctuated with the **proclamation** *Hear this word* capture the imagination with language pertaining to sound, speech, and smell—and the corresponding parts of human anatomy. A subliminal message reinforces the herald's public announcements. Nearly forty such references dot these chapters. Lions *roar*, the trumpet *sounds*, God *reveals his secrets*, witnesses *testify*, and the women of Samaria *speak* to their husbands. The Lord *swears*, the priests *announce* the time for freewill offerings, farmers *lament*, and the populace hates the one who *reproves* in the gate. Their festivals are filled with *songs and harps*, and their houses are built of *hewn* stone. The prudent *keep silent* in such an evil time, and the one who comes to bury the dead is warned, *Hush! We must not mention the name of the Lord*. In related language, the shepherd rescues from the *mouth of the lion* two legs, or a piece of an *ear*; the houses of *ivory (tusks)* will perish, and the women will be led out with *fishhooks implanted (in their lips?)*. Famine brings cleanness of *teeth*, they lie on beds of *ivory*, and they turn justice into *poison*.

Amos 7-9 convey God's truth in five visions. While speech is common, visual images dominate. Related language denotes space, dimension, location, motion, and direction; it provides backdrop, foreground, and action. In the visions, grass *sprouts*, fire *burns*, a plumb line *hangs in total silence*.

Robert Martin-Achard: Amos' utterances were, then, first of all **spoken**; they were intended to be heard with all their intonations, their plays on words, their rhythms, their associations of sounds and images. All this oratorical art was employed by the prophet to make himself into Yahweh's spokesman in face of the people of Samaria and Bethel. Our best translations, even when rendered as faithfully as possible, reproduce his utterances only imperfectly. We need take only one example. One day Amos sees a basket of ripe fruit, fruits ripened at the end of summer, *qaitis*. He discovers at the same moment that Yahweh is announcing the end, *qets*, of Israel. The time is ripe for the judgment of a people that is clearly intractable before its God (**8:1-2**).

As much as possible, then, we in our turn should speak these prophetic utterances; we should not be content with just reading them with our eyes. We should proclaim them, using our voice, our breath, our whole body, so that they imprint themselves upon us and become our very flesh!

James Luther Mays: Beyond the primary forms determined by his message and the controversy which it provoked Amos knew the art of appropriating a variety of other speech-forms as the vehicle of what he had to say. His speeches display a remarkable skill at using all the devices of oral literature available in Israel's culture. He sang a funeral dirge for Israel in anticipation of its doom (5.1–2), and formulated woe-sayings as a way of marking certain kinds of action as those which lead to death (5.18; 6.1; 5.7?). He used several forms that belonged to the priest to mimic and attack the cult of the nation (4.4f.; 5.4, 21–24, 14f.?). He was especially adept at the employment of forms of speech that appear in the riddles, comparisons, and popular proverbs of folk wisdom. He used the graduated numbers-saying in the oracles against the nations (1.3, 6, 9, etc.), argued with the logic of proverbs (3.3–6), used comparisons and riddles to make his point (2.9; 3.12; 5.2, 7, 19, 24; 6.12; 9.9). Many of his metaphors come from observation of the country life which he knew as shepherd and farmer (1.3; 2.13; 3.12; 4.1; 9.9). But countryman from Tekoa though he was, his rich and polished speech warn that he is not to be taken for a simple and uncultured person. **No prophet surpasses him in the combination of purity, clarity, and versatility that characterize his language.**

Perhaps his art is most apparent in the three composite sayings, in which Amos takes a form and, by using its structure in a series of sayings, creates a sequence of increasing emphasis and urgency that builds to a climax. The oracles against the nations lead up to the oracle against Israel (1.3 – 2.16). The recitation of the ineffective curses prepares for the announcement of a decisive intervention by Yahweh (4.6–12). The vision reports move in order from the forbearance of God to the revelation that the end has come for Israel (7.1–9; 8.1–3).

Billy Smith: Amos employed a **wealth of rhetorical forms** in bringing God's message to Israel. Speech forms in the book include (1) messenger formulae: “*this is what the LORD says*,” “*says the LORD*”; (2) an oracle formula: “*declares the LORD*”; and (3) vision-reports introduced by “*this is what the Sovereign LORD showed me*.” These speech forms cite the source of the prophet's authority and, at the same time, present his credentials as a prophet. Amos went to Israel under divine appointment to bear strong messages of judgment and hope.

Other features are (1) graded numerical sayings: “*for three sins of..., even for four*” (e.g., 1:3,6,9); (2) participial style: “*you women who oppress*” (4:1); (3) quotation of the audience: “*and say to your husbands, ‘Bring us some drinks’*” (4:1); (4) climactic patterns (1:3-2:16; 4:6-12); (5) woe oracles (5:18-20; 6:1-7); and (6) wordplays: “*a basket of ripe fruit*” in 5:5b and “*the time is ripe*” in 8:1-3.

Additional features of language use in Amos include (1) oath formula (4:2; 6:8; 8:7); (2) antithesis (5:4-5); (3) richness of imagery (2:13); (4) disputation (3:3-8; 9:7-10); and (5) curse formula (7:17). These features of language give convincing evidence that Amos was familiar with the best wisdom, priestly, and prophetic forms of rhetoric. Such use of rhetorical forms must have enhanced the power and attractiveness of his verbal presentations as it does his literary work. The first audiences of the spoken and written messages of the prophet must have resonated readily with his rhetorical forms typically used by wisdom teachers, priests, and prophets. The book offers a striking display of language use.

PURPOSE OF WRITING

Trent Butler: Amos has one central point: Israel must “*prepare to meet your God*” (**Amos 4:12**). The Lord's people have forsaken him and created a life opposed to everything God taught them. They must face the future with fear, because God “*will punish you for all your sins*” (**Amos 3:2**). God disciplined them and sought to bring them to repentance (**Amos 4:6–11**). They are beginning to see disasters around them and should know that only God is capable of causing such troubles (**Amos 2:3–6**).

John Goldingay: As far as we know, he was the first prophet to confront either Ephraim or Judah as a whole with a fundamental critique of its life and worship, with a declaration that Yahweh intended to bring terrible calamity to the nation, and with an exhortation therefore to have real recourse to him. Over against Elijah and Elisha and Hosea and Isaiah, his focus lies not on questions of worship or politics but on human beings’ treatment of one another, on the way people are constantly being hurt by other people, and on the way God then “inflexibly and relentlessly” champions and defends them.

Allen Guenther: Amos exposed Israel’s success for what it was—a temporary reprieve from certain destruction—unless ... the nation repented (**5:15**). The perhaps of Amos’s prophetic visions and divine pronouncements penetrate the facade of hewn stone and the curtain of wealth to probe the social structures and spiritual condition of this people.

The prophet Amos described the situation. Taxes were a burden to the average landholder (**7:1-6**). The capital city and the public administration in Samaria were the main beneficiaries (**3:9-10**) of taxation. Fines (**2:8**) and exactions (**5:11**) further handicapped the subsistence farmer and sharecropper. A crop failure would result in mortgage foreclosures and ultimately in the sale of persons to debt-slavery (**2:6; 5:11; 8:6**). The poor were dismissed as an expendable commodity (**8:4**). The weight of the national budget and the imposition of surcharges and penalties favored the rich, many of whom probably occupied government posts or contracted for government services.

Added to officially sanctioned financial costs were the manipulation of the judicial system (**2:7; 5:5, 12**) and deception in the exchange of goods (**8:5**). The poor person had no real access to justice when the only legal recourse was to appeal to the very rich who also sat as judges in the local courts (**2:7; 5:7, 12, 15**). Corruption was rampant. Power prevailed. Those at the bottom end of the economic ladder were pawns to be used and discarded at will (**8:4-6**). Structural injustice (**2:7; 5:7, 12**), personal unrighteousness (**8:5-6**), and conspicuous consumption (**6:5-6**) had become the hallmark of the day.

J. Alec Motyer: His message is relevant, humbling and frightening. It rebukes the ‘eleven and six-thirty’ of our formalism; it offers the salutary reminder that a tradition of the church may have lasted two hundred years only to be as false at the end as it was at the beginning; it insists that the church loses the centrality of the Word of God to its eternal peril; it exposes the sin of religious self-pleasing; it describes a religion which is abhorrent to God and calls for its replacement by a resting upon divine grace in faith and repentance, a commitment to God’s law

in obedience, and a ceaseless concern for the needy among men. Without these, there is nothing so effective as religion to separate us from God's love and to cement us to His wrath. . .

First, Amos insisted that **privilege brings peril (3:2)**. The claim of the day clearly was that privilege brings security. They had been privileged to have direct dealings with God (2:9—11). At certain dates in the historical past God had shown that He was on their side. The particular stress of Amos is this: the nearer to God the closer the scrutiny and the more certain the judgment. Far from their privilege saving them, more will be required from those to whom more has been given; the greater the light the greater the risk. The church is not exempt from judgment; far from it, the judgment begins and rages most severely there.

Secondly, **past history cannot take the place of present spiritual and moral commitment**. A stale testimony of what happened years ago is like a lesson in history. God looks for up-to-date commitment to Himself (5:6), to moral values (5:14, 15), to personal and social ethics (5:24).

The third emphasis in Amos' message to the church is that **religious profession and religious practice are invalid—to be more precise, repulsive to God and therefore not just useless but also dangerous—unless verified by clear evidences**. Throughout his book, by implication, but in a succinct fashion in 7:7 — 8:10, Amos makes clear what the evidences of true religion are. It is the task of the expository studies at that point to explain them, but here they are in summary. In personal terms, true religion is to respond fully to the grace and law of God, living out the law in a life of obedience, resting on the grace both for ability and forgiveness; towards God, true religion is a reverent hearing and receiving of His Word; and towards other people it appears as honesty, considerateness and unfailing concern for the needy. Take these things away and what remains does nothing more than invite the adverse judgment of God.

Gary Smith: Amos did not preach political revolution or lead the poor on economic boycotts. One might assume that the poor appreciated his criticisms of the injustices against them, but there is no indication in his sermons of any support from among the poor. His main purpose was not to lobby for economic revolt by the poor; he was sent to announce God's judgment on Israel and to call for spiritual transformation that would influence economic, social, and religious behavior. . .

His mission or commission is to “*go, prophesy to my people Israel*” (7:15), but the key themes in his sermons suggest that his central responsibility is to warn the people about God's roaring attack that will bring the nation to an end (2:13–16; 3:8, 11; 5:2, 18, 27; 6:7, 14; 7:9, 11, 17; 8:3). This is astonishing news, for the people of God think that God loves them and will protect them from foreign threats. This news of the demise of the nation seems an impossibility for a rich and powerful nation like Israel. It runs contrary to everything the people have been taught and everything they are presently experiencing. This message seems out of touch with reality.

Amos wants people to rethink their theology and change their view of God's dealings with Israel. Thus, he has several themes or strategies in his preaching.

(1) Amos questions the prevalent view that Israel has a sacred, untouchable, and indestructible status based on ancient covenant and Day of the Lord traditions (3:1–2; 5:18–20).

(2) He probes the true nature of the people's worship of God. Is it a genuine turning to God or something different (4:4–5; 5:21–26)?

(3) He draws the attention of the wealthy in the land to the violence and injustices that they perpetrate (2:6–12; 4:1–3; 5:11–14; 8:4–6). If they see this behavior as unacceptable to God, maybe they will “*hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts*” (5:15).

(4) He attempts to destroy the upper classes' trust in their wealth, pride in their military achievements, and security in their grand homes (6:1–14). These cannot save anyone, and each will be taken away if the nation does not change.

(5) He reminds everyone that the coming destruction of the nation of Israel does not mean that God's covenant promises will never be fulfilled. The promised time of peace and prosperity will come in the future, sometime after Israel's destruction (9:11–15).

MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY

John Goldingay: Amos's distinctive theological theme is his proclamation concerning God's involvement with the nations among whom Israel lives its life. In other respects his theology parallels that of other prophets, but this theme makes him stand out. It is the focus of his opening chapter or two; it then reappears in his closing chapter. He declares that Yahweh is sovereign over all the peoples over which he cares to exercise sovereignty, and in this connection he names a sequence of peoples around Israel in 1:3 – 2:3. There is no question of deities that other peoples worship having any capacity to provide for their peoples or to protect them. These peoples are beneficiaries of Yahweh's goodness, they are responsible to live in light of his expectations, and they are liable to his discipline if they fail to do so. “The real reason for Yahweh's authority over the other nations is suggested in **Amos 9:7**”: he brought the Philistines from Kaphtor and the Aramaeans from Qir, as well as the Israelites from Egypt. He has shown grace to them as to Israel, and he has the right to have expectations of them.

Chuck Swindoll: More than almost any other book of Scripture, the book of Amos holds God's people accountable for their ill-treatment of others. It repeatedly points out the failure of the people to fully embrace God's idea of justice. They were selling off needy people for goods, taking advantage of the helpless, oppressing the poor, and the men were using women immorally (**Amos 2:6–8; 3:10; 4:1; 5:11–12; 8:4–6**). Drunk on their own economic success and intent on strengthening their financial position, the people had lost the concept of caring for one another; Amos rebuked them because he saw in that lifestyle evidence that Israel had forgotten God.

With the people of Israel in the north enjoying an almost unparalleled time of success, God decided to call a quiet shepherd and farmer to travel from his home in the less sinful south and carry a message of judgment to the Israelites. The people in the north used Amos's status as a foreigner as an excuse to ignore his message of judgment for a multiplicity of sins.

However, while their outer lives gleamed with the rays of success, their inner lives sank into a pit of moral decay. Rather than seeking out opportunities to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly, they embraced their arrogance, idolatry, self-righteousness, and materialism. Amos communicated God's utter disdain for the hypocritical lives of His people (**Amos 5:21–24**). His prophecy concludes with only a brief glimpse of restoration, and even that is directed to Judah, rather than the northern kingdom of Israel (**9:11–15**).

Tchavdar S. Hadjiev: The central accusation that Amos levies against Israel is related to the **practice of justice**. The audience are charged with violence and oppression of the poor (**2:6–8; 3:10; 4:1; 5:10–12; 8:4–6**) and, more generally, with disregarding justice and righteousness (**5:7, 24; 6:12**). *Justice* (*mišpāṭ*) has decidedly legal connotations. It often refers to judicial decisions, and the laws and rules that were based on them. *Righteousness* (*šēdāqā*) describes the moral standards to which behaviour in the context of communal life and personal relationships needs to conform. These standards are held to be a self-evident part of the moral fabric of creation (**NIDOTTE** 3.743–769). When used together *mišpāṭ ūšēdāqā* form a hendiadys the meaning of which goes well beyond the legal sphere. **Weinfeld** (1995: 7–44) has shown that the phrase points to the concept of **social justice** and includes in its domain of meaning not just fair judicial process and refraining from oppression, but also positive actions to support the poor and vulnerable members of society. According to Ezekiel, to do *mišpāṭ ūšēdāqā* ('*justice and righteousness*'; cf. **18:5**) involves giving bread to the hungry and clothing the naked (**18:7**).

Moreover, justice and righteousness have a **cosmic dimension**. They are the foundation of God's throne (**Ps. 89:14**) and a gift that God passes onto the king of Israel (**Ps. 72:1**). This gift to the king results not only in defence and deliverance of the poor but also in prosperity (*šālôm*), rains and abundant harvest (**Ps. 72:1–7, 16**). So justice and righteousness are not only the conduct which seeks the good of the community but also the blessings that result from it. More broadly, they are the principle of order and harmony established by God in creation which encompasses both the 'natural world' and the social, political and economic sphere of human existence (**Houston** 2010: 37–41; 2017: 35).

Israel's violation of the divinely established moral order of the universe takes different forms: physical violence, driving people into debt bondage and slavery, sexual abuse, corruption and bribery, and imposition of a heavy tax load. These actions were not all necessarily 'illegal' but they were definitely **immoral**. Amos does not appear as a champion of the law. He challenges the law and the actions of the elite on the basis of a **higher moral standard** to which people are accountable. The existence of such a standard can be seen most clearly in the OAN (**Barton** 2012: 57–61, 67–69). They condemn Israel's neighbours for inhumane acts and extreme cruelty. The assumption is that a basic standard of human behaviour exists, which at the very least requires people not to abuse and exploit others for their own benefit. Amos expects everyone to be aware of this standard and to adhere to it.

Thomas McComiskey: The Doctrine of God –

Central in Amos's teaching about God is his divine sovereignty. Yahweh is the God of history. He effects the migrations of peoples (**9:7**) and controls the orderly progression of natural phenomena (**4:13; 5:8**). He is in no way a mere automaton controlled by the religious rituals of

his creatures. Yet within that sovereign domain, humankind has freedom to bow in submission to Yahweh or to reject him.

The Doctrine of Election –

Amos affirms the historical election of Israel (3:2). But he inveighs against the perverted concept of election popularly held in his day—that is, the irrevocable commitment of Yahweh to the nation. Their election alone did not guarantee national blessing, for the sovereign Lord had promised they would be his “*treasured possession*” if they obeyed him and kept his covenant (Ex 19:5). Amos, more than any other prophet, **urges the responsibility of elective privilege.**

Eschatology –

The unique contribution of Amos to the eschatology of the OT is his teaching about “*the day of the LORD.*” He stresses that it will be a time when the Lord will judge all sin, even in his own people. The gloomy portrayal of that day in the prophecy of Amos reflects the fact that Amos’s hearers are for the most part guilty of transgression. For them that day will hold no ray of light (5:18–20).

Another day is coming, however, when hope will shine with glorious promise (9:13–15). The Davidic promise will be realized in the **restoration of David’s kingdom**, and Jews and Gentiles will be united in the kingdom of David’s greater Son.

Billy Smith: The End for Israel –

The prophet’s message of the imminent destruction of Israel was based on Israel’s sin. Amos indicted various segments of the population: greedy land-grabbers (2:6); the rich (3:10,15; 6:4-6); the women of Samaria (4:1); religious frauds (4:4-5; 5:4-7,21-23); the merchants (8:4-6); and those responsible for injustice in the courts (2:7; 5:7,10,12; 6:12). The message of Amos was that Israel would not survive the judgment of God (2:13-16; 3:11-12; 5:2,18-20; 6:7,14; 7:8; 8:2; 9:1-4,8a). Israel, the Northern Kingdom, did not survive the assault of the Assyrians in 725-722 B.C. (2 Kgs 17). That attack was the judgment of God upon his people Israel.

The Judgment upon Sin –

The end of Israel as a nation may be traced backwards through God’s judgment to the root cause in the nation’s sin against God. Israel’s privileged relationship as people of God did not shield them from the judgment of God. From the vivid imagery of a bloodcurdling roar of the Lord (1:2) to the word of Israel’s destruction “*from the face of the earth*” (9:8), the prophet’s message of judgment upon sin is persistent. Amos proclaimed God’s judgment upon the nations because of their sins. He singled out groups of people within Israel, as well as one individual (Amaziah), who would suffer the judgment of God because of their sins.

God’s people face a day of judgment for their sin. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad*” (2 Cor 5:10). All nations and all people face a day of accounting to God for their sin, and “*the wages of sin is death*” (Rom 6:23).

INTERPRETATIVE CHALLENGE:

John MacArthur: In **9:11**, the Lord promised that He “*will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down.*” At the Jerusalem Council, convened to discuss whether Gentiles should be allowed into the church without requiring circumcision, James quotes this passage (**Acts 15:15,16**) to support Peter’s report of how God had “*visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name*” (**Acts 15:14**). Some have thus concluded that the passage was fulfilled in Jesus, the greater Son of David, through whom the dynasty of David was reestablished. The Acts reference, however, is **best seen as an illustration of Amos’ words and not the fulfillment.** The temporal allusions to a future time (“*On that day,*” **9:11**), when Israel will “*possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles*” (**9:12**), when the Lord “*will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them*” (**9:15**), all make it clear that the prophet is speaking of Messiah’s return at the Second Advent to sit upon the throne of David (cf. **Is. 9:7**), not the establishment of the church by the apostles.

STRUCTURE

M. Daniel Carroll R.:

I. Preface (1:1–2)

- A. Superscription (1:1)
- B. Summary Oracle (1:2)

II. The Oracles against the Nations (1:3 – 2:16)

- A. Oracle against Damascus (1:3–5)
- B. Oracle against Philistia (1:6–8)
- C. Oracle against Tyre (1:9–10)
- D. Oracle against Edom (1:11–12)
- E. Oracle against Ammon (1:13–15)
- F. Oracle against Moab (2:1–3)
- G. Oracle against Judah (2:4–5)
- H. Oracle against Israel (2:6–16)

III. The Words of God and the Prophet to Israel (3:1 – 6:14)

- A. Divine Exposure of Israel’s Guilt (3:1 – 4:13)
 - 1. Two Tales of One City (3:1 – 4:3)
 - 2. Love Can Be Blind (4:4–13)
- B. Prophetic Lament for the Death of Israel (5:1 – 6:14)
 - 1. What’s in a Name? (5:1–17)
 - 2. The Delusion of Religion (5:18–27)
 - 3. The Delusion of Power (6:1–14)

IV. Visions of Israel’s Future (7:1 – 9:15)

- A. Two Visions of Natural Disaster (7:1–6)
- B. A Vision of Military Defeat (7:7–17)

1. Vision: Tin Fortresses (7:7–9)
2. Expansion: The Confrontation at Bethel (7:10–17)
- C. A Vision of Religious Failure (8:1–14)
 1. Vision: A Basket of Disaster (8:1–3)
 2. Expansion: The Cost of Religious Perversion (8:4–14)
- D. A Vision of Divine Sovereignty in Judgment (9:1–15)
 1. Vision: The Shaking of the Temple (9:1–6)
 2. Expansion: The Hope beyond the Ruins (9:7–15)

Gary Cohen:

- I. Author and Theme of the Book (1:1-2)**

- II. Judgment Against the Heathen Nations (1:3—2:16)**
 - A. Against Syria (1:3-5)
 - B. Against the Philistines (1:6-8)
 - C. Against Tyre (1:9-10)
 - D. Against Edom (1:11-12)
 - E. Against Ammon (1:13-15)
 - F. Against Moab (2:1-3)

- III. Judgment Against God’s Chosen People (2:4-16)**
 - A. Against Judah (2:4-5)
 - B. Against Israel (2:6-16)
 1. Israel’s waywardness (2:6-8)
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 3. Israel’s perfidy (2:12-13)
 4. Israel’s judgment certain (2:14-16)

- IV. Amos’s Sermons Against Israel (3:1—6:14)**
 - A. Judgment announced against Israel (3:1-8)
 1. The betrothal of Israel to God (3:1-2)
 2. The bisection of Israel from God (3:3)
 3. The prophet’s bemoaning of the separation (3:4-8)
 - B. Samaria’s coming doom (3:9-15)
 1. The prophet summons the enemies (3:9)
 2. The belligerence of the people of Samaria (3:10)
 3. The banishment of Samaria and Israel (3:11-15)
 - C. Samaria’s failure to heed God’s chastenings (4:1-13)
 1. Your cows will collapse (4:1-3)
 2. Your ceremonies will cease (4:4-5)
 3. Your chastisement has called (4:6-11)
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 - D. Samaria’s false religion condemned (5:1-27)
 1. God’s dirge for Israel (5:1-3)
 2. God’s directions to Israel (5:4-7)
 3. God’s deity over Israel (5:8-9)

4. God's dismay over Israel (5:10-13)
 5. God's demands for Israel (5:14-15)
 6. God's drawing near to Israel (5:16-20)
 7. God's denial of Israel (5:21-26)
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- E. Samaria's ease to be turned to suffering (6:1-14)
1. God's message to those at ease in Zion—calamity coming (6:1-3)
 2. God's message to those in luxury in Samaria—exile coming (6:4-7)
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 4. God's message to those confident in Israel—affliction coming (6:12-14)

V. Amos's Visions of Coming Judgment (7:1—9:15)

- A. Vision of the locust swarm (7:1-3)
- B. Vision of the fire (7:4-6)
- C. Vision of the plumb line (7:7-9)
- D. Historical interlude: opposition at Bethel (7:10-17)
1. Amaziah's report (7:10-11)
 2. Amaziah's rebuke (7:12-13)
 3. Amos's reply (7:14-15)
 4. Amaziah's reward (7:16-17)
- E. Vision of the summer fruit (8:1-14)
1. The sinful condition of Israel (8:1-6)
 - a. Ripe fruit (8:1-3)
 - b. Ripe nation (8:4-6)
 2. The suffering coming to Israel (8:7-14)
 - a. Sackcloth for dress (8:7-10)
 - b. Famine from God's Word (8:11-14)
- F. Vision of the Lord beside the altar (9:1-10)
1. The present destruction of the sinful kingdom (9:1-6)
 - a. The holy pursuit (9:1-4)
 - b. The holy Person (9:5-6)
 2. The future restoration of the righteous kingdom (9:7-15)
 - a. The sinful in Israel removed (9:7-8a)
 - b. The remnant out of Israel retained (9:8b-10)
 - c. The house of David repaired (9:11-12)
 - d. The people and land of Israel restored (9:13-15)

J. Vernon McGee:

I. Judgment on Surrounding Nations, Chapters 1:1–2:3

- A. Introduction, **Chapter 1:1–2**
- B. Judgment against Syria for Cruelty, **Chapter 1:3–5**
- C. Judgment against Philistia for Making Slaves, **Chapter 1:6–8**
- D. Judgment against Phoenicia for Breaking Treaty, **Chapter 1:9–10**
- E. Judgment against Edom for Revengeful Spirit, **Chapter 1:11–12**
- F. Judgment against Ammon for Violent Crimes, **Chapter 1:13–15**
- G. Judgment against Moab for Injustice, **Chapter 2:1–3**

II. Judgment on Judah and Israel, Chapters 2:4–6:14

- A. Judgment against Judah for Despising the Law, **Chapter 2:4–5**
- B. Judgment against Israel for Immorality and Blasphemy, **Chapter 2:6–16**
- C. God’s Charge against the Whole House of Israel (Twelve Tribes), **Chapter 3** (Privilege creates responsibility; the higher the blessing, the greater the punishment.)
- D. Israel Punished in the Past for Iniquity, **Chapter 4**
- E. Israel Will Be Punished in the Future for Iniquity, **Chapter 5**
- F. Israel Admonished in the Present to Depart from Iniquity, **Chapter 6**

III. Visions of Future, Chapters 7–9

- A. Visions of Grasshoppers, **Chapter 7:1–3**
- B. Vision of Fire, **Chapter 7:4–6**
- C. Vision of Plumbline, **Chapter 7:7–9**
- D. Historic Interlude, **Chapter 7:10–17** (Personal Experience of the Prophet)
- E. Vision of Basket of Summer Fruit, **Chapter 8**
- F. Vision of Worldwide Dispersion, **Chapter 9:1–10**
- G. Vision of Worldwide Regathering and Restoration of Kingdom, **Chapter 9:11–15**

Tchavdar S. Hadjiev: The passage that stands at the heart of the book (**5:1–17**) has an elaborate **chiastic structure** that is now almost universally recognized. In fact, the chiasm extends further to the whole of **4:1 – 6:7** (**Hadjiev** 2009: 179–184):

- Z: Feasting on Mount Samaria (**4:1–3**)
 - Y: Criticism of Israel’s worship (**4:4–13**)
 - X: Sin, repentance, judgment (**5:1–17**)
 - A: Death and mourning: the judgment of Israel (**5:1–3**)
 - B: Seek the Lord and live: call to repentance (**5:4–6**)
 - C: Lack of justice: the sin of Israel (**5:7**)
 - D: The Lord is his name: praise to the Creator (5:8–9)**
 - C’: Lack of justice: the sin of Israel (**5:10–12[13]**)
 - B’: Seek good and live: call to repentance (**5:14–15**)
 - A’: Death and mourning: the judgment of Israel (**5:16–17**)
 - Y’: Criticism of Israel’s worship (**5:18–27**)
- Z’: Feasting on Mount Samaria (**6:1–7**)

J. Sidlow Baxter: Outline

I. The Author and Theme of the Book, Amos 1:1-2

II. The Prophecies of Amos, Amos 1:3-2:16

- A. Concerning Damascus, **Amos 1:3-5**
- B. Concerning Philistia, **Amos 1:6-8**
- C. Concerning Tyre, **Amos 1:9-10**
- D. Concerning Edom, **Amos 1:11-12**
- E. Concerning Ammon, **Amos 1:13-15**
- F. Concerning Moab, **Amos 2:1-3**

- G. Concerning Judah, **Amos 2:4-5**
- H. Concerning Israel, **Amos 2:6-16**

III. The Sermons of Amos, Amos 3:1-6:14

- A. The Doom of Israel, **Amos 3:1-15**
- B. The Depravity of Israel, **Amos 4:1-13**
- C. A Dirge over Israel, **Amos 5:1-6:14**
 - 1. The ruin of Israel in coming judgment, **Amos 5:1-17**
 - 2. The rebuke of religious people, **Amos 5:18-27**
 - 3. The reprimand of the entire nation, **Amos 6:1-14**

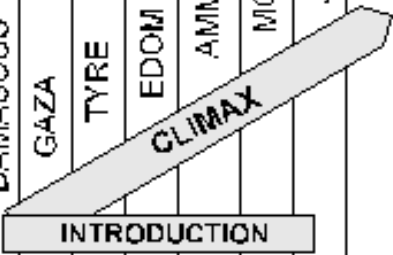
IV. The Visions of Amos, Amos 7:1-9:15

- A. A Vision of Devouring Locusts, **Amos 7:1-3**
- B. A Vision of Fire, **Amos 7:4-6**
- C. A Vision of a Plumb Line, **Amos 7:7-9**
- D. An Historical Interlude: Opposition from the Priest of Bethel, **Amos 7:10-17**
- E. A Vision of a Basket of Summer Fruit, **Amos 8:1-14**
- F. A Vision of the Lord Judging, **Amos 9:1-10**
- G. A Vision of Future Blessing, **Amos 9:11-15**

Hampton Keathley IV:

AMOS

JUDGMENT								REASONS				RESULTS				RESTORATION					
DAMASCUS	GAZA	TYRE	EDOM	AMMON	MOAB	JUDAH	ISRAEL	THEME	GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE	HYPOCRISY	GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY	NO REPENTANCE	COMPLACEMENT	LOCUSTS	FIRE	PLUMBLINE	RIPE FRUIT	JUDGMENT	OF ISRAEL	OF ALL NATIONS	PERMANENTLY
1:3	6:5	9:10	11-12	13-15	2:1-3	4:5	6:10	3:1f	4:1f	5:1-17	18-27	6:1f	7:1	7:8	7:17	8:1f	9:1f	9:11	9:15	9:13-15	



Phillip Kayser: AHA Bible Moments

Progressive Outline of Amos	
By Phillip G. Kayser	
Judgment on Nations	
Reasons	
Results for Israel	
Results for Judah +	
Messianic Glories	
1:3-5	Damascus
1:6-8	Gaza
1:9-10	Tyre
1:11-12	Edom
1:13-15	Ammon
2:1-3	Moab
2:4-5	Judah
2:6-16	Israel
3:1-15	Special privileges
4:1-13	Refused to be corrected
5:1-17	No repentance
5:18-27	Hypocrisy
6:1-11	Complacency
7:1-3	Locusts
7:4-6	Fire
7:7-9	Plumbline
7:10-17	Exile of Israel 722 BC
8:1-3	Rotten fruit
8:4-10	Exile of Judah 607 BC
8:11-14	400 yrs silence 400 BC
9:1-10	Destruction in AD 70
9:11	A new Israel (church)
9:12	Spread to Gentiles
9:13	Millennial Glories
9:14-15	Salvation of Israel

OUTLINE OF AMOS

AMOS – NO ESCAPE CLAUSE FROM GOD’S JUDGMENT

PEOPLE OF PRIVILEGE ARE NOT IMMUNE FROM GOD’S JUDGMENT AND MUST RETURN TO THE LORD IN REPENTANCE TO EXPERIENCE HIS BLESSING

Amos 3:2 “You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

Amos 4:12 “Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.”

(1:1-2) INTRODUCTION: SETTING AND SEVERITY OF THE MESSAGE

THE LION ROARS IN PROPHETIC JUDGMENT AGAINST ISRAEL THROUGH HIS SURPRISING MESSENGER AMOS

A. (:1) Setting

1. Identification of the Obscure Prophet
2. Medium of the Revelation
3. Focus of the Prophet’s Burden = God’s Own People
4. Timeframe of His Ministry

B. (:2) Severity of the Message

1. Majestic Thunderings – The Lion Roars
2. Global Grovelings – Creation Responds

I. (1:3 – 2:16) EIGHT BURDENS – ORACLES OF JUDGMENTS AGAINST THE NATIONS CLIMAXING WITH JUDGMENT AGAINST ISRAEL

A. (1:3 - 2:3) Against the Surrounding Nations

The Sovereign God Roars in Judgment Against Surrounding Nations for Specific Moral Transgressions

1. (1:3-5) Against Damascus (capital of Syria)
2. (1:6-8) Against Gaza (capital of Philistia)
3. (1:9-10) Against Tyre (capital of Phoenicia)
4. (1:11-12) Against Edom
5. (1:13-15) Against Ammon
6. (2:1-3) Against Moab

B. (2:4-16) Against Judah and Israel

The Climax of God's Judgment Is Directed Against His Own People – Especially Israel

1. (:4-5) Against Judah
2. (:6-16) Climax: Against Israel

II. (3:1 – 6:14) THREE MESSAGES OF CONDEMNATION AGAINST ISRAEL

A. (3:1-15) Message #1 — Judgment Should Be No Surprise –

The Fact of Israel's Guilt in the Present – Israel Stands Guilty of Idolatry Violence and Materialism

1. (:1-10) Judgment Deserved
 - a. (:1-2) Israel's Unique Covenantal Relationship Heightens Accountability
 - b. (:3-8) God's Clear Revelation of Certain Judgment Should Awaken Fear
 - c. (:9-10) Invoking Witnesses to God's Judgment Against Samaria for Idolatry, Violence and Materialism
2. (:11-15) Judgment Decreed
Comprehensive Judgment – Extending to Their Perceived Invincibility, Their Man-Made Religious System and Their Decadent Opulence
 - a. (:11-12) Punishment by Foreign Conquerors
 - b. (:13-15) Punishment of Center of Worship and Houses of Opulence

B. (4:1-13) Message #2 — Judgment Could Have Been Avoided by Repentance —

Judgment Must Follow When God's Patience and Forbearance with His Stubbornly Rebellious People Have Reached Their Limit

1. (:1-11) Judgment Deserved for Idolatry and Oppression
 - a. (:1-3) Humiliating Deportation Due to Decadent Opulence
 - b. (:4-5) Sacrilegious Worship
 - c. (:6-11) Five Historical Scenarios of Stubbornly Spurning God's Fatherly Discipline – 5 Covenant Curses
 - 1) (:6) Discipline of Famine
 - 2) (:7-8) Discipline of Drought
 - 3) (:9) Discipline of Disease and Plagues upon the Crops
 - 4) (:10) Discipline of Defeats in War
 - 5) (:11) Discipline of Devastating Destruction

C. (5:1 – 6:14) Message #3 — Judgment Will be Severe Against Those Who Have Persisted in Sin

1. (5:1-17) Funeral Lament: Judgment Deserved for Failing to Seek after God and Righteousness
 - (:1) Literary Genre = Funeral Lament
 - a. (:2-3) Tragic Fall of Israel
 - b. (4-15) Three Exhortations to Seek after God and Righteousness
 - 1) (:4-5) Avoid Idolatry
 - 2) (:6-13) Anticipate Fiery Judgment
 - 3) (:14-15) Amend Your Ways and Appeal to God's Grace
 - (:16-17) Conclusion of the Funeral Son – Nationwide Wailing

2. (5:18-27) The Day of the Lord Will Be Darkness Not Light – Righteousness before Ritual – God Desires Justice and Righteousness Rather than Vain Religious Show
 - a. (:18-20) The Day of the Lord Will Be a Time of Extreme Darkness
 - b. (:21-24) True Justice and Righteousness Must Replace Hypocritical Worship
 - c. (:25-27) Historical Transgressions Pave the Way for Judgment Via Exile
3. (6:1-14) Rebuking the False Security of the Leaders
Prosperity Must Not Provide a Platform for Prideful False Security on the Part of Leaders Who Fail to Pursue Justice and Righteousness
 - a. (:1-7) Woe to the Smug Who Feel Secure
 - 1) (:1-3) Smugness Based on Denying Reality
 - 2) (:4-6) Self-made Reality Focuses on Self Indulgence
 - 3) (:7) Shock Based on Facing Reality
 - b. (:8-14) Warning that Destruction from the Lord Is Coming Soon
 - 1) (:8) Confirmed by the Divine Oath
 - 2) (:9-10) Chronicled by the Scope of Death and Destruction
 - 3) (:11-13) Caused by Divine Opposition to Prideful Rebellion and Self-Reliance
 - 4) (:14) Carried Out by the Lord God of Hosts Via an Oppressing Enemy Nation

III. (7:1 – 9:10) FIVE VISIONS

A. (7:1-3) Vision of Swarming Locusts — Desolation

B. (7:4-6) Vision of Consuming Fire — Destruction

C. (7:7-9) Vision of the Plumb Line – Divine Righteousness = the Standard of Measurement – Israel Measured and Found Crooked

(7:10-17) Historical Interlude – Confrontation at Bethel: Dealing with Opposition

D. (8:1-14) Vision of the Perishing Summer Fruit – Israel Destined for Imminent Judgment

E. (9:1-10) Vision of the Lord beside the Altar – Israel Doomed with No Escape

(9:11-15) CONCLUSION: PROMISE OF MILLENNIAL RESTORATION AND PROSPERITY

TEXT: Amos 1:1-2

TITLE: INTRODUCTION: SETTING AND SEVERITY OF THE MESSAGE

BIG IDEA:

**THE VOICE AND THE MOUTHPIECE –
THE LION ROARS IN PROPHETIC JUDGMENT AGAINST ISRAEL
THROUGH HIS SURPRISING MESSENGER AMOS**

INTRODUCTION:

Gary Smith: The heading to this scroll of sermons (1:1) introduces the readers to the person God uses to deliver his message, the general audience this message addresses, and the time when Amos interacts with his audience. It also contains a brief thematic statement about his message (1:2). . . These two verses serve as an **introduction** to the whole book.

Jorg Jeremias: This mortal danger, however, is not directed at enemies. Rather, in the following clause the divine roar of the lion directly causes the withering and drying up of the most fertile regions in the Northern Kingdom. Amos' own vocation perhaps prompted the allusion to the shepherds' vitally important pasturelands, whose desolation often represents the most terrible disaster during the later period (usually as "*pastures of the wilderness*," Jer. 9:9 [10E]; 23:10; Joel 1:19, 20, et passim); during this period Mount Carmel, with its dense forests, together with Bashan (cf. Amos 4:1), Lebanon, or the plain of Sharon, stands representatively for the most fertile regions of Palestine (cf. Isa. 33:9; 35:2; Jer. 50:19; Nahum 1:4). The expression "*top of Carmel*" in particular, however, provides the bridge to the fifth vision (Amos 9:3). Together, **these two poetic sentences circumscribe the end of all vegetation** (Wolff, Weiss). It is not, however, some foreign power that brings about this devastation—this is the most important statement of the entire verse—but rather "*Yahweh of Zion*," who in judgment on his own people demonstrates his power (cf. Ps. 50:2). This prepares the reader for the hymnic sections of the book of Amos (4:13; 5:8f.; 9:5f.) and for the numerous divine predicates such as "*Yahweh, God of hosts*." This applies especially, however, to the book's former concluding doxology in 9:5f. (cf. the introduction), in which the "*mourning*" of the shepherds' pastures becomes the "*mourning*" of human beings in the face of the God who through the destruction of the temple withdraws his own presence from them and yet is still recognized and praised as the **Lord of the world**.

Tchavdar S. Hadjiev: The introductory verses make clear the **divine origin** of the text we are about to read and summarize its message. This is a vision that Amos saw of the Lord's destructive roar against his land and its people. At the same time the opening of the book stresses more strongly than other prophetic books the **human aspect** of the message. These are the words of Amos, not just the roar of God. Prophetic preaching is a message fully incarnate in the words of the human herald. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the prophetic book reflects the style, theology, concerns and thought-world of its author(s). The other important point is the northward march of the divine

speech, implicit in the superscription and explicit in the hymn. Amos came to Israel from Jerusalem to speak a message of judgment against the Northern Kingdom. There is also an implicit southward movement. The message against the Northern Kingdom was preserved and read in the South.

Allen Guenther: Outline

The Prophet, **1:1a**

The People, **1:1b**

The Time, **1:1c**

The Tone, **1:2**

I. (:1) SETTING

A. Identification of the Obscure Prophet

“The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa”

Amos would easily have been looked down upon by the kings of Israel and Judah and those in positions of authority and prominence. God usually does not choose to work through those who seem outwardly impressive (**1 Cor. 1:26-31**).

Thomas McComiskey: Most prophetic books (**Isa 1:1; Jer 1:1; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Na 1:1**) as well as some wisdom books (**Pr 1:1; Ecc 1:1; SS 1:1**) begin with a **superscription** that serves a similar function to a **title page** on a modern book. The superscription was likely added by an editor or later tradent; in Amos, it identifies the genre, the author, his occupation, and the time period in which he ministered. . .

Likely that Amos was a breeder of various types of animals besides sheep.

Mark Copeland:

NAME - Amos means "**burden-bearer**"

HOME - The village of Tekoa

a. 12 miles south of Jerusalem, 18 miles west of the Dead Sea

b. Near the wilderness of Judea, a very rugged area

-- So while he was in Judah, he primarily prophesied against Israel in the north

OCCUPATION - "*a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit.*"

a. An outdoorsman, accustomed to the wilds of nature, and of hard, honest toil

b. It would be easy for him to have little sympathy for the lazy and materialistic conduct of his northern kinsman

CHARACTER

a. Not known for his sympathy or warmth, but for his sense of justice and right

b. "Not a sob is to be found in his book for the nation of wicked apostates, and there is only a sigh for the poor" (**Hailey**)

He is reminiscent of John the Baptist

http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/mp/mp_06.htm

Douglas Smith: Background on the Prophet

(Adapted from: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

Before Amos began prophesying, he had been one of the “*shepherds*” of Tekoa, a town in the hill country of Judah about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. The word used for “*shepherds*” in **1:1** is not the usual Hebrew word *roeh*, but the rare word *noqe*, suggesting instead “*sheep breeders*.” Amos evidently managed or owned large herds of sheep and goats, and was in charge of other shepherds.

In **Amos 7:14** the prophet further described himself as “*a shepherd*” and as one who “*took care of sycamore-fig trees*.” This word for “*shepherd*,” *bôqer*, occurs only here in the Old Testament, and describes a “herdsman” or “cattleman.” Besides overseeing his livestock operations, Amos was also occupied in growing sycamore fruit, presumably as a sideline. The sycamore-fig tree was a broad heavy tree, 25 to 50 feet high, which produced a fig-like fruit three or four times a year. The sycamore did not grow in the heights of Tekoa, but only in the warmer lowlands, as the Jordan Valley and the fertile oases by the Dead Sea. Both of these places were near enough to Tekoa for Amos to supervise the taking care of the trees (**7:14**)—a technical term that describes the process of slitting or scratching the forming fruit so that some juice runs out, allowing the rest of the fig to ripen into a sweeter, more edible fruit.

The three terms together indicate that Amos, as a breeder, rancher, and farmer, was a substantial and respected man in his community.

Gary Smith: The Hebrew word for “*shepherd*” used here (*nqd*) is a rare word in the Hebrew Bible, but the word is used in Akkadian and Ugaritic texts to refer to a person of status who is in charge of a group of shepherds. This implies that Amos is not a poor, uneducated shepherd, who spends his day leading a group of sheep. He probably is a **manager of shepherds**, possibly for a wealthy family or the government. This pastoral background explains why he uses illustrations about birds (**Amos 3:5**), lions (**3:12**), and the separation of the grain from other foreign material (**9:9**). These are all a part of his daily life in his natural surroundings. His involvement in the business world before going from Judah to Israel gives him insight into the way people sometimes unjustly treat others and makes him sensitive to the abuses he will observe later. . .

God calls common people such as Amos to be his servants, and these people are not always the most qualified; they are simply people willing to speak God’s words.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Amos’s business took him to the northern kingdom where he sold his wool, cattle, and fruit. On these journeys he was disturbed by the evidences of dissolute living, dishonesty, and injustice. His visits to Bethel shocked his spiritual sensitivity. There he saw the evidence of Baal worship syncretized with Yahweh. The priesthood was corrupt and indifferent to the issues of justice. In the nation as a whole, the poor were getting poorer and the rich richer.

B. Medium of the Revelation

“which he envisioned in visions”

James Mays: That Amos ‘saw’ (*hāzāh*) his words is a conventional way of saying that his words were received as revelation before they were spoken (cf. **Isa. 1.1; 2.1; Micah 1.1**). The conventional idiom rests on the **visionary experience** which underlay the activities of older seers and prophets (e.g. Balaam in **Num. 24.2f., 15f.**; and Micaiah ben Imlah in **I Kings 22.17**) and the canonical prophets. Amos reports five visions (**7.1–9; 8.1–3; 9.1–4**) through which he received his basic message. . .

Thus the title is primarily concerned to introduce the book as the sayings of a man who is carefully identified by name, home, vocation, and time. That his words were of divine origin is recognized by the note that he ‘saw’ them, and this fact is repeatedly emphasized by the recurrent ‘*This is what Yahweh has said*’ which introduces many of the oracles within the book. But the title stakes out a crucial hermeneutical principle; the sayings are to be read and understood as words for a particular time and place through one individual man. Rather than an embarrassment, their historicality is a key to their meaning.

C. Focus of the Prophet’s Burden = God’s Own People

“concerning Israel”

Billy Smith: Amos addressed Israel as the **covenant people**, not as the breakaway Northern Kingdom. The people of Israel, especially the king and official leadership, had seen themselves as a separate kingdom from Judah since their radical break with the Southern Kingdom in the days of Rehoboam of Judah and Jeroboam I of Israel (**1 Kgs 12:16-17**). That break occurred either in 930 or 922 B.C. Almost two hundred years later, Amos came to them as the people of God. Their recent history of rebellion had not canceled their covenant with God. Amos called them to account as responsible covenant partners.

D. Timeframe of His Ministry

1. Southern Kingdom Reference

“in the days of Uzziah king of Judah”

2. Northern Kingdom Reference

“and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel”

Robert Martin-Achard: Historians in general hold that the reigns of Uzziah (Azariah—about 783–742) and of Jeroboam II (about 786–746) were **prosperous** for both Judah and Israel. Moreover, both kings were successful at the expense of either their Edomite neighbours (**2 Kgs. 14:22**) or the Arameans (**2 Kgs. 13:25; 14:25**). . .

The economic situation profited from these favourable circumstances, the ruling class in the cities benefiting particularly. International trade developed, and houses were

improved along with their furnishings (3:10; 5:11; 3:12; 6:4). But division developed right at the heart of Yahweh's people, in so far as a minority, grouped round the court and settled in the capital city, increased its power and its resources, while the mass of the people, notably in the country, saw themselves dispossessed of their means and condemned to lead a pitiful existence. The coming of Amos fitted into this context of inequality, which could not be hidden by the grandiose nature of the festivals in honour of the national God (5:21 ff). Israel was going to pay very dearly for the ephemeral glory that they were then experiencing under Jeroboam II. Some thirty years later Israel had ceased to exist as an independent State, while its elite was to disappear for ever in the deportation!

3. Natural Disaster Reference

“two years before the earthquake”

Allen Guenther: The earthquake mentioned here features prominently in the judgment scenes of chapters eight and nine. Amos ministered two years prior to that momentous event. Three centuries later it remained vividly alive in Judah's memory (**Zech. 14:5**). That event was the break point anticipated by Amos. From the days of the earthquake, the judgments predicted by this seer were launched against Israel and stood as a warning to Judah.

John MacArthur: Josephus connects it with Uzziah's sin of usurping the role of a priest (**2Chr 26:16-23**). An earthquake of severe magnitude occurred ca. 755 B.C.

The book of Amos was written about **760 B.C.** We know this because he prophesied during the reigns of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) of Israel and Uzziah (790-740 B.C.) of Judah, and because he mentions an earthquake that archeologists calculate to have occurred about 760 B.C. Like Hosea, he specifically prophesies against the Northern Kingdom. During this time, the nation of Israel (the northern kingdom) was marked by total apostasy, idolatry, immorality, and such like. Amos prophesies against them ahead of their 722 B.C. destruction at the hands of the Assyrians.

Amos' name means *burden*. He was from Tekoa, about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. As many have noted, the first six chapters use the *oracle* or “word-based” prophecy format, whereas chapters seven through nine are conveyed through *visions*.

<http://www.fellowshipbibleannarbor.org/BibleStudies/collegesundayschool/Sum2005/AmosOutline.pdf>

Billy Smith: It may be that reference to the earthquake is to set an ominous tone for the predominant words of judgment that follow (cf. **2:13; 4:11; 6:11; 8:8; 9:1,5**).

II. (:2) SEVERITY OF THE MESSAGE

James Mays: The **couplet** describes the awesome voice or noise of Yahweh and its devastating effect; when Yahweh utters his voice from his residence in Jerusalem, it

reverberates across the earth, searing the landscape, and reaching even to the summit of Carmel in the north. . . Yahweh does not speak in the first person; his voice is portrayed as a devastating phenomenon. The two bi-cola are perfect synonymous parallelisms in 3+3 rhythm. . .

A hymnic overture presents Amos as a herald announcing the advent of Yahweh whose earthly residence is on Zion, the God whose ancient appearances wrought terror and defeat on his enemies, whose glory in judging all that resist his authority was celebrated in Jerusalem's temple.

William Harper: When Yahweh manifests his power and majesty, all nature feels the terrible influence of the manifestation. The essence of the teaching of Amos seems to be presented in this verse, which serves as an introduction, prepared either by himself or the editor. In any case it is a separate section and not to be immediately connected with what follows.

A. Majestic Thunderings – The Lion Roars

*“He said, ‘The Lord roars from Zion
And from Jerusalem He utters His voice’”*

Nobody can say that they didn't hear the message; God spoke decisively and loudly and from the center of His abode with His chosen people. There was nothing subtle or hidden or obscured about God's revelation. He demands a hearing and He demands the appropriate response of confession of sin and repentance.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Most importantly, **1:2** brings special attention to God. Rudolph has pointed out that the first recorded word of Amos is **Yahweh**. Yahweh is the ultimate focus of the message of the prophet. He is the primary actor in the oracles and visions; the hymnic passages highlight God's power, and the visions reveal his demanding relationship with Israel. Yahweh will not tolerate worship or a socioeconomic and political world that uses his name for its own ends. He will not be mocked. Yahweh will not tolerate rivals, disobedience, or misrepresentation. **Yahweh, the Divine Lion, is the incomparable and omnipotent sovereign King.**

Thomas McComiskey: The prophet introduces a shocking note in depicting Yahweh as roaring from Zion. Though “*roar*” (*sa 'ag*) is frequently used in the OT of a lion's roar, it need not always carry this connotation (**Job 37:4; Pss 38:8[9]; 74:4**). In the Hebrew here, Amos's words are identical to those of **Joel 3:16**, where *sa 'ag* occurs with no apparent reference to a lion's roar. The cosmic effects of the roar of the Lord in Joel may connote the **crashing of thunder**. In **Job 37:4** *sa 'ag* is used in this way. Nevertheless, the use of the same verb in **Amos 3:8**, where the Lord does roar like a lion, indicates that the lion metaphor may be intended here. Whether a cosmic roar or a lion's roar, the image evokes a sense of **God's impending judgment**.

Gary Smith: The imagery of **roaring** describes the bellowing warning that foreshadows an attack by a lion (**3:4, 8**). God's roaring communicates his intention to attack. This

warning is equated with the words Amos speaks both here and in **3:8**. . .

The source of this warning is the Lord God, not Baal. The prophet reveals here his Judean theological position, namely, that God speaks from his temple in Jerusalem, not from the Israelite temples in Bethel and Dan.

Allen Guenther: The lion appears most often in the Scriptures in association with Judah. Indeed, Judah itself is referred to as a lion's whelp (**Gen. 49:9**). The throne room of Solomon was decorated with lions (**1 Kings 10:19-20**), resulting in the proverb: "*A king's rage is like the roar of a lion*" (**Prov. 19:12**, NIV). Appropriately, that authority and power is recognized as vested in Israel's God, the One who rules on Mount Zion. . .

God's warning comes **from Zion**, the temple hill; from Jerusalem, the holy city. Whose voice, then, have the Israelites been listening to in Bethel and in Gilgal? Presumably not that of the living and true God. Yes, God had frequently spoken to the Northerners through his servants, the prophets—through Elijah, Elisha, and the sons of the prophets. None of these genuine prophets, however, is ever associated with the alternative religious centers Jeroboam I had set up when he led the ten Northern tribes away from the Davidic dynasty. So the roar from Jerusalem implies a judgment on all other centers which profess to dispense the oracles of the Lord [*The Yahweh-Baal Conflict*, p. 398].

B. Global Grovelings – Creation Responds

*“And the shepherds' pasture grounds mourn,
And the summit of Carmel dries up.”*

Nature got the message. The rest of God's creation – the people made in His own image to have fellowship and communion with Him – need to respond in humility and submission as well.

Gary Smith: The thundering voice of God will not bring rain and blessing, but the curse of drought and disaster, signs of his punishment (**Deut. 28:22–24; Isa. 5:6; 19:7; 42:15**). God, not the Canaanite fertility god Baal, controls the land. His curse will affect even the forested hills of Mount Carmel in Israel and the pasturelands of their shepherds. What does a shepherd like Amos think when there is no grass for his sheep? When the grass is gone and the vineyards and trees of Carmel turn brown for lack of water, one must ask why. Is this not the hand of God? Is God not trying to say something to us?

Verse 2 announces God's ability to **control the forces of nature**. He is not just a God of history who marvelously redeems people from superior armies; he is also the God who has created and continues to control every aspect of this world. "*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it*" (**Ps. 24:1**); thus, he sends both the blessing of rain and fertility and the curse of drought and death. By implication, Amos's claims devastate the Israelites' belief in the fertility and power of Baal, for he is powerless, not even worthy of mention next to the mighty power of Yahweh. God's daily providential care of nature and his unusual intrusion into the regular patterns of nature to create miracles

are two primary ways of controlling the lives of people and accomplishing his will on earth.

Billy Smith: The effect of the Lord's thunderous voice would be **devastation**. Older English translations have the homonym “*mourn*” instead of “*dry up*” as their rendering of the verb. In the context “*dry up*” is correct. It is parallel to “*withers*” in the second half of the line. Usually thunder accompanies rain. Instead, the “thunder” of the Lord would produce a general and devastating drought, from the “*pastures of the shepherds*” to the “*top of Carmel*.” This is a figure of speech known as **merismus**, which uses opposites to convey the idea of the whole. That is, the Lord will bring about devastation throughout the land.

Trent Butler: Amos' Message Shakes the Earth.

John MacArthur: Carmel is known for its bountiful trees and lush gardens. “*Carmel*” means “fertility” or “garden land” and refers to the mountain range that runs E to W in northern Israel and juts out into the Mediterranean Sea (cf. **9:3**).

Thomas McComiskey: The prophet saw God's wrath causing a withering drought to destroy the green hills of Mount Carmel – a landmark of the northern kingdom. So in this vivid way, Amos pictured the impending judgment of God on that kingdom.

Douglas Smith – Background info taken from *The Ultimate Guide to the Bible*, **Carol Smith**, Barbour Publishing, 2000 -- Major transition coming with 722 BC invasion by Assyria; Amos sent from Judah as a visiting prophet to bring God's message of judgment to Israel. People tend to think that tomorrow will be like today; false sense of security.

Setting: The wealthy people of Israel were enjoying peace and prosperity. They were quite complacent and were oppressing the poor, even selling them into slavery. Soon, however, Israel would be conquered by Assyria, and the rich would themselves become slaves.

Megathemes:

- 1) Everyone Answers to God -- Amos pronounced judgment from God on all the surrounding nations. God is in supreme control of all the nations, they all are accountable to Him.
- 2) Complacency -- With all the comfort and luxury that Israel was experiencing came a false sense of security. Prosperity brought corruption and destruction.
- 3) Oppressing the Poor -- The wealthy and powerful people of Samaria, the capital of Israel, had become prosperous, greedy and unjust. Illegal and immoral slavery came as the result of over-taxation and land-grabbing. There was also cruelty and indifference toward the poor. God is weary of greed and will not tolerate injustice.
- 4) Superficial Religion -- Although many people had abandoned real faith in God, they still pretended to be religious. Merely participating in ceremony or ritual falls short of true religion.

Robert Martin-Achard: Verse 2b discloses the **sad consequences** for the country and for its inhabitants of Yahweh's intervention. The pastures where the shepherds, amongst whom Amos is included (**1:1; 7:14**), were accustomed to lead their flocks, mourn for their vegetation withers as in the dry season when the whole of nature seems to be stricken to death. We should note that the author can make play with the double meaning of the Hebrew word *abelu*. It comes from the root *abal* which means both to be in mourning and to be dried up. Carmel, which was known for its flourishing vegetation, would become a miserable and sterile area, destined for death, with its glory turned into confusion. This is suggested by the verb *yabesh*, to become parched, which evokes by assonance with the verb *bosh* ideas of shame and dishonour.

Briefly, then, according to verses 1 and 2, Yahweh is about to reveal himself in his formidable grandeur, which will result only in ruin and misery for his people. The book of Amos begins therefore with a threat of death that hovers over the kingdom of Jeroboam II, and on which Amos' oracles will comment at length and which they will confirm.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why doesn't God choose the most powerful and influential human personalities to convey his prophetic message?
- 2) How would Amos, based in Tekoa in Judah, be received in Israel as a proclaimer of God's word of judgment?
- 3) What was the significance of the reference to this major earthquake?
- 4) How should the cowering response of nature to God's thundering words of judgment inform our response?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

J. Vernon McGee: Amos was a fearless man with a message from God. Not only was Amos an unknown when he arrived in Bethel of the northern kingdom of Israel, but he is still rather unknown today. In our country, Amos is a name that is associated with Andy because of the popular radio program of the past generation, "Amos and Andy." Actually, we should associate the Amos of Bible times with Hosea. They were contemporary prophets, and I am sure they knew each other. Hosea's message emphasized the love of God, but a God of love who also intends to judge. Amos spoke of the lofty justice and the inflexible righteousness of God which leads Him to judge.

It is startling to see that Amos had a world view, a global conception. He spoke first to the nations which were contiguous to and surrounding the nation Israel. He spoke to the great world powers of that day—that in itself isn't something unique. The later prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—did it also. But the method of these other prophets was first to speak of God's judgment of the nation Israel and then to take up the judgment of the other nations. Amos reverses that method. He spoke first of God's judgment of the nations round about and then of Israel's judgment.

When Amos first spoke in Bethel, saying that God was going to judge Syria, Philistia, Phoenicia, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, everybody filled the king's chapel. He really was drawing a crowd. They were very glad for him to preach on the sins of the Moabites, you see, but not on their sins. There are people even today who like the preacher to preach on the sins of the Moabites which were committed four thousand or more years ago, but any preacher who mentions the people's own sins is in real trouble. Amos exercised a great deal of diplomacy, it seems to me, in speaking of the other nations first. He was an eloquent man. Although he was a country preacher from out yonder in the desert, he used the language of a Shakespeare. He was, in my judgment, a great preacher.

Robert Martin-Achard: This first verse of Amos also informs us that the prophet, whoever he may be, is tied to a particular time, and that his message is meant for a particular moment in the destiny of the people of God. The prophetic message presupposes a particular historical and geographical framework, as well as that of a precise economic and cultural situation. It is just this that at times renders the reading of Amos difficult for us, for he is addressing a specific people in circumstances that he knows well. He turns up at Bethel and at Samaria in the time of king Jeroboam II; and in spite of the progress we have made in our knowledge of Israel's past, thanks notably to archaeological research, many of the elements in the history of the 8th century in the Syro-Palestinian region still elude us.

The God of the Scriptures does not act in a vague, impersonal manner. His interventions are seen to be with real and factual people and in particular places and times. His Word is not fulfilled in generalities or in mere principles. It is the same today as it was yesterday. Thus it is that when we study as carefully as possible what happened in former times or what was said in bygone days at other times and in other places, the divine Word meets up with us in our own situations and its relevance suddenly becomes apparent to us. Setting oneself to listen to Amos is ultimately to discover how greatly the prophet helps us to read our own time and to see our own century as Yahweh sees it.

John Goldingay: "Amos had a vision of God's power that could and would strike in the natural world and have long-term effects in the human world." And Jerusalem is the place where Yahweh dwelt, and from which he has spoken powerfully and destructively. "By roaring is signified . . . the terrible voice of God," and "it is because God loves justice that he roars." The word for "*wither*" is also a word for "*mourn*," or it has a homonym with that meaning. Perhaps withering is the pastures' way of mourning, as human beings put on sack and cut their hair (cf. **8:10**).

Gary Cohen: “How long will judgment tarry?” is one of the basic questions of life. The psalmist cries, “*How long. . . Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations. . . For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his habitation*” (**Psalm 79:5-7**). There have been times, such as when the Israelites wandered in the wilderness and carried the Ark with them daily, that God’s judgment struck almost instantaneously after a sin (e.g., **Num. 16:1-35**). This is not, however, God’s ordinary way of governing His world. Judgment upon the wicked is often delayed in order to give an opportunity for repentance (**2 Pet. 3:9**) and in order to let the situation develop so that the wickedness will be openly exposed as fully deserving judgment (e.g., **Gen. 15:16**). Eventually judgment always comes. It has been said, “The wheels of God’s justice grind slowly, but when they come they do grind finely.” This is the basic message of the first three chapters of Amos.

That the Lord selected a shepherd from quiet Tekoa, ten miles southeast of Jerusalem, to announce His cataclysmic judgments is one of God’s sovereign ironies. Perhaps God, in that situation, did not want His prophet to be a wise intellectual who might debate with the learned royal sinners in the palace of Samaria. God preferred His spokesman to announce His visions as irrevocable fait accompli, and such a one as Amos from Tekoa would lend an aura of undeniable finality to the visions. However, Tekoa also may have been a center of godly wisdom (see **2 Sam. 14:2, 4, 9**).

TEXT: Amos 1:3 – 2:3

TITLE: *ORACLES OF JUDGMENTS AGAINST THE SURROUNDING NATIONS*

BIG IDEA:

THE SOVEREIGN GOD ROARS IN JUDGMENT AGAINST SURROUNDING NATIONS FOR SPECIFIC MORAL TRANSGRESSIONS

INTRODUCTION:

Thomas McComiskey: Overview

A striking pattern runs through these oracles. 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 seizes upon Israel. One can imagine Amos's hearers approving the denunciation of these heathen nations. They can 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 plays no favorites; he swoops down on the unsuspecting Israelites too in the severest language and condemns them for their crimes.

J. Vernon McGee: We begin now a section of this prophecy which deals with the judgments of God upon the nations which were contiguous to the nation Israel, that is, those that surrounded that nation. This man Amos gives us a world view. The Word of God, even the Old Testament, shows that God is not only the God of the nation Israel, but He is also the God of the Gentiles. In the New Testament, Paul is the one who makes that abundantly clear. And God judges the nations. Although in this day of grace God has one great purpose, that of calling out a people to His name, that does not mean that He has taken His hands off the affairs of this world—He has not. He still moves in judgment upon the nations of the world, and this Book of Amos has a tremendous message along that line.

Alec Motyer: The passage now lying before us for study is a roll-call of the nations surrounding Israel. They have one negative common denominator: none of them had ever received any special revelation of God or of His law; He had never sent prophets to them; there was no Moses in their historical past; the voice of God had never sounded in the ears of their founding-fathers. Yet Amos presents them as nations under judgment. They were without special revelation but not without moral responsibility; they were without direct knowledge of God but not without accountability to God; they were without the law written upon tables of stone but not without the law written in the conscience. . .

Amos first examines violations of the general relationships of life, human being to human being, then the particular responsibilities of life, brother to brother, and finally the special claims of life, the attitude of the strong to the weak. In this way he speaks out on behalf of six basic principles of human conduct.

1. People are not things (sin of Damascus)
2. Priority of human welfare over commercial profit (**1:6** – *sin of Gaza*).
3. The inviolability of the pledged word. It is the element of ‘covenant’ or promise which distinguishes the accusation against Tyre from that against Gaza.
No pledged word should be treated as negotiable simply for self-interest and self-advantage. This is what Tyre had done. . .
4. The inadmissibility of hatred nourished in the heart. (sin of Edom)
5. The limitation of personal ambition by the rights of the helpless.
(sin of Ammon)
6. The renouncing of vengeance. (sin of Moab)

Warren Wiersbe: Eight times Amos used the phrase “*for three transgressions and for four*,” a Jewish idiom that means “an indefinite number that has finally come to the end.” God is long-suffering with sinners (**2 Peter 3:9**), but He marks what they do and His patience eventually runs out. To try God’s patience is to tempt the Lord; and when we tempt the Lord, we invite judgment.

Anthony Petterson: The speeches have a similar pattern. They begin with the phrase “*for three sins . . . even for four*,” which seems to indicate that the sins of the people have reached their limit, and now God will not relent from his punishment.

David Guzik: This phrase will introduce God’s announcement of judgment against each nation. It didn’t mean that **Damascus** only committed three sins, and then God thought of a fourth sin; it simply has the idea of “sin upon sin upon sin.”

Thomas Constable: The expression “*for three transgressions* [Heb. *pesha'im*, rebellions, i.e., against the universal Sovereign; cf. Gen. 9:5-17] *and for four*” is one of Amos’ trademark phrases (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, 18-19, 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. The phrase may also be a poetic way of describing seven transgressions, symbolizing completeness. 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**).
<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/amos.pdf>

Gary Cohen: The word “*transgressions*” is the Hebrew *peshe*, which is from the root *pasha*, meaning “*to fall away, or break away from anyone or thing; to turn away*.” Hence, this word for sin emphasizes a turning away or breaking away from God’s holy standards of righteousness, goodness, fairness, and morality, as comprehended in the Ten Commandments and His other laws.

Robert Martin-Achard: The collection of proper names that we find here reminds us once more that the God of the Bible concerns himself not with some imaginary world

but with our earth, and with the history of the nations to be found on it. It is also striking to see with what precision Amos evokes both past and contemporary events. These involve the fate of the nations of the Syro-Palestinian region vis-à-vis their God. He witnesses by this means to the continuing interest that Israel's God expresses for people in circumstances that are particularly their own.

John Goldingay: Yahweh declares that he will act against Ephraim's neighbors for their wrongdoing, mostly for what we might call **war crimes**, though the war crimes (as is commonly the case with war) are an incidental offshoot of a **concern with economics and with trade**. "The cumulative, cascading references to violence" are "an assault on the mind." Although these peoples are mostly ones with whom Ephraim had been in conflict at one time or another, they are not as such Ephraim's enemies against whom Amos is declaring curses, though neither are they Ephraim's friends. He begins with Damascus, Gaza, and Tyre to the northeast and west; comes to Edom, Ammon, and Moab to the southeast; then concludes with Judah. He thus begins with three peoples with whom Ephraim had virtually no family relationship, except that its ancestors originally came from Aram, of which Damascus is the capital. Then he comes to three further peoples that, like Israel, descended from Abraham. Finally he confronts brother Judah before turning his attention to Ephraim itself, his real concern. In other words, while Amos is talking **about** these different peoples, he is not talking **to them**. Prophecies about other nations are regularly addressed to Israel because they are significant for Israel in some way. Here they lull the Ephraimites into a **false sense of security before kicking them in the teeth**. The section is a substantial, carefully composed creation, combining pattern with variation, straightforwardness with adroitness, intelligibility with rhetoric, coolness with horror, factuality with forthrightness, the political with the personal, ethics with theology, and human skill with divine authority.

Tchavdar S. Hadjiev: Every oracle begins its description of judgment with the promise that *the Lord will send* [only in **1:14** *kindle*] *a fire*. Burning the captured city was common in ancient warfare so there is a realistic note in this, although fire here acts as a divine agent and assumes a supernatural quality (**Andersen and Freedman** 1989: 239). Strongholds (*'armēnôt*) could be the battle-towers situated on the city walls, but more likely here the term refers to the royal citadel (**1 Kgs 16:18; 2 Kgs 15:25**).

Gary Smith: This series of highly repetitive oracles is **grouped in pairs** based on three elements.

- (1) **Family connection:** Ammon and Moab came from the children of Lot (**Gen. 19:30–38**), while Judah and Israel were the two Hebrew nations
- (2) **Repeated words:** "*I will destroy the king . . . and the one who holds the scepter*" in **Amos 1:5** and **8**; offenses against one's "*brother*" in **1:9** and **11**; and "*war cries*" plus the death of the king and his officials in **1:14–15** and **2:2–3**.
- (3) The **stylistic construction** of each pair. These characteristics argue that these oracles fit together as a well-planned rhetorical argument aimed to change the Israelites'

view of their future political status.

I. (:3-5) AGAINST DAMASCUS (capital of Syria)

A. (:3) Reason – Decimated God’s People with Cruelty and Brutality (2 Kings 13:7)

“Thus says the LORD, ‘For three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because they threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron.’”

Billy Smith: The oracle against Damascus has all the elements of messenger speech. . . It begins with the messenger formula, *“This is what the LORD says.”* With it the prophet claimed authoritative status for himself and for his message. The switch from third person in the introduction to first person in the message is noteworthy. With the introductory third-person phrase, Amos pointed to the source and authority for his message. Then he cast the message in the first-person divine speech in order to confront his audience directly and to call for their response.

Warren Wiersbe: Damascus was the capital of Syria, one of the Jews’ persistent enemies. Amos denounced the Syrians for their inhuman treatment of the Israelites who lived in Gilead, east of the Jordan River. They cruelly “threshed them” as though they were nothing but stalks of grain. God had called the Syrians to punish Israel (**2 Kings 10:32-33; 13:1-9**), but the Syrians had carried it too far.

Trent Butler: The image comes from the grain harvest, where grain was spread on the floor and separated from the stalk by dragging an implement with iron teeth over it (**Isa. 28:27**). God condemned the Syrians for invading Gilead, taking prisoners of war including women and children, and treating them like grain on the threshing floor.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: This area was prized for its fertile land for farming and livestock. A crucial trade route ran from Damascus past the Red Sea along its western edge (the King’s Highway).⁴⁹ By Amos’s day, Israel and Aram had disputed this territory continually for a century.

Allen Guenther: The Arameans’ sin lay not in subjugating the Israelites but in their excessive demands for revenue and in the inhumanity with which they extracted their taxes and subjugated the population. They were called to account for demanding “more than the market would bear” from their newly acquired subjects. Before God’s tribunal, the Arameans stood adjudged as guilty for the dual sins of greed and violence, sins which are comfortable bedfellows.

B. (:4-5) Judgment

*"So I will send fire upon the house of Hazael,
And it will consume the citadels of Ben-hadad.
⁵"I will also break the gate bar of Damascus,
And cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven,*

*And him who holds the scepter, from Beth-eden;
So the people of Aram will go exiled to Kir, ' Says the LORD."*

Warren Wiersbe: The phrase “*I will send a fire*” (**Amos 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5**) means “*I will send judgment*”; for fire represents the holiness and judgment of God (**Deut. 4:11, 24, 36; Heb. 12:29**). Indeed, the Lord did judge Syria: The dynasty of King Hazael ended; his son Ben-Hadad was defeated; Damascus lost its power (business was done at the city gate, **Amos 1:5**); and “*the house of Eden*” (**delight, paradise**) became a ruin. King Josiah defeated Ben-Hadad three times (**2 Kings 13:25**), but it was the Assyrians who finally subdued Syria and took them into captivity.

Trent Butler: Gaining power through acts of terror courts divine judgment. . .

Both names have symbolic character, Aven meaning *idolatry, nothingness, guilt* and Beth Eden meaning *house of paradise*, making a play on the garden of Eden. The Valley of Aven probably refers to the valley in Lebanon (**Josh. 11:17**), while Beth Eden was a Syrian (or Aramean) city-state on the Euphrates River two hundred miles from Israel (**2 Kgs. 19:12**). Military judgment would end the Syrian dynasty and send the people into exile. The Syrians would go back where they came from—Kir (**Amos 9:7**).

M. Daniel Carroll R.: *Yahweh will break the city's bar*. This was a horizontal shaft, made of wood or bronze (1 Kgs 4:13), which was placed behind the doors into the city to prevent their opening; it was secured on both ends in the gate posts. The term probably signifies the entire gate complex, which protected a city's entrance but was also the weakest point of its fortifications. The breach of the gate by a battering ram or its destruction by fire signaled the collapse of a city's defenses, leaving it exposed to onrushing enemy troops (**Jer 51:30; Lam 2:9**). . .

The oracle closes with *Yahweh has spoken*, forming an inclusio with the opening clause, *Thus says Yahweh*. The oracle consequently begins and ends with divine proclamation; it is a sure word of judgment (cf. **1:8, 15; 2:3**).

Gary Cohen: In **2 Kings 16:9** the fulfillment of this prophecy is explicitly stated, and the Syrians were exiled to Kir. This occurred in 732 B.C., when Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria killed Rezin, the king of Syria. The location of Kir is still unknown. Thus did the Lord fulfill His will against wicked Damascus. He threshed them who threshed His people.

Allen Guenther: Ultimately, it is not essential to be able to identify the specific Assyrian invasion to which he is referring. It probably occurred around 750-725 B.C., within 25 years after the date of the prophecy. The certainty of the judgment and the source (the Lord) lie much closer to the heart of this text than does the date.

Robert Martin-Achard: They were to be the victims of total war for having shown no pity upon their vanquished foes. Yahweh is here acting as Judge on behalf of a

population that is defenceless before the occupying power.

James Mays: Amos considered Kir to be the original home of the Arameans from whence Yahweh had brought them (9.7). Their punishment amounts to a reversal of their history. Yahweh, who brought them out of Kir, will send them back, after obliterating what they have achieved in the meantime. Once again it is apparent to what extent in Amos' prophecy the sphere of international history is the theatre of Yahweh's dominion, and how the patterns of events are an expression of Yahweh's actions. Yahweh himself makes history in a positive sense, and cancels the history which men make in acts of rebellion.

Lloyd Ogilvie: As we reflect on this first oracle, several points need underlining. Yahweh is Lord over all the nations, not just His chosen people. His anger is especially roused by human cruelty. Disregard for the value and dignity of human life will not go unpunished. And Yahweh will use the unfolding drama of the struggle of nations to accomplish His purposes.

II. (:6-8) AGAINST GAZA (capital of Philistia)

A. (:6) Reason – Deported and Enslaved Large Numbers of God's People

“Thus says the LORD, ‘For three transgressions of Gaza and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because they deported an entire population To deliver it up to Edom.’”

Warren Wiersbe: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron were the five key Philistine cities (**Josh. 13:5**), and Amos denounced all of them for trading in human lives. They raided Jewish villages and captured people to be sold as slaves. To add insult to injury, the Philistines sold these slaves to Israel's ancient enemy, the Edomites. Since Edom was descended from Esau, Jacob's brother, it was a case of brother enslaving brother. (God had something to say to Edom in Amos **1:11-12**.) Throughout the history of ancient Israel, slavery was practiced, but the Law of Moses clearly governed how the slaves were to be treated. The law that permitted slavery at the same time protected the slaves. However, it was one thing to put a prisoner of war to work and quite something else to kidnap innocent people and sell them like cattle.

James Mays: The omission [of the city of Gath] may be due to Gath's frequent inclusion in the Judean territory (**I Sam. 21.11–16; 27–30; II Sam. 15.18ff.; II Chron. 11.8–10; 26.6**), or to Gath's having come under the rule of Ashdod in this period, or perhaps to the current ruined condition of Gath resulting from the raid of Hazael (**II Kings 12.18**). Gath is not mentioned in the other prophetic oracles against the Philistines (**Jer. 25.20; Zeph. 2.4; Zech. 9.6–7**), and its absence here is hardly serious evidence against the authenticity of the saying.

Trent Butler: Human beings have innate value and must not be sold like commercial cargo. . .

The Philistines were part of the Sea Peoples, a group of related peoples who came from lands and islands of the northern Mediterranean and invaded the eastern and southern Mediterranean coastal lands. Among their stopping places were Crete (**Jer. 47:4**); Cyprus (**Num. 24:24**); and Ugarit. They attacked Egypt shortly before 1200 B.C. and invaded Palestine shortly after 1200 B.C. Even when Pharaoh Ramesses III of Egypt defeated them about 1190 B.C., he still had to let them settle the coast of Palestine (**Deut. 2:23**). They eventually centered in five cities—Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath. They were the first major threat to Israel after they settled in the promised land (**1 Sam. 4:7**).

The Philistines did not torment prisoners of war as Syria did. But they rejected their worth as humans and sold them on the open market to the highest bidder. They treated people as produce.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: This oracle denounces **trafficking in slaves** (cf. **Joel 3:4–6** [MT **4:4–6**]; **Ezek 27:13**). In the ancient world, slaves were used as domestics, in the construction of fortifications, temples, and government buildings, to build roads and dig irrigation systems, and to work on farms and in mines. A limited number were granted more respect due to administrative experience or skill; still others would be conscripted into the conquering army. There were several possible sources of slave labor—including people selling themselves or their family members into servitude to pay off crippling debts, a topic to which the book will later turn (**2:6**; cf. **8:6**). Warfare and cross-border raids were the primary means of acquiring slaves.⁸⁸ In light of the general thrust of the OAN to condemn cruelty in war, it is probably the case here that the Philistines acquired these captives in a violent way. . .

What could be in view here, then, is the taking of captives for economic gain and their cruel treatment as commodities to be put into the service of the highest bidder, irrespective of their personal fate and well-being. Life had become cheap. Israel and Judah would have been the closest targets for this capture of slaves.

Allen Guenther: The twofold Philistine crime consists first of selling an entire community into slavery, and therefore into cultural and ethnic oblivion. Such an act of genocide destroys people's identity. In a world in which one lived on through descendants and culture, the enslavement of an entire people represented a living death. The children they fathered and mothered would belong to their masters. Their virgin daughters would become concubines or wives of the highest bidder, and their sons slave laborers whose children would belong to their masters. Torn from their land and loved ones, even their gods might cease to be worshiped. That was annihilation.

Robert Martin-Achard: Yahweh does not reproach the Philistines so much for their raids against their neighbours—in fact the Israelites are not singled out or named; their crime is the enslaving of their captives (cf. **1 Sam. 30:1 f**) and organizing on a grand scale a veritable traffic in 'displaced persons', in order to hand them over to the Edomites who would then sell them again further south (**v. 6c**).

James Boice: The condemnation here is not against slavery in and of itself, just as the previous oracle was not against war in and of itself. The crime is not that soldiers were enslaved after being taken in battle, which was the standard practice, but that the Philistines used their temporary supremacy to **enslave whole populations** – soldiers and civilians, men and women, adults and children, young and old – for commercial profit. Gaza did not even need the slaves. She merely sold them to Edom for more money.

B. (:7-8) Judgment

*“So I will send fire upon the wall of Gaza, And it will consume her citadels.
8 I will also cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, And him who holds the scepter,
from Ashkelon; I will even unleash My power upon Ekron,
And the remnant of the Philistines will perish, ’ Says the Lord God.”*

Warren Wiersbe: God’s judgment on Philistia came in the days of King Uzziah (**2 Kings 18:7-8**) and the Assyrian invaders under Sargon and the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. The slave masters were themselves taken into exile and slavery.

Gary Cohen: Keil claims that Gath was a fifth Philistine capital city, but the Philistines may have deserted the more inland Gath by this time.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Assyria would inflict incalculable damage in just a few decades after the end of the prophet’s ministry. Nevertheless, the Philistine cities did not cease to exist. The *remnant of the Philistines*, in other words, did not completely *perish*. This sweeping language does not mean literal annihilation. This hyperbole is found throughout the book—for example, with respect to Israel (**2:14–16; 3:1–2, 12; 4:1–3, 6–11; 5:1–3, 15; 6:9, 14; 7:1–6; 8:1–3; 9:1–4**)—in order to communicate the horrific consequences of war: widespread death and physical destruction. Warfare invites powerfully emotive descriptions of battles and their aftermath. For those who experience armed conflict, defeat does indeed signal the end of life—personal, socioeconomic, political, cultural, and religious—as they know it.

III. (:9-10) AGAINST TYRE (capital of Phoenicia)

A. (:9) Reason – Delivered up God’s People in Violation of a Peace Pact

*“Thus says the LORD, ‘For three transgressions of Tyre and for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because they delivered up an entire population to Edom
And did not remember the covenant of brotherhood.’”*

Warren Wiersbe: Amos has moved from Damascus in the northeast to the Philistine cities in the southwest, and now he sets his sights straight north on Phoenicia and its major city, Tyre. During the reigns of David and Solomon, Israel had a warm relationship with the people of Tyre (**1 Kings 5:1ff**). Amos called it “*the brotherly covenant*” (“*treaty of brotherhood*,” NIV), suggesting that the “*covenant*” was more than a treaty but involved a friendly partnership that went deeper than politics.

Tyre, however, committed the same sins as the Philistine cities by selling Jewish captives to the Edomites as slaves (**Amos 1:6-8**). But Tyre's sin was worse than that of Philistia because Tyre was violating a long-standing compact that was based on friendship and a mutual respect for humanity. Tyre was selling its friends as slaves!

Trent Butler: God expects individuals and nations to be true to their word and not to break their promises. . .

Tyre was a proud Phoenician city on an island off the coast of the Mediterranean Sea about twenty-five miles south of Sidon, the other major Phoenician city. David and Solomon had depended on alliances with Tyre to get building materials, builders, and access to the sea. Tyre and Sidon controlled a virtual monopoly of commercial activities

in the eastern Mediterranean. Ahab's queen Jezebel from Tyre gave Baal worship a strong foothold in Israel about 870 B.C. (**Josh. 19:29**).

Tyre duplicated the Philistines' terroristic atrocities and went them one better. Tyre broke an international alliance treaty. Their prisoners of war were supposed to be their allies. Such betrayal deserves punishment.

Gary Cohen: The sin of Tyre's trafficking in Hebrew slaves was all the more heinous in light of the years of brotherly relations and nonaggression between the two nations. It was Hiram, the king of Tyre, who had participated so cordially and actively in the construction of both David's royal house and the Temple of Solomon (**2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kings 5:1, 7-18**).

Allen Guenther: The worst has yet to be told. Those whom they put up for sale were their neighbors and friends. At some point they had bound themselves together in a treaty of friendship. Whether or not the captives are Israelites makes no difference for Amos. The sin which caps their list is failure to keep faith. "Treaties are made to be broken," they apparently are saying. One moment the Tyrians are your friends, the next they trade you in the marketplace. Business is business, they glibly say while disregarding a treaty of brotherhood. Nothing—not past relationships, earlier agreements, or even personal friendships—can be allowed to interfere with a good deal.

Such callousness, lack of integrity, and denial of friendship fall under international censure and divine wrath. Fire will sweep along those massive walls and through the gorgeous mansions till nothing of worth remains (**1:10**). The possessions the people of Tyre have grasped and hugged will turn into smoke, dust, and ashes in the day of God's judgment through an unnamed agent.

Tchavdar S. Hadjiev: Betrayal of a brother and failure to live up to covenant obligations is a reprehensible thing. The mention of brotherhood anticipates the next oracle and the grand betrayal of Edom.

Billy Smith: 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.

B. (:10) Judgment

“So I will send fire upon the wall of Tyre, And it will consume her citadels.”

Warren Wiersbe: Judgment came in 332 B.C. when Alexander the Great wiped Tyre off the face of the earth and left it a place for drying nets (**26:5, 14**).

Gary Cohen: Therefore judgment in **verse 10**, without any additional punishment as in the case of the other offending nations, fit Tyre’s crime perfectly. Her “walls” and “citadels” (strong towers) would be consumed by the Lord, because she had cruelly turned against her brother nations Israel and Judah, whose walls and citadels she had helped to build years before. Why did she turn against her brother? The answer was, for the money that the trade in Jewish slaves brought from the west. God saw what Tyre had done, and He determined that the glorious outward symbols of Tyre’s wealth, her city’s walls and towers, would be torn down.

IV. (:11-12) AGAINST EDMOM

A. (:11) Reason – Denied Forgiveness and Compassion in Relentlessly Pursuing Hatred and Violence

“Thus says the LORD, ‘For three transgressions of Edom and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because he pursued his brother with the sword, While he stifled his compassion; His anger also tore continually, And he maintained his fury forever.’ ”

Warren Wiersbe: The Edomites nursed a long-standing grudge against the Jews, perpetuating the ancient rivalry between Jacob and Esau, which began before the twin boys were born (**Gen. 25:21-26**). The Edomites wouldn’t allow their Jewish cousins to pass through their land during Israel’s march to Canaan (**Num. 20:14-21**). King Saul suppressed the Edomite army (**1 Sam. 14:47**), and David conquered them (**2 Sam. 8:14**), but in the days of King Jehoram, Edom revolted against Judah and won their freedom (**2 Kings 8:16-22**).

Amos condemned the Edomites for their persistent hatred of the Jews, which the prophet described as “*raging anger and flaming fury*” (**Amos 1:11**; see also NIV). We don’t know when the Edomites aided the enemy by pursuing the Jews with the sword. It could have been during anyone of the numerous times when enemies invaded the land. When the Babylonians attacked and captured Jerusalem, the Edomites assisted the enemy and gave vent to their anger (**Obad. 10-14**; see **Ps. 137:7**). You would think that brother would help brother in a time of need, but the Edomites “*cast off all pity*” (**Amos 1:11**) and acted like beasts instead of humans. The phrase “*his anger did tear*” (v. 11) uses a verb that describes ferocious beasts tearing their prey (**Ps. 7:2**; **Gen. 37:32**).

Trent Butler: Nations and individuals are expected to support and protect family, so when love fails inside the family, punishment is on the way. . .

Stifling all compassion reads literally “*he destroyed his motherly love*” or “*his mercy*.” Those feelings of closeness and commitment that should characterize all family relationships had gone sour. Edom had destroyed them and taken the sword after his brother. What destroys family relationships? Edom proves example number one—anger that a person refuses to give up. In parallel statements the Hebrew text describes Edom's wrath as “*his anger tears forever; his rage endures for the duration*.”

M. Daniel Carroll R.: “*Pursue*” (*rdp*) can refer to chasing a defeated foe after a battle (**Gen 14:15; Josh 10:10; 1 Kgs 20:20**), and if that is the case here, then the reference is to defeat inflicted on Israel or Judah. The second verb, “*destroy*” (*šht*, piel), can refer to the annihilation of a people (e.g., **2 Sam 11:1; 2 Kgs 19:12** [par. **Isa 37:12**]; **Jer 51:25**) or more generally to God's comprehensive judgment (e.g., Gen 6:17; 9:15; 2 Sam 24:16; Jer 48:18; Lam 2:5–6; Ezek 20:17).

David Guzik: Edom held on to **anger** and **wrath** when they should have long before put it away. For this, the judgment of God would come against them. We need to learn to give our **anger** and **wrath** to God and let Him be our avenger.

B. (:12) Judgment

“So I will send fire upon Teman, And it will consume the citadels of Bozrah.”

Warren Wiersbe: Teman and Bozrah were strong cities that today don't exist. The Edomites lived “*in the clefts of the rock*” and had their “*nest among the stars*” (Obad. 3-4), boasting that their fortresses were impregnable; but the Lord destroyed their nation so thoroughly that nothing is left today except ruins. When the Romans attacked Jerusalem in A.D. 70, they destroyed what was left of the Edomite (Idumean) people, and Edom was no more.

Trent Butler: Edom's major cities faced God's destruction. Bozrah was Edom's ancient capital located near the modern village of Buseirah in northern Edom (**1 Chr. 1:44**). Teman means “*south*” in Hebrew. This apparently was the name of a city or region in southern Edom (**Jer. 49:7,20**). High in Edom's mountains, these cities appeared invincible. But both Tyre and Edom would discover that no fortress could protect when God decided to punish.

Gary Cohen: What a lesson we see here against prolonged hatred and an unmerciful spirit (cf. **Matt. 6:14-15**).

V. (:13-15) AGAINST AMMON

A. (:13) Reason – Devastated God's People in Covetous Kingdom Expansion

“Thus says the LORD, ‘For three transgressions of the sons of Ammon and for four

*I will not revoke its punishment,
Because they ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead
In order to enlarge their borders.”*

Alec Motyer: We come now to the third area of human relationships from which Amos proposes to deduce principles of conduct: those relationships in which **helplessness** in the one party ought to elicit tenderness and compassion in the other. His chosen instances are the expectant mother and the unborn child (1:13-15) and the dead body (2:1-3). . . Nothing moves God to punish so much as wanton cruelty to the helpless, for is He not rightly called the Father of the fatherless and the Defender of the widow’s cause (**Ps. 68:5**)?

Warren Wiersbe: The Ammonites and Moabites (**2:1-3**) were the descendants of Lot through his incestuous union with his daughters (**Gen. 19:30-38**). They were a ruthless people who were the avowed enemies of the Jews (**Deut 23:3-6; 1 Sam. 11:2; Neh. 2:10-19; Jer. 40:14; 41:5-7**). In order to enlarge their land, they invaded Gilead; and not satisfied with attacking the men defending their homeland, the Ammonites killed women and unborn children (see **2 Kings 8:12; 15:16**). To the Ammonites, land was more important than people, including defenseless women and innocent children. Such brutality shocks us, but is “modern warfare” any kinder?

Trent Butler: Greed and hunger for power do not justify brutality in dealing with enemy captives.

The origin of Ammon was connected to Lot, Abraham's nephew (**Gen. 19:36–38**), so here, too, family relationships are involved. During the wilderness journeys, Israel faced opposition from the Ammonites (**Num. 21:21–25**). These two nations separated by the Jordan River continually clashed throughout their history (**1 Sam. 11:1–11; 2 Kgs. 14:25**).

One sure way to weaken an enemy's armed forces is to ensure that no babies are born in the nation. To do this, armies ripped open the pregnant women when they captured a city. This was apparently a common warfare strategy, used especially against those being taken into exile (**2 Kgs. 8:12**). Ammon used this tactic in dealing with Israel, their close neighbor, as they sought to regain the land of Gilead taken from them by the Israelites under Moses.

Gary Cohen: Four lessons can be learned from God’s dealing with Ammon:

- (1) even the wicked justify their aggressive acts and wars;
- (2) the mere declaration of war does not justify atrocities against civilians;
- (3) God sees the atrocities that occur, even in the chaos of the battlefield; and
- (4) that person or nation who advances himself wickedly, at the expense of others, ultimately will be demoted by the Lord God.

Jorg Jeremias: **Ammon and Moab –**

Several shared literary features emerge in the announcements of punishment for these

two peoples:

- (1) an indication of the circumstances amid which fire is kindled against the palaces; the asyndetic enumeration of the same preposition (four or three times *b*, “with, amid” in **1:14b; 2:2b**) emphasizes the **suddenness of the events**;
- (2) conscious repetition of words in connection with the loud outcry that, accompanied by the blast of trumpets, opens every battle as a signal of attack (**1:14b; 2:2b**); and
- (3) the emphatic **inclusion of officials** in the fate of the rulers as those bearing the primary responsibility, whether this fate implies exile as in the case of the Arameans (**1:15**) or death as in the case of the Philistines (**2:3**); only in the case of Moab is it explicitly stated that the population will perish.

B. (:14-15) Judgment

*“So I will kindle a fire on the wall of Rabbah, And it will consume her citadels
Amid war cries on the day of battle And a storm on the day of tempest.
Their king will go into exile, He and his princes together,’ says the LORD.”*

Warren Wiersbe: Amos announced that a storm of judgment would come to the people of Ammon and that their capital city (Rabbah) would be destroyed. This took place when the Assyrians swept over the land in 734 B.C. Not only did Amos predict the destruction of their land, but so did Ezekiel (**25:1-7**). The chief god of Edom was Molech (Malcham, Milcom), which means “reigning one, king.” **Amos 1:15** could be translated, “*Molech will go into exile,*” thus showing the inability of their god to save them.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The cruelty in their attack will be matched by a furious battle against Ammon’s fortresses at Yahweh’s hand. Even as Ammon had victimized the defenseless, its fortresses will be useless against the divine foe.

Robert Martin-Achard: The manner in which Amos expresses himself here renders transparent the indignation of the God of Israel (v. **14b**). Upon Ammon he will hurl himself like a tempest (**Jer. 23:19; Ezek. 13:13**), and his war-cry (**Jer. 4:19; Amos 2:2**) will be heard on the day of battle. Yahweh is thus dealing with what we might call a holy war on the wretch who has dared to lay hands on the very sources of life.

James Mays: The exile of Ammon’s king and his officers is announced. As in the oracles against Damascus and Gaza, the displacement of royal power and the destruction of military defences are chief features of the judgment. And once again the motif of exile appears. The judgment of Yahweh will be a quite specific reality within the sphere of political and military reality. Its result will be a complete vacuum of power, an absence of the customary rule and might by which the usual events of history were determined.

Thomas McComiskey: Ammon’s dominion came to an end when Nebuchadnezzar sacked the city of Rabbah and took large numbers of its citizens captive. This opened the way for Arabian invaders to occupy their territory. The Ammonites passed from history for good.

VI. (2:1-3) AGAINST MOAB

A. (:1) Reason – Desecrated the Dead in Act of Disrespect and Degradation

“Thus says the LORD, ‘For three transgressions of Moab and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime.’”

Thomas Constable: 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. Burning the king's bones indicated a desire to completely destroy the peace and even the soul of Edom's king, in this case King Mesha, for eternity. 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.

Warren Wiersbe: Animosity between Moab and Israel began very early when the Moabites refused to give the Jews passage on the major highway (**Deut. 23:3-4; Judges 11:17**). The king of Moab also hired Balaam to curse Israel (**Num. 22-24**), and then the Moabite women seduced the Jewish men to commit fornication and idolatry (**Num. 25**). During the period of the judges, Israel was subject to the Moabites for eighteen years (**Judges 3:12-30**).

What was the sin of Moab? Disrespect for the dead and for royalty. We don't know which king's remains were subjected to this humiliation, but the deed disgraced the memory of the king and humiliated the people of Edom.

Amos announced that the king of Moab and his officials were all guilty and would be destroyed, along with their cities. Moab was taken by the Assyrians, and the land eventually became the home of numerous nomadic tribes. The nation of Moab was no more. (For other prophecies of Moab's doom, see **Isa. 15-16; Jer. 48; Ezek. 25:8-11; Zeph. 2:8-11**.)

Trent Butler: Even archenemies do not deserve irreverent treatment and desecration. Like Ammon, Moab's beginnings are traced to Abraham's nephew Lot (**Gen. 19:37**). Situated between Ammon and Edom and between the Dead Sea and the Arabian Desert, Moab had little hope for expansion. They gained Israel's enmity by refusing to allow the wilderness wanderers to pass through their territory (**Num. 22:1-24:25**). Worse still, Moabites lured Israelites into false worship (**Num. 25:1-5**). On the other hand, God protected Moab, refusing to let Israel conquer Moabite territory (**Deut. 2:9**).

Amos accused Moab of capturing Edom's king and burning his remains, even his bones, apparently to prevent any hope of bodily resurrection (**1 Cor. 15:35-54**). Here was a

family feud taken to the extreme—seeking to prevent military success and to rob others of rewards beyond the grave.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The meaning of the preposition *lamed* attached to the term *lime* requires clarification. Should it be translated as *to lime* or as “*for the purpose of lime*”? If the former, the emphasis is on how thoroughly the bones had been burned, perhaps to disrupt profoundly the fate of the soul of the dead king. If the phrase is taken as “*for the purpose of lime,*” then the idea is that the king’s bones were burned to obtain lime in order to plaster something, like a wall or building (cf. **Deut 27:2, 4**). Either possibility displays callousness and blatant disrespect.

John Goldingay: Moab is the last of Ephraim’s eastern neighbors; its territory lies between Ammon and Edom. Its offense is distinctive. Yahweh presupposes that respect for the human body does not stop when someone dies. The body is an essential part of the person. People should be allowed to rest in She’ol, not have their tomb desecrated (cf. **Jer. 8:1–2**). The Moabites have treated the Edomite king’s body as something that has no value—or rather, that has value to provide plaster and whitewash.

B. (:2-3) Judgment

*“So I will send fire upon Moab, And it will consume the citadels of Kerioth;
And Moab will die amid tumult, With war cries and the sound of a trumpet.
³ I will also cut off the judge from her midst,
And slay all her princes with him, ’ says the LORD.”*

J. Vernon McGee: “*Moab shall die with tumult*”—that is, they will go out with a real bang, and the nation will be ended. This proud nation was brought to extinction later on at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, and you haven’t seen a Moabite since then.

But isn’t it interesting that, many years before, out of this heathen country had come that gentle, lovely, and beautiful girl by the name of Ruth who became the wife of Boaz? Her story is recorded in one of the loveliest books in the Bible. Ruth is in the genealogical line which leads to Jesus Christ. And she had come from Moab, of all places. They were really a heathen, pagan people with a sad and sorry beginning and just as sad and tragic an end as a nation. But Ruth’s story reveals what the grace of God can do in the life of a believer if the believer will let Him do it.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is your emotional reaction to the Lord’s sovereignty over the nations and His holding them accountable for their transgressions?
- 2) If “judgment begins at the house of God” why does Amos start his prophetic judgments with Israel’s neighboring countries?

3) What aspects of this passage contribute to the certainty and severity of these judgments?

4) Does the punishment fit the crime in our justice system?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Allen Guenther: God Rules –

The Lord's threatening roar receives no challenging response from other gods. Why are the gods of these other nations silent when the Scripture is full of stories about contests of gods?

Here, as on so many other occasions, God shows himself superior to the gods of the nations, whether of Mesopotamia, Egypt, or of Canaan (**Deut. 4:15-19; Josh. 24:14-15**). Before the fifth century B.C., the predominant polemic in the message of the prophets takes the form of showing how inadequate the other gods are and how God bests them in every power encounter. Israel's Lord is supreme over all that is called God. The exodus, the entry into and possession of the land, and the contest with Baal and Asherah in Elijah's day—these all show that the Lord is incomparable and that his reign is not restricted to the territory the Israelites came to occupy.

Tchavdar S. Hadjiev: The sins of Israel's neighbours are military atrocities (Aram, Edom, Ammon), slave trade (Gaza, Tyre) and defiling of graves (Moab). In essence, these are acts of violence and aggression motivated by greed and self-interest (Gaza, Ammon), by anger (Edom) or by desire to humiliate an enemy (Moab). Together they show Israel's neighbours to be brutal, self-centred and arrogant people. Their punishment, therefore, will be severe: exile (Aram, Ammon) and total extermination (Gaza, Moab).

The nations are not accused of idolatry, but of inhumane treatment of others. Initially the series hints that the victims might be Israelites and allows for the possibility of nationalistic outrage. With the Moab oracle this possibility is imploded. The Lord condemns the violence against Edom, itself a transgressor and a perpetrator of violence. Once we reach the final accusation (**2:1**) the anonymity of the earlier victims takes on a new meaning. God is not a partisan, concerned only about the well-being of his own people. He protects everyone, regardless of their ethnicity. The criticisms imply that the nations have violated moral norms which are universally applicable to all people and recognized through convention and custom (**Barton** 1980: 39–45; 2012: 57–60). Even though the nations do not have a special revelation of the divine will, they still have a responsibility to follow the general moral principles, available to them through the created order of which they are part (**Rom. 2:14–15**).

The foreign nations anticipate the portrayal of Israel in **2:6–16**. The violence of Aram, Edom and Ammon prefigures the violence of Israel against the poor and the afflicted (**2:7a**). The delivering of whole communities of exiles by Gaza and Tyre mirrors the selling of the righteous and the needy into slavery (**2:6b**). The atrocities of Ammon, motivated by desire for territorial gain, echo the selling of people into slavery for financial gain (**2:6b**). The violence committed by Edom and Ammon against women links in with the sexual exploitation of female servants in Israelite households (2:7b). **In their transgressions the nations are a mirror image of Israel.** Thus, the OAN present the reader with a stark theological proposition: by acting unjustly towards the poor, **Israel has lost its distinctive identity as a people of God and has become like the neighbours it hates and abhors.**

J. Barton: Having won the people's sympathy and agreement, he rounds on them by proclaiming judgment on Israel, too. This technique has two obvious advantages. First, it ensures that the prophet's word of doom will be heard, since he has gained his audience's attention by flattering their feelings of superiority and their natural xenophobia. Secondly, it makes it much harder for them to exculpate themselves or dismiss the prophet's message as mere raving, since they have implicitly conceded that sin and judgment are rightly linked, by their approval of what has gone before.

The general form of **1:3 - 2:16** is that of **messenger speech**.

(1) It begins with the introductory messenger formula, *“This is what the LORD says.”*

(2) Next comes a statement of the certainty of judgment, *“For three sins of...even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.”*

(3) Then follows the specific charge of guilt.

(4) The succeeding item is the announcement of punishment, *“I will send fire.”*

(5) The closing element is the concluding messenger formula, *“says the LORD.”*

S. Lewis Johnson: Amos, it has been said, was a prophet of **social justice**. Well, now we must not think of social justice as we think of social justice today. Social justice today is unfortunately linked with **socialism**, and the sense of many people is that one cannot have social justice if he does not have socialism. And so we have great figures who tell us that they hate capitalism and they want a caring government, little realizing that a caring government is a government of people who care, and the fact is that human nature is sinful. **What is capitalism?** Is it a system of evil men for accomplishing economic ends? No, no, no. It's not intended to be that. What is capitalism? Why it's simply a system for producing goods and services. As a matter of fact, it is done better than any other system to this point in the history of the human race.

Now, when we look at other systems, we will find a vast difference between them. They go at things in a different way. It's my opinion that capitalism does understand the fact that human nature is sinful. Capitalism is realistic, not perfect, realistic. It has many flaws but the flaws are not the system. The flaws are those who are involved in the system, the evil man. They are the ones who are responsible for the evil, but unfortunately no system can change the nature of man and thus in socialism it fails by being fundamentality a system that does not understand human nature. That's to my

mind the fundamental flow of socialism. Humanity's natural inquisitiveness will always be at odds with any system that requires persons to produce as much as they can but permits them to keep only what they need.

Further, coerced charity has the opposite affect from voluntary charity such as ideally exists in a capitalistic society. Actually all of the charitable institutions that we know about us today are the products of the people who are in a capitalistic system. It could be a whole lot more, and it could be a whole lot more significant. And some of you sitting in this audience could also part with a few more of your dollars for causes that are good and would even commend the system which most of you hold to be a better system as I do myself. Recipients of coerced charity are taught in socialism to believe it's their right to be taken care of, and they look to the government for help rather than to their own labors.

The welfare state results and the institutionalism of covetousness characterizes such societies. Take a look at Soviet Russia. Take a look at other societies in which socialism has full play in them. That's what you find and if you find something different I'd like for you to bring it to me because I think that history stands back of that. As a matter of that, the campaigns against capitalism carried on by individuals in this country and in other countries constitute, as one person has put it I think so beautifully, constitute one of the notable chapters in the history of false witness. And one of the things responsible for this is our own media in the United States of America. They have a basic misunderstanding of human nature coupled with its apparent socialist bias. In fact, these two go together. . .

Amos was a social prophet, but he was a social prophet within the society of the northern and southern kingdoms, particularly the northern kingdom. And consequently he was not a prophet of social justice in the misguided way in which that term is used in our society today. **He spoke about right and wrong, and he spoke from the fundamental basis of the word of God.** What a difference between the social prophets of today and Amos. The social prophets of today do not ground their opinions in the word of God.

TEXT: Amos 2:4-16

TITLE: ORACLES OF JUDGMENTS AGAINST JUDAH AND ISRAEL

BIG IDEA:

THE CLIMAX OF GOD'S JUDGMENT IS DIRECTED AGAINST HIS OWN PEOPLE – ESPECIALLY ISRAEL

INTRODUCTION:

Gary Smith: Amos 2:4–16 treats the final pair of nations, Judah and Israel. These oracles bring the sermon to a climax by applying the theological principles developed in 1:3 – 2:3 to Amos's own countrymen in Judah and then to his Israelite audience in Samaria. Since this is merely a continuation of the preceding section, the same date, background, and structure are maintained.

The surprising reversal of the usual positive ending of the war oracle gives this section a dramatic conclusion. Instead of ending his message with the expected promise of victory, saying that Israel will be saved by God's strong hand and defeat all her enemies, Amos predicts the unparalleled defeat of Israel's army. This shocking conclusion probably catches most of his listeners off guard and forces them to imagine what was previously thought to be impossible. How could God ever destroy his own people whom he earlier promised to bless? How could Israel's strong army actually be annihilated? Is God speaking to Amos? Has Israel rebelled against God, and will they be punished for their sins of oppression just like the other nations?

Billy Smith: What lessons should the Israelites and modern readers glean from the previous oracles? The first lesson is the **sovereignty of God**. God's sovereign rule means that every nation is accountable to him. Foreign nations were not immune to God's judgment because of their allegiance to other gods. Israel and Judah did not enjoy immunity because they were in covenant with God.

The second lesson is the **tolerance of God**. "*For three sins ... even for four*" describes God's tolerance of sin to a point. His tolerance is impartial, for all nations alike, and limited, for "four" but no more. Ultimately a nation's sin reaches a point when God's tolerance ends and judgment is the only outcome (cf. 8:1-3).

The third lesson concerns the **judgment of God**. His judgment is impartial for any nation regardless of relationship to him. It matches in severity the sins judged. Inhumanity to humans in the case of foreign nations is comparable to rejection of the Lord's instruction in the case of Judah. Judah's covenant relationship with God did not immunize the nation from judgment.

Alec Motyer: The people to whom Amos spoke had devalued the doctrine of election into a non-moral doctrine of divine favoritism: Israel was God's 'pet', surrounded by a divine imperial preference, protected, subsidized, the recipient of many unique

allowances and special pleadings. The word to this people is based on the inflexible, unchanging righteousness of the Lord God, and the foundation for such a message is unobtrusively laid when Amos brings his charges against the nations. He speaks in the name of the God of righteousness, and neither here nor elsewhere in his book does the title 'God of Israel' appear. In the same way, the appeal to conscience, to common humanity, underlying his review of the world is another move depriving Israel of any special ground or plea. Whatever makes Israel distinct among the nations, there is no distinction at this point, that the same moral rules operate inside as outside. Thus the noose tightens until, as we shall now see, the unique position granted by grace to the church of God, far from excusing or even ameliorating the offence, aggravates the situation so that Israel's fourth transgression is even less understandable or forgivable than that of the heathen who knew not God. The uniqueness of the church includes its unique peril.

Trent Butler: Main Idea: God's judgment awaits any nation that forgets the basic rules of human decency, but it is even more certain when God's own people forget him, his teachings, and all he has done for them.

I. (:4-5) AGAINST JUDAH

A. Reason

“Thus says the LORD, ‘For three transgressions of Judah and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because they rejected the law of the LORD And have not kept His statutes; Their lies also have led them astray, Those after which their fathers walked.’”

Warren Wiersbe: Although the temple was filled with people bringing their sacrifices, Judah was a nation given over to idolatry. *“Their lies [idols] lead them astray, lies after which their fathers walked” (2:4, NKJV)*. They were wandering like lost animals and like drunken men. The Gentiles had sinned against conscience and the laws of brotherhood and humanity, but the Jews had despised and rejected the very laws of God, given to them by Moses. Theirs was the greater sin, for greater privilege always brings greater responsibility (**Rom. 2:17-3:9**).

Gary Smith: The willful sin of Judah is not described as an oppressive act against some foreign nation that has ignored the ethical standards of the Judeans' conscience, but a direct refusal to follow God's stipulations and instructions in the Torah. They are breaching covenant responsibilities with God. Moses warned the people not to forget what God did for them in the past and what God said to them at Sinai. If they did forget, they might soon become proud and self-sufficient, thinking that they really did not need God (**Deut. 8:1-20**). This presents a high standard for Judah, for they have been given the full revealed truth of what God wants them to do; they do not have to wonder what is right and wrong based on their conscience. . .

They have adopted social, economic, and political principles from the neighboring cultures and pervert the moral, ceremonial, civil, and economic guidelines in the

covenant. These leaders have a clear understanding of what God wants from them, but they still fail to lead the people to follow after God. Who should be followed, God or these liars?

Gary Cohen: Notice in **verse 4** the progression of God's three charges against Judah:

- first, the despising of His holy and life-giving law;
- second, the consequent breaking of His commandments and regulations concerning worship and life;
- and third, the consequent self-deception that the ignoring of God's regulations did not really matter much in daily living.

That triple error brought the divine wrath upon Judah.

Billy Smith: The most significant difference is that whereas previous oracles cited various forms of inhumanity perpetrated on others as the repeated indictment, the wrongs cited in the Judah oracle are covenant related. **Breach of covenant** was Judah's intolerable rebellion against God. . .

The powerful, rich landowners stepped on the poor by using the courts to pervert justice. Thus they revealed their contempt for those less fortunate, treating the poor like dirt. A literal rendering of the third line of **v. 7** reveals the emphasis of the speaker: "*And the way of the afflicted they turn aside.*" Needy ones were pushed off the road, "bullied and oppressed by the wealthy", pushed aside as they sought justice at the gate (cf. **5:12; Exod 23:6; Prov 17:23**). The specific charge is unclear; however, some circumvention of justice is the obvious reference.

Lloyd Ogilvie: We can surmise that some in Amos's audience took prejudiced delight in hearing Judah included in the indictment of foreign nations. Since the division of the kingdom in Solomon's time, tension, criticism, hostility, and conflict had grown. Judah was quick to denounce the apostasy of Israel. Now Judah was being given its comeuppance. "Long overdue!" some of Amos's listeners probably said with pious self-justification.

The accusations of Yahweh against Judah could not have been more painted. His chosen, called, and cherished people in Judah had come to the place where they despised the Law of the Lord. The crucial issue is covenant disobedience. This led to breaking the Torah and to idolatry. They followed after "fakes" *kēzābīm*. For generations their fathers had followed pagan gods rather than trusting only in Yahweh. .

Don't miss the fact that this oracle of judgment was delivered by a citizen of Judah. Amos was confronting the sins of his own people. This must have had an impact on his audience. It made what he had to say about Israel all the more difficult to evade.

Alec Motyer: The final contrast whereby Amos describes their rejection of the Lord's truth can now be seen in its full shame: the contrast between rejection and cultivation of the truth: they rejected and have not kept God's word, but on the contrary have been led astray after lies in which their fathers walked. Both in what they have rejected and in

what they adopted the whole man was involved. Rejected points a mental state which first despises and then dismisses; lies also belong to the activity of mental appraisal and (in this case) to the adoption of falsehood as truth. But in contrast kept and walked imply the sort of life which arises out of the mental decisions which have been made: once the truth has been despised it is not kept in an obedient, conformed life; once the lie has been embraced it guides the walk, the direction which life takes.

Allen Guenther: Amos explains the most frequent cause of such defection from the law of God as being the pursuit of false gods (*their lies have led them astray*). The word lie is used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to idols (**Isa. 28:15, 17; Ps. 4:2; 40:4**). Indeed, in **Psalm 4:2** the godless are described as those who seek a divine word from the Lie. No wonder idols lead Judah astray—they constitute the Lie. They promise life but deliver death. They have enticed whole generations of God’s people with their deceitful words and have distorted the truth of God. Judah plunged headlong into the way of death instead of walking in God’s ways.

John Goldingay: The **lies** that have led Judah astray since the time of their ancestors would have included the recurrent recognition of other deities that began with Solomon, the false forms and objects of worship that they introduced into the temple, and their trust in foreign alliances. The alien deities are themselves “‘lies’ personified.”

B. Judgment

“So I will send fire upon Judah, And it will consume the citadels of Jerusalem.”

Warren Wiersbe: God had frequently punished His people in their land by allowing various nations to attack and subdue them, but now He would punish them out of their land. The Babylonian army would destroy Jerusalem and take thousands of captives to Babylon where they would live in the midst of gross idolatry for seventy years. However, unlike the six Gentile nations Amos had denounced, Judah would not be destroyed but would be spared. In His mercy, God would allow a remnant of Jews to return to establish the nation and rebuild the temple.

Gary Smith: Amos’s Israelite audience probably agrees that Judah deserves this judgment, but when they do this, they are admitting that God’s law is a legitimate standard to judge a nation’s morality. If so, it may then serve as a scale for evaluating Israel’s behavior as well. Many in Israel are somewhat aware of what God demands in the covenant stipulations. By supporting God’s punishment of Judah, the listeners recognize the authority that will spell out their own shortcomings.

Billy Smith: Being “God’s people” does not create immunity to the judgment of God but in fact increases accountability. Their guilt placed them alongside those foreign nations who perpetrated atrocities on fellow human beings.

J. Vernon McGee: Again and again, Amos mentions, as do the other prophets, that there is to be a judgment by fire. When Nebuchadnezzar came against the city, he absolutely

burned Jerusalem to the ground. There was nothing left but the stones—of which there is an abundance in that particular area.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: If, however, the sins of v. 4 are understood to be of a sociopolitical and economic nature (instead of as religious or cultic violations), then the rationale of the judgment is plain. The mistaken foreign policy choices, the immoral decisions and lifestyle of the leadership, and the misguided words of false prophets had led Judah to engage in unwise wars and to the creation of a self-destructive social environment. These realities are echoed in the accusations and pronouncements of judgment made by Isaiah and Micah, Amos's counterparts in the Southern Kingdom. The sins committed within Judah would bring a judgment of invasion and military defeat. This truth anticipates what will be said of Israel in the rest of the book.

II. (:6-16) CLIMAX: AGAINST ISRAEL

James Mays: In his indictment Amos does not proceed by assembling a list of laws which have been broken. The correlation between his language and particular statutes in the Book of the Covenant rest on allusions, on one word in some cases. The impression given is not so much that Amos itemizes one infraction of law after another, but rather that he throws together a montage of typical acts to portray the **character of a society**. The entire series could be brought under the rubric of one prohibition from the Book of the Covenant: *'You shall not pervert the justice due to the poor in his suit'* (Ex. 23.6). And the concern which penetrates all the accusations is akin to the exhortations (in the style of a divine saying) which have been appended to certain prohibitions in the redaction of the collections in the Book of the Covenant. Ex. 22.22ff.: *'You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword'* (cf. Amos 6.9; 9.1); Ex. 22.26f.: *'If he [i.e. the neighbour whose cloak is expropriated] cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.'* It is this will of Yahweh for justice, this divine concern for the weak, which constitutes the basic norm for measuring the life of Israel. Amos does not preach law in legalistic fashion, but represents the divine will and concern which lies behind it.

A. (:6-8) Reason – Disobeyed in 3 Major Areas:

1. (:6-7a) Injustice / Extortion / Oppression

"Thus says the LORD, 'For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because they sell the righteous for money And the needy for a pair of sandals. ⁷ These who pant after the very dust of the earth on the head of the helpless Also turn aside the way of the humble;'"

Gary Smith: This accusation is not pinpointing any illegal court action, but the merciless selling of destitute people who could likely remove their debt if given just a bit more time. This is a blatant case where wealthy Israelites do not care for the poor as the covenant stipulations required (Ex. 21:2–11; Deut. 15:12–18). Israelites were not to

take interest, but were to have an open hand to share with those in need and to have mercy on the needy, for God’s covenant people were freed from slavery at the time of the Exodus from Egypt (**Ex. 22:25–27**).

Thomas McComiskey: The needy are seen as being in the right or having a just cause. The word *ṣaddîq* is used in this sense in **Exodus 23:7**, where in a context of litigation it is coupled with “innocent” (*nāqî*). In **Deuteronomy 25:1** *ṣaddîq* is the antithesis of “guilty” (*rāšaʿ*). On a number of occasions (e.g., **Isa 32:7**; **Jer 5:28**) the prophets spoke of the “needy” as being in litigious situations. This shows us something of the social conditions of that time, when the poor had to fight for their just rights, which were all-too-frequently ignored. . .

Here the text presents certain difficulties; but if one follows the MT literally, the most favorable rendering is, “*who pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor,*” meaning either that the oppressing classes long to see the poor brought to extreme anguish, or the oppressors are so avaricious that they craved the dust with which the poor have covered their heads. In ancient Near Eastern culture, pouring dust on one’s head signified sorrow (e.g., **2Sa 1:2**; **Job 2:12**).

John Goldingay: Whereas the earlier critiques basically involve one act of rebellion, in keeping with the implications of the three/four formula, the critique of Ephraim names a series of acts. Further, whereas the first six critiques concerned national acts of the kind involved in war-making against other nations and the seventh focused on unfaithfulness to Yahweh in worship, Ephraim’s acts of rebellion are undertaken by Ephraimites against one another. These actions do sometimes have direct implications for people’s attitude toward Yahweh, which makes for a comparison with the critique of Judah.

2. (:7b) Immorality

*“And a man and his father resort to the same girl
In order to profane My holy name.”*

Gary Smith: This probably has nothing to do with the sacred prostitution practiced at Baal temples, nor an attempt by fathers to have sexual relations with their daughters-in-laws. Instead, it refers to sexual mistreatment of a hard-working household employee. Fathers and sons were not to have sex with the same woman (**Lev. 18:8, 15, 17; 20:10–20**). The law provided some protection for female slaves because they were so vulnerable to mistreatment by their masters (**Ex. 21:7–11; Lev. 19:20–22**). In spite of this, powerful men could intimidate them with dire financial consequences if they did not cooperate with their deviant immoral desires. The emphasis is still on the strong-armed oppression of defenseless people.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The word the maiden (*hanna ʾărâ*) can refer broadly to a young woman. A number of scholars locate the girl within the **religious sphere** because of the words profaning my holy name in the next clause and the mention of altars and a worship center in v. **8**. In this case, she would be a **sacred prostitute**, and so the prophet is denouncing sexually charged syncretistic rites of fertility

religion (cf. **Hos 4:14**). Another religious interpretation is proposed by **Barstad**, who contends that the young woman is a *marzēah* hostess. The *marzēah* was an association of the well-to-do whose religious celebrations (perhaps funerary) were characterized by alcohol consumption (cf. **6:4–7**; perhaps **4:1**). In this case, the actions of the two males are not sexual but cultic. The protagonists would be wealthy, and what is criticized is connected to drinking in a non-Yahwistic festivity. Both of these options, however, are problematic, albeit for different reasons. The sacred prostitution view assumes the existence of cultic prostitution, something which is now contested. Even if such rituals with their accompanying theology did exist, neither the technical term for female cultic personnel (*qadēšā*) nor the word for prostitute (*zōnā*) is used. The most serious problems with **Barstad**'s interpretation are that it ignores the sexual meaning of the words go to and imposes the interpretation of a *marzēah* feast with too little evidence.

Other scholars explain the impropriety as a reference to some sort of **incest**. The Law prohibits sexual intercourse between a man and his wife's daughter (**Lev 18:17; 20:14**), a son and his father's wife (**Lev 18:8; 20:11; Deut 22:30 [MT 23:1]**), and a father and his daughter-in-law (**Lev 18:15; 20:12**). This view envisions something similar here—for example, a father having a sexual relationship with a young woman with whom his son is to be married, perhaps because of the son's own sexual involvement with her (cf. **Deut 22:23–29**).

The third option, the one favored by many commentators and taken here, is that this maiden is of lower social status like the other victims in the passage. Perhaps she is in the family's domestic employ or finds herself in debt slavery and powerless before the advances of her masters. **Lust is empowered by status**; this victim is treated as nothing more than an object to be used for pleasure without any regard for her personal worth and reputation. This exact case lies beyond the purview of the decrees of the Law but this violation would be commensurate with its thrust concerning sexual decency. The choice of the ambiguous word *na'ārā* is interesting. It can be used of a female servant (e.g., **Exod 2:5; 1 Sam 25:42; Prov 31:15**; cf. **Exod 21:7–11**), but the more technical terms are *'āmā* and *šiphā*. The vagueness perhaps allows for consideration of a set of victims not limited to servants.

3. (:8) Idolatry

*“And on garments taken as pledges they stretch out beside every altar,
And in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been
fined.”*

Allen Guenther: Israel's institutions, too, fail to embody the divine will. Trade and commerce, the judicial system, marriage and the family, the religious system—all have become perverted. These are representative sins. The description points to customary actions (**2:6–8**). The societal structures have become weapons of oppression for those in control. If the nation is to be restored to wholeness, the medium of exchange must become compassion, love, and justice.

Warren Wiersbe: Both Israel and Judah were enjoying peace and prosperity, and divine judgment was the furthest thing from their minds.

Amos first exposes their sinful present and names three flagrant sins. To begin with, the people of the Northern Kingdom were guilty of **injustice (Amos 2:6-7a)**. Supported by corrupt judges, the rich were suing the poor, who couldn't pay their bills, and forcing them into servitude and slavery.

Their second gross sin was **immorality (Amos 2:7b)**, with fathers and sons visiting the same prostitute! These may have been "cult prostitutes" who were a part of the heathen idolatrous worship. Thus there was a double sin involved: immorality and idolatry. Or the girl may have been a household servant or a common prostitute. Regardless of what the act of disobedience was, it was rebellion against God and defiled His holy name.

The third sin was open **idolatry (Amos 2:8)**. The wealthy men took their debtors' garments as pledges but did not return them at sundown as the law commanded (Ex. 22:26-27; Deut. 24:10-13, 17). Instead, these rich sinners visited pagan altars, where they got drunk on wine purchased with the fines they exacted from the poor. Then, in their drunken stupor, they slept by the altars on other people's garments, defiling the garments and disobeying the law. The officials were getting rich by exploiting the people, and then were using their unjust gain for committing sin. After describing their sinful present, Amos reminded them of their glorious past (Amos 2:9-12). God had led His people out of Egypt (v. 10a), cared for them in the wilderness (v. 10b), and destroyed other nations so the Jews could claim their inheritance in Canaan (vv. 9, 10c). He gave them His Word through chosen prophets (v. 11a), and He raised up dedicated people like the Nazirites (Num. 6) to be examples of devotion to God. What a glorious past they had! But instead of being humbled by these blessings, the people rebelled against the Lord by rejecting the messages of the prophets and forcing the Nazirites to break their holy vows. The Jews wanted neither the Word of God nor examples of godly living.

Robert Martin-Achard: Verse 8 attacks another abuse of the Israelites. Among them were individuals who used goods taken in pledge as if they were their own property, even for religious purposes. The Law actually saw to it that an insolvent debtor must hand over his cloak to his creditor; but it adds that if this is the only covering the poor creature has, then he must receive it back before the sun goes down (**Exod. 22:25 f; Deut. 24:12 f, 17**); for in the eyes of Yahweh the existence of a human life is more precious than any payment of a debt.

Amos observes that a favoured class profits from its situation by extorting another's goods. In that case its attitude is doubly blameworthy, because it is accompanied by a veneer of piety. An iniquity, even when it reaches into cultic practice, remains an iniquity!

M. Daniel Carroll A.: One can also discern a list of seven. In contrast to the first option, the clauses of **2:6-8** are not seen as parallel but as distinct wrongdoings:

1. selling the righteous (v. 6a),
2. selling the poor (v. 6b),
3. trampling the weak (v. 7a),
4. pushing aside the afflicted (v. 7a),
5. going to the girl (v. 7b),
6. the misuse of pledges or distraints (v. 8a),
7. and the consumption of wine in a sanctuary (v. 8b).

This enumeration would mirror the stylistic feature of the heptad so prevalent in the rest of the book.

B. (:9-12) Rejection of God's Covenant Faithfulness

Tchavdar Hadjiev: Verses 9–12 function as a **hinge** in this text. On the one hand, they intensify the accusation by confronting the behavior of the Israelite leaders toward those dependent on them with Yahweh's own intervention for Israel in its helplessness during the land conquest. Israel has learned nothing from its own history. On the other hand, they intensify the pronouncement of judgment against Israel in vv. 13–16 by juxtaposing Yahweh's intervention for Israel in the form of the total annihilation of mighty adversaries with his imminent intervention against Israel, which will be just as thoroughgoing and comprehensive. Strictly speaking, this double contextual link and intensification applies only to v. 9. Verses 10–12 are already set apart by the transition to elevated prose and to the device of direct address, something one does not expect stylistically until the pronouncement of punishment in v. 13; their recollection of the exodus introduces the basic salvific-historical event of Israel's confession, and the theme of the rejected prophets and nazirites introduces a new, substantively quite different accusation than in vv. 6–8.

Gary Cohen: This entire passage shows that God knows the bounty of blessing that He has bestowed on each of us and upon our nation. Our sins therefore appear all the worse, because they represent ingratitude for His many blessings.

1. (:9-11) Examples of God's Past Grace Shown to Israel

Gary Smith: Amos now changes his approach to describing Israel's rebelliousness. He emphasizes what God did for Israel in the past by rescuing them when they were oppressed by stronger nations. One would expect Israel to be thankful to God and obey his covenant stipulations because of his grace. One would also assume that the Israelites would understand from their past history that God consistently fights against oppressors and on behalf of the oppressed. This view of God's ways puts the present Israelite oppressors in a dangerous position as God's potential enemies. Their failure to appreciate his gracious deeds in the past and their rejection of his attempts to warn them through the prophets and Nazirites put the nation on a collision course with God.

- a. (:9) Destruction of the Impressive Amorites (Tall and Powerful)
"Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, Though his height was

like the height of cedars And he was strong as the oaks; I even destroyed his fruit above and his root below.”

Billy Smith: The first action of God Amos mentioned was the destruction of the Amorite. Why that action was given priority over the chronologically preceding exodus from Egypt (v. 10) is a puzzle. Could it be that Amos gave priority to the destruction of the Amorite because that action alone allowed Israel to possess the promised land? Or was it because Israel's continued possession of the land was at stake, since they were engaging in the kinds of behavior for which God had judged the Amorites? Deterioration of their moral and spiritual condition would surely result in their being driven off the land just as the Amorites had been (9:7-8). Another possibility is that following the rhetorical pattern of 1:3 - 2:16, that is, announcing this message to Israel last, he reversed the chronology to make the historical and theological point all the more significant. This prophetic word is not just about the Amorites; it is about Israel's covenant with God dating back to the exodus, the act of God par excellence. . .

Amos employed two metaphors to describe the abnormal size and strength of the Amorite: “*tall as the cedars*” and “*strong as the oaks.*” Cedars and oaks were the most massive of native trees in Israel. The prophet also used a common idiom regarding the “fruit” and the “roots” to express total extermination of the Amorite. Destruction of “his fruit” left no possibility of future life from seed. Destruction of “roots” left no possibility of future life for the tree. God is able to deal decisively with the enemies of his people.

Allen Guenther: **Amorites** is used as a general term for the assortment of peoples whom Israel eventually replaced in Palestine (Num. 13:28-29). The metaphors which characterize the Amorites as tall as the cedars and as strong as the oaks display people at the height of arrogance and power (Isa. 2:10-18). The divine judgment destroyed their fruit above and roots below (cf. Hos. 9:16; Job 18:16; Mai. 4:1). The metaphors shift the scene from the hills of Lebanon (cedars) and Bashan (oaks) to the fertile valleys of Palestine, where orchards flourished and were an important part of the economy. Destroying both root and fruit “combines the imagery of both planting and harvesting, imagery which when applied to human beings conjures up images of stability and prosperity” (Wolff: 169). Both are erased in the sweep of God’s judgment.

The horticultural imagery contains a double message. In spite of all their security, self-confidence, pride, and strength, the Amorites were felled by their Creator. Yet God delayed their destruction for four generations until the Amorite measure of sins was filled to overflowing (Gen. 15:16). That bushel of sins consisted of idolatry and disgusting practices (Exod. 23:23-24). A second, thinly veiled message is directed against Israel. For many generations, the Lord has patiently endured their smug self-satisfaction, their misuse of power against fellow Israelites, and their worship of foreign deities. Their sins exceed by far the iniquity of the Amorites. So now the ax is about to strike at Israel’s roots, scattering her fruit as she comes crashing to the ground (cf. Matt. 3:10).

b. (:10) Deliverance Via the Exodus

“And it was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt, And I led you in the wilderness forty years That you might take possession of the land of the Amorite.”

Lloyd Ogilvie: In **verse 10** Yahweh continues to review His acts in Israel’s salvation history. He alone made possible the Exodus, the provision and protection in the wilderness, and the possession of the Promised Land.

Billy Smith: God's goal was more than their liberation from slavery. He brought them up in order to put them in the **land of promise**. God's action of abundant provision is the basis for his judgment against them (). The act of deliverance from Egypt was the single most important event of **2:10; 3:1; 9:7** Israel's history. It was the foundation of the covenant between God and the nation Israel (**Exod 19-24**) and fully revealed God's providential care of his chosen people (**Josh 2:10; Judg 2:1; 6:8; 1 Sam 8:8; 2 Sam 7:6; Isa 11:16; Jer 2:6; 7:22; 11:4; 23:7; Ezek 20:10; Dan 9:15; Hos 2:15; 11:1; 13:4; Mic 6:4**).

c. (:11a) Designation of Spiritual Leaders -- Prophets and Nazirites

*“Then I raised up some of your sons to be prophets
And some of your young men to be Nazirites.”*

Billy Smith: God raised up prophets to proclaim his message to Israel and Nazirites to serve as models of dedication to God. With prophets and Nazirites, God provided guidance to Israel for their life in the land.

Gary Smith: In the years since the Exodus God graciously sent various prophets (Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Ahijah, Elijah, Elisha) to communicate messages from God, to encourage the people to maintain their covenant relationship with him, and to call them back from their sinful ways. God also raised up Nazirites (Samson in **Judg. 13**; Samuel in 1 Sam. 1) to be examples of holy living. They followed a disciplined manner of life, dedicated themselves to live in an especially close relationship to God, and strictly observed the promises of their vows. They were illustrations of godly living. They were so thankful for God’s grace to them that they purposely changed their lifestyle to show their gratitude.

(:11b) Lament

“Is this not so, O sons of Israel?’ declares the LORD.”

James Mays: Stylistically, the question is a feature of a dispute-saying and it therefore interprets the proclamation as a weapon in a controversy between prophet and audience. Amos uses the ‘salvation-history’ here in precisely the way he employs the election theme in **3.2a**. The recitation of Yahweh’s deeds in history is unfolded only to bring Israel under judgment. The events of that history were the constant themes of Yahwist orthodoxy recited by the Israelites in the cult as their claim upon Yahweh and in pious

hope that Yahweh would continue to protect and prosper them (5.14, 18). But Amos does not employ the proclamation as salvation-history; he brings it as **indictment**.

2. (:12) Resistance to Spiritual Leadership and Divine Revelation

*"But you made the Nazirites drink wine,
And you commanded the prophets saying, 'You shall not prophesy!'"*

Gary Smith: But some Israelites in Amos's audience apparently oppose the Nazirites and prophets. In **Amos 2:12** he reports that these Israelites coerce people who have taken a Nazirite vow into drinking wine and thus force them to break their vows of abstinence. This is in direct conflict with what God required and is a blatant attempt to substitute their own cultural rules for God's expectations. Maybe less spiritual people are embarrassed by the dedication of the Nazirites, or perhaps they consider the Nazirite rules as old-fashioned cultural remains from a bygone era. The fact that they make the Nazirites do these things suggests a dictatorial atmosphere in which people feel obligated by social pressure or priestly demands to do something they do not want.

Alec Motyer: In all this catalogue of divine grief, one thing stands out for special astonishment—rightly reflected in RSV by the allocating of a separate paragraph to **verse 12**. If there is one thing which (dare we say it?) amazes God more than anything else in the life of His people, it is that He should make His way plain to them, in word and deed, and that they should reject and deny it. Israel wanted neither the example of holy living nor the declaration of divine truth.

Amos has come full circle. True indeed it is that the outward sins of the people of God lie in parallel to the sins of the heathen, but behind this similarity there is a most appalling difference. To Israel, to His own people, God had spoken and they had said 'No'. The deepest sin of the people of God, the sin from which all sin springs, the sin which, through His prophet, the Lord singles out for final reaffirmation, is the sin of possessing revelation from God and ignoring it. This is the 'fourth transgression' of the people of God.

Allen Guenther: Israel has consistently distorted the examples of godliness and countermanded God's orders. The people of Israel are not about to honor the self-effacing example of the Nazirites. Self-denial, asceticism, and voluntary poverty do not fit their plans. Nor are the rich and powerful inclined to receive the word of preachers critical of their interpretation of the faith and their way of life.

Early in the Northern Kingdom, prophetism came under the thumb of the monarchy and was nearly squelched by it. Ahab molded Israel's future ruling elite and held the Lord's prophets in fear as well as contempt. He attempted to silence the prophet Micaiah (**1 Kings 22**). Elijah's Nazirite lifestyle was hardly attractive to King Ahab. With a one-generation interlude of Jehu's revolution (**2 Kings 9-10**), the pattern remained intact down to Amos's day.

Political, economic, social, and religious structures have become infested with paganism and have sealed themselves against the healing balm offered by God's messengers and saints. Gangrene has set in; the patient cannot survive.

C (:13-16) Judgment

1. (:13) Heavy Judgment

*“Behold, I am weighted down beneath you
As a wagon is weighted down when filled with sheaves.”*

Lloyd Ogilvie: We need to look carefully at the translation of **verse 13**, “**Behold, I am weighed down by you, as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down.**” The Hebrew verb in both clauses is active and not passive. The RSV thus translates, “*Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down.*” The rare verb, ‘ûq (hiphil), is rendered by **Wolff** as “break open,” as a cart of sheaves breaks open the earth beneath its wheels, suggesting the image of an earthquake. Stuart thinks the verb more likely means “bog down,” as a heavily loaded cart sometimes grinds to a halt.

James Mays: The one thing that is clear about **v. 13** is that Yahweh's action upon Israel is compared to the effect of a wagon, overloaded with sheaves of grain. The metaphor may seem less than adequate for its subject, but it is quite typical of Amos to select an image from the life of the shepherd and farmer to portray the most awesome divine reality (cf. **3.8, 12; 5.19**). **H. Gese** thinks that the verb means ‘cleave/furrow’: Yahweh will cleave the ground under Israel as a laden wagon furrows the soft earth of a field. The imagery describes an earthquake that furrows the earth and throws the populace into a panic. The earthquake motif appears in **4.11**, perhaps in **3.14f.; 6.11; 8.8; 9.1a**; and a particular earthquake is used to date Amos in the superscription of the book (**1.1**). The power of Yahweh will split the very earth of the land which he gave them, leaving Israel no security in the encounter.

Alternate View:

Gary Cohen: “*As a wagon is weighted down*” (**v. 13**). God describes by a vivid picture His feelings of abused longsuffering. The portrait is one of His having borne a great deal of evil from the people of Israel. They had filled up the full measure of His patience. Their sins had reached His straining and breaking point, and He could bear no more—judgment was about to fall. (Cf. **Matt. 23:35-36; 1 Cor. 11:30; Eph. 4:30.**)

2. (:14-16) No Possibility of Escape – Futile Flight

“Flight will perish from the swift, And the stalwart will not strengthen his power, Nor the mighty man save his life. ¹⁵ He who grasps the bow will not stand his ground, The swift of foot will not escape, Nor will he who rides the horse save his life. ¹⁶ Even the bravest among the warriors will flee naked in that day, declares the LORD.”

Robert Martin-Achard: Yahweh's intervention throws panic into the Israelites' ranks, as when a military disaster occurs (**vv. 14 ff**). It becomes a general ‘each one save himself’. Each one seeks safety in flight, but in vain. The bravest and the swiftest are in

confusion; warriors, bowmen, infantrymen, and horsemen (vv. 14c–15c) lose their lives. We note the deliberate repetition of the same terms and the panting rhythm of this strophe. The most valiant of all will flee away naked, that is to say, without anything to protect them on the day when Yahweh will chastise his people (v. 16). This poem comes to its climax with a vision of collapse and of panic. So disappeared the troops of Jeroboam II, who had been the glory of their land.

Warren Wiersbe: Amos closed his message with the announcement of their terrible future (Amos 2:13-16). Israel would be crushed by their own sins just as a loaded cart crushes whatever it rolls over. Judgment is coming, and nobody will be able to escape. The swift won't be able to run away; the strong won't be able to defend themselves; the armed will be as if unarmed; and even the horsemen will be unable to flee. The bravest soldiers will run away while shedding their equipment and clothing so they can run faster. Yes, Assyria would invade Israel (720 B.C.) and the nation would be no more.

Gary Smith: The results of God's action are astonishing. God will shake up the troops in Israel's army so badly that they will not be able to escape in an upcoming battle. The fast runners will find that they are not swift enough and cannot escape defeat. The strongest and bravest will have no fortitude for battle and will be unable to save even themselves from death. The archers will not stand their ground in the face of the enemy's charge, and horsemen (probably charioteers) will unsuccessfully try to run away.

In other words, Israel's strong military force will collapse and run, and none will escape death. This will be an awesome demonstration of God's power! As Amos's audience in Samaria hears these words, they must have been astonished and petrified. How can such a thing happen? Will God actually do this? What will happen to them if such a disaster does take place?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How quick are we to applaud God's judgment on others without first considering our own accountability and sinfulness?
- 2) What is the relationship between level of revelation from God and accountability?
- 3) Who are the oppressed in our society and what are we doing to show mercy and compassion towards them?
- 4) What types of lies are promulgated in our Christian circles to try to undermine allegiance to the Lord?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gary Smith: These concluding oracles continue to build on Amos's basic principles in **1:5 – 2:3** that

- (1) every nation is accountable for its inhumane acts of rebellion against God, and
- (2) if one can identify some common theological agreement with the worldview of an audience, those points can be used to evaluate the behavior of the listeners. But Amos goes beyond these two points in **2:4–16** to suggest that
- (3) those who have received greater revelation of divine truth will be evaluated on the basis of what they know;
- (4) God holds people accountable if they reject his gracious deliverance of them from oppression and start oppressing others;
- (5) rebellion against God's design for healthy human relationships erodes his holy reputation; and
- (6) God fights on behalf of the oppressed.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Any responsible teaching or preaching of this passage must lead to an even more startling conclusion than Amos's confrontation of Israel when his audience least expected it. There is a ninth oracle for our own audience today. In it we must list the relational and social sins of neglect in our own churches and in our own lives.

Alec Motyer: Four charges levelled against the people of God:

1. that they had rejected His law (**2:4, 5**),
2. contradicted His salvation (**2:6-12**)
3. and (consequently) forfeited His favour (**2:13-16**)
4. they have misunderstood God's love (**3:1, 2**)

Anthony Petterson: While the Israelites may have felt secure, and possibly smug, as they heard God's denunciation of their enemies, the focus of God's condemnation now falls squarely on them in the climax of this unit. Amos identifies seven ways in which the powerful have served themselves at the expense of the poor and vulnerable. Selling the innocent and needy could refer to bribery in the courts or to forcing people into slavery because of their debts (cf. **8:4-6**). A pair of sandals may be the low price for which they were sold or the trivial amount of their debt. The poor are trampled on, and the oppressed are denied justice. Male members of the household abuse the same girl, probably taking advantage sexually of a female servant (cf. **Ex 21:7-11**). God's people were to bear his holy name by living holy lives, but this action goes completely against God's character and profanes his holy name (**Am 2:7**). The Israelites seem religious with their altars, but they violate the law, which required garments taken in pledge to be returned (**Ex 22:26-27; Dt 24:13**). Fines, which were the property of the victim or the state, were used for personal indulgence. The description "*their god*" (**Am 2:8**) suggests it is not the Lord whom they worship. Israel's sin is considerably more reprehensible given God's gracious gifts to his people in the past. He delivered them into the promised land, driving out its strong inhabitants (the Amorites and Canaanites). He saved them from Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness. He raised up

prophets who called people back to the covenant (e.g., Moses, Deborah, Samuel) and Nazirites as exemplars for the faith, but the Israelites can't bear their testimony. God announces he is coming in judgment against his people. Seven warrior images show that strength will be to no avail on the day of God's judgment (**vv. 14-16**).

TEXT: Amos 3:1-15

TITLE: FIRST MESSAGE OF CONDEMNATION AGAINST ISRAEL –
JUDGMENT SHOULD BE NO SURPRISE

BIG IDEA:

**THE FACT OF ISRAEL'S GUILT IN THE PRESENT – ISRAEL STANDS
GUILTY OF IDOLATRY, VIOLENCE AND MATERIALISM**

INTRODUCTION:

J. Sidlow Baxter: [following his outline in this section]

(3:1 - 6:14) THREE MESSAGES OF CONDEMNATION AGAINST ISRAEL

Key introductory phrase: "*Hear ye this word!*" [3:1; 4:1; 5:1]

Each of them is divided by an emphatic "*therefore,*" so that in each we have, in the first part, judgment **deserved**, and in the remainder, judgment **decreed** . . .

- The first of these addresses declares the fact of Israel's guilt in the **present**.
- The second stresses Israel's sin in the **past** (see **verses 6 to 11**, which recount Jehovah's repeated but unavailing chastenings of Israel, and note the five-times occurring mournful refrain, "*Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith Jehovah*" – **verses 6, 8, 9, 10, 11**).
- The third address stresses the punishment of Israel's sin in the **future** (see **v. 1-3** and **v. 16 to vi. 14**). Note the vehemence and intensity at the end (**vi. 9-14**). Yet notice, also, in this third address, the eleventh hour warning in the thrice-uttered appeal of Jehovah: "*Seek ye Me, and ye shall live,*" etc. (**v. 4, 6, 14**).

Note further about these three addresses that in the first we see the **principle** underlying Divine judgment – "*You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities*" (**iii. 2**). This is the key verse of this book.

Amos is the prophet of **judgment for abused privilege**. Judgment is always determined according to privilege. Increased privilege is increased responsibility. Israel had been supremely favoured, and therefore was supremely responsible. Here is a solemn lesson for all of us to learn.

In the second address we see the **forbearance** behind Divine judgment. Before the stroke of a final major judgment is allowed to fall on the nation, there comes a succession of minor judgments, to warn (). It is when these are ignored and the Divine patience is outraged **iv. 6-11** that the culminative judgment falls (**iv. 12**).

In the third address we see the uncompromising **severity** of Divine judgment on the impenitent, where sin has been obdurately persisted in (**v. 2, 3; vi. 8-14**).

Thomas Constable: [Alternative Approach]

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*. The first message was explanation, the second accusation, and the third lamentation.

Allen Guenther: Israel suffers from what some might call attention deficit disorder. Amos shouts for Israel's attention: *Hear this word* (3:1; 4:1; 5:1). The nation is occupied with everything except God. The prophet here fleshes out the earlier sweeping accusations (2:6-16).

The nation has grown moral callouses. It is too set in its ways to recognize its own plight. In an attempt to stop its headlong rush to destruction, the Lord exposes the corruption which threatens to tear this people apart. Israel is unaware that her vital signs are so dangerously weak and deteriorating. Will these warnings startle her into remedial action, or will they fall on deaf ears?

The perspective shifts from Israel as one of the nations (Amos 1-2) to Israel's unique covenant relationship to the Lord [*Covenant*, p. 379]. Amos begins by describing his reluctant participation (3:3-8). His assigned role is to announce God's legal proceedings against his people (3:1-2, 9-13) and to invite the witnesses to come forward with the evidence they have gathered. The lawsuit follows what in modern legal proceedings amounts to the formal arraignment (2:6-16).

Jorg Jeremias: In its present form, Amos 3-4 is in its own turn divided into three sections. The center is occupied by a collection of individual sayings revealing the sin of influential groups in the capital Samaria (3:9 - 4:3). The collection is itself doubly framed: at the beginning by the superscription (3:1), a programmatic saying (3:2), and a pericope of legitimation (3:3-8), and at the end by a (probably exilic) penitential liturgy following one of Amos' cult-critical sayings (4:4ff., 6-13). Both parts of this framing structure, each in its own way, prevent the sayings against Samaria from being read as a reproof against certain groups (as was yet the case in the oral discourse); they now name—*pars pro toto*—the sin of all Israel.

I. (:1-10) JUDGMENT DESERVED

A. (:1-2) Israel's Unique Covenantal Relationship Heightens Accountability

M. Daniel Carroll R.: These first two verses encapsulate the essence of Amos's message: Israel merits the punishment that is to come because of its unique relationship with Yahweh. Instead of functioning as a guarantee of blessing, that historical bond establishes the basis for divine judgment. Yahweh has the right to chastise his people and hold them accountable for their transgressions. In the rest of the book, Israel's guilt will be explained in more detail and its judgment portrayed graphically.

James Mays: This brief oracle has been placed at this point in the collection as a kind of introduction to the following sayings. Since it bases Yahweh's punishment on the

special relation to Israel which he himself inaugurated, the word furnishes a **theological framework** within which other announcements of coming judgment can be understood. The particular sins which Amos itemizes in the subsequent oracles are to be seen within the context of Yahweh's relation to Israel if the passion and significance of the divine decision to judge is to be understood. The unit is composed of introduction (v. 1) and divine saying (v. 2). The introductory proclamation-formula summons a group to hear the word, identifies the divine speaker and addressees (1a) and then elaborates further the identification of the audience by referring to the deliverance from Egypt (1 b). The two members of the divine saying are joined by 'therefore', which throws Yahweh's statement of his unique relation to Israel (2a) into the role of a basis for his announcement that he will punish all their iniquities (2b).

(:1a) Call to Attention
"Hear this word"

M. Daniel Carroll R.: This oracle begins with what some categorize as a "call to attention" (*Hear this word* + relative clause; cf. 5:1). This is not a mandate merely to listen; it carries a strong expectation of a **response**. *This word (haddābār hazzeh)* must be understood, internalized, and acted upon, because Yahweh has spoken.

1. (:1b) Focus of Judgment = Family of Israel
"which the LORD has spoken against you, sons of Israel, against the entire family which He brought up from the land of Egypt,"

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The *family* of Israel is part of the families of the earth. Its election is to be understood against the background of that commonality.

2. (:2a) Privilege of Election Intensifies the Judgment
"You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth;"

Jorg Jeremias: The people of God have forgotten that election means not only privilege, but also **heightened responsibility** they have not assumed. Sin weighs more when it occurs in the knowledge of divine salvation (cf. 2:6–9); the "*unfaithful servant*" (**Matt. 18:23–35**) cannot expect leniency from the judge, since he has **misused God's undeserved kindness** by treating his own fellow human beings severely. Israel experienced God's proximity in a unique way whose exclusivity **Amos 3:2** doubly emphasizes through the initial "*alone*" and through reference to Israel's difference from all other nations. At the same time, the **intensity of this relationship** is emphasized. In Hebrew, the verb "*know*" (*yd'*) means far more than cognitive understanding; among human beings, it circumscribes the most intimate fellowship extending even into the sexual sphere (**Gen. 4:1** et passim), and refers to the ideal fellowship between Israel and God for which Hosea hopes (cf. **Hos. 2:22 [21E]; 4:1**; J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea*, ATD 24/1 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983], 51, 61). When God is the subject, as in **Amos 3:2** and **Deut. 9:24**, both the unique favor he at his own initiative shows to Israel as well as his care for Israel are meant. The term *yd'* aims more strongly than does the terminus technicus "*elect*" (*bhr*) at God's intimate personal favor,

something made especially clear by its more frequent use as a reference to God's election of individuals (Abraham: **Gen. 18:19**; Moses: **Ex. 33:12, 17**; **Deut. 34:10**); in the case of the prophet Jeremiah, the temporal indication ("*before I formed you in the womb I knew you*") makes it quite clear that this relationship comes from God alone, and the parallel verb ("*. . . I consecrated you*") shows that God **links the choice of Jeremiah with a commission**. According to **Amos 3:2**, Israel misunderstood God's election and nearness in the sense of the self-assurance of the favored one, instead of comprehending the commission to be a model for the world of nations. "*I have known you*" (*yd'*, **v. 2**)—"they do not know (*yd'*) how to do right" (**v. 10**): so the respective disposition of Yahweh's and Israel's "*knowing*." Thus has Israel wasted its uniqueness among the nations, and is now called to account by God against the standard of its experience with God ("*therefore*"). The kind of performance review originally implied by the verb *pqd* leads, as in Hosea (cf. **Hos. 1:4**), to an exclusively negative result, the consequence of which is thus the "punishment" of "offenses" explicated by **vv. 9ff.**

Robert Martin-Achard: **Verse 2a** refers to a fact, the election of Israel, and **v. 2b** deduces its consequences. The prophet does not elaborate on this; he takes for granted in the case of the Israelites that from amongst the masses of the families of the earth—an allusion to the patriarchal tradition (**Gen. 12:3; 28:14**)—Yahweh has selected Israel (**v. 2a**). But from that he draws a conclusion diametrically opposed to that of his partners in dialogue. The latter take it for granted that their election protects them from the divine wrath, and shelters them from the menace of destruction. As for the prophet, it is precisely because the Israelites are the object of Yahweh's choice that he will require them to give an explanation of their iniquities (**v. 2b**). Just being the people of God offers no absolute guarantee, rather it confers a special responsibility—'*It is you only whom I have "chosen" . . . therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities*'. We are to note the **astonishing reversal** accomplished by Amos: election (**v. 2a**) takes the place here of the bill of indictment. We can conceive just how scandalized his hearers must have been by his proposition: **the prophet had turned the history of salvation into a history of judgment.**

Thomas McComiskey: God's choice of Israel as the vehicle of his redemptive purposes is, from the human standpoint, strange. The people were slaves, possessing no homeland; and Israel was the weakest of the nations of the world (cf. **Dt 7:7**). The calling of Christians is similar, for Paul reminds us that God calls the weak so that human boasting may be excluded (**1Co 1:26–29**).

3. (:2b) God's People Are Never Exempt from Accountability for Sin
"Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Trent Butler: **Covenant Consequences** –

He showed them why they should believe his word from God and obey it.

First, they were the people of Israel (literally, **sons of Israel**). They belonged to the family of the patriarch Jacob to whom God had appeared at their sanctuary Bethel with his promise of blessing for the nation (**Gen. 28:10–22**).

Second, they were an **extended family**. They were not individuals looking out for themselves. They had common interests and common responsibilities. They had to hear God's message and obey it in the interest of the larger clan, not just for their own sakes.

Third, they had a special reason for obedience—**God's saving history with them**. God had brought them up from slavery in Egypt to make them into a nation. The only satisfactory response would be to show their gratitude for salvation through obedience to their Savior.

God had one final reason why Israel should obey (**3:2**). They were the **special chosen people of God**. Out of all the families of the earth he had made a covenant with them (**Josh. 24**). They had agreed to obey the covenant regulations and expectations because they knew God would fulfill his promises to the patriarchs. God had kept his covenant promises. Israel had not kept theirs. Thus we hear the awesome prophetic word therefore predicting disaster. A people who do not keep covenant promises face God's covenant lawsuit where God brings charges against his people and then announces the verdict: punishment for all their sins.

John Goldingay: Yahweh here reformulates the nature of Israel's wrongdoing. Here (alone) he speaks not of rebellion (against him) but of waywardness, deviation from the proper way, and of Israel's many such deviations. "Other nations are indicted for grave atrocities and barbaric actions, but only Israel is taken to task for every one of its moral-ethical infractions."

B. (:3-8) God's Clear Revelation of Certain Judgment Should Awaken Fear

1. (:3-6) Perceived Relationship between Actions and Responses – Series of Examples

Trent Butler: Just as you can predict certain results in nature, so you can explain the supernatural destruction of a city as divine action.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The structure of **3:3–8** is carefully crafted. **Verses 3–5** present a series of five rhetorical questions that all begin with the interrogatory particle *hā*; **v. 6** adds two more questions, which are prefaced by *'im* (*if*), for a total of seven. Series of five and seven are a common literary characteristic of the book.

John Goldingay: The answer to the first five questions is "**Not usually**." In each case the listeners are invited to work back from an event that must have a cause. While no doubt there are exceptions to the rule, generally it works. Two people walking together probably arranged to meet (**v. 3**). When a lion roars, it's probably caught something, and the same applies to a cougar or young lion (**v. 4**). When a bird dives into a trap, it's probably been lured by some bait, and if a trap goes off, it's probably caught something (**v. 5**). **Events have causes**. Okay, Amos, so what? In light of **v. 2**, are the two walkers Yahweh and Israel (cf. LXX's assimilation of **v. 3** to **v. 2**)? Or are they you and Yahweh? Is Yahweh the lion, as **1:2** might imply? Is the bird Israel?

Allen Guenther: With the exception of the first question, which provides linkage to the idea of election, intimacy, and wilderness travel (3:1-2), the cause-and-effect imagery is bound up with death and destruction. The prophet's message is an unpleasant one, to say the least. In this sequence of destructive metaphors, one moves through a progression of causal agents: animals, people, God, indicating that all of life is bound up with the "law" of cause and effect.

Tchavdar Hadjiev:

Table 6 Literary structures in 3:3–8

	Content	Form (see NIV)
v. 3	1 Two people walking	Does (something happen) unless/when (something else happens/has happened)?
v. 4	2 Lion	
v. 5	3 Lion 4 Bird/snare	
v. 6	5 Snare/(bird) 6 Trumpet in city/fear 7 Disaster in city/the Lord	When (something happens) will not/has not (something else happen/happened)?
v. 8	8 Lion/fear 9 Lord/prophesy	Something has happened Who will not (do something)?

The **rhetorical effect** of these patterns is twofold. On the one hand, it highlights the role of **verse 3** as an introduction and **verse 6** as a conclusion to **3:3–6**. On the other hand, the literary pattern presents **verse 8**, which differs both thematically and formally from the rest, as the **climax** of the whole. **Verse 7**, a statement not a question, clearly stands outside this arrangement. By delaying the arrival of the culmination in **verse 8**, it frustrates the expectations of the reader/listener, increases the suspense and in this way contributes to the climactic role of the last pair of questions.

James Mays: The first seven questions range across happenings which common experience and outlook would connect self-evidently with another event. When two men are seen making their way across the horizon of Judah's empty hill country, one knows they could hardly have met except by appointing a time and place (**v. 3**). The lion's distant roar announces that his stalk, during which a sound would alert his quarry, is over; he has captured his prey (**v. 4**). If one sees a bird checked in his flight, tumbling to the ground, it is clear that a hunter's throw-net ensnared it; or a hunter who sees his spring-trap snap up knows something has tripped its trigger. In **6a** the sequence is reversed—the cause is the blast of the šōpār sounded in alarm, and the result is the hubbub of the city stirring in near panic—but the argument remains the same. Of more consequence is the progress of the series from the situations of normal life to one of

crisis precipitated by nearing danger. The harmless argument to which no listener could object now grows ominous. Now the question is asked whether disaster strikes a city unless Yahweh wills it and does it. To this proposition the listeners might not so readily agree. Was not Yahweh their God, the deity who wrought weal and peace for them? But if disaster struck, would it not be also his work, for surely they were not in the power of another god. Yet if Yahweh worked woe as well as weal, how in principle could they object to Amos' prophecy that God had decreed disaster for them? The problem they found with Amos' message becomes more a problem with their God and less with the prophet!

- a. (:3) Example of Appointments – God's Judgment Is No Accident
"Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?"

Trent Butler: Two people do not just happen to meet and travel together. They schedule an appointment. So Israel's walk with God was no accident. God had planned it and scheduled it, but now Israel was failing to appear for their scheduled appointment.

Gary Cohen: the thought of **verse 2** continues as God declares that He can no longer walk with Israel because they, He and Israel, are no longer in agreement regarding where to meet or in which direction to walk. A different view is taken by **Keil**, who sees this verse as beginning the next section and speaking of the meeting between Amos and God. According to this view, Amos would not be speaking for God and breathing out judgments if he and God had not met by God's call. Both explanations fit the context and are reasonable, however I favor the first view. A bisection of the union between God and Israel has taken place.

Billy Smith: The condition for two people traveling together, as stated in the rhetorical question of **v. 3**, is that "they have agreed to do so." They must have met, worked out travel plans, and agreed on time to depart, destination, and the route to take. His use of an everyday "life situation in the first question lured his listeners into his train of thought."

Amos's initial question may have been only proverbial. But could **the Lord and Israel** be the "two" in the prophet's mind? Certainly they had met (**3:2**). Their walking together was a grave concern of the prophet. Their failure to do so was the result of their sin (**vv. 9-10**) and would surely bring down the judgment of God upon them (**vv. 11-15**). As Micah would urge, **all people are to walk with God (Mic 6:8)**. As **Gitay** observes, this connection between **vv. 2 and 3** is suggested by the fact that only in **v. 3** does he have a rhetorical question in this paragraph that is not paired with another. Also, **v. 3** (like **v. 6**) has nothing to do with animals hunting or being hunted as do **vv. 4-5**. The relationship between God and Israel is the result of a covenant.

- b. (:4) Example of the Lion Exulting over Its Prey – God's Roar Means He Is Ready to Devour in Judgment
"Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey?"

*Does a young lion growl from his den
unless he has captured something?"*

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The roar of a hungry lion means that he will eventually start hunting and no-one will be safe.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Lions do not roar when they attack; they are in fact quiet as they stalk their victims in order not to scare them away. Lions roar for other reasons, one of which is **hunger**. Once the prey has been caught and a lion feasts on the kill, it does not roar.⁶⁸ It will snarl at other lions, predators, and scavengers to keep them from the prize or from its part of the carcass. Clearly, the scene in **v. 4** occurs after the violent death of the quarry. In this context, it is best not to translate either of the two verbs as “roar.” Our translation has growl and snarl respectively. The noise from the bushes alerts all who hear of violent carnage.

- c. (:5) Example of Effectiveness of Traps – God’s Judgment Has Been Activated by Israel’s Sin
*“Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it?
Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all?”*

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The focus now moves from the terrifying awesomeness of the predator (lion) to the helplessness of the prey (birds). The snare which spring[s] up from the ground introduces the additional idea of **disaster that is sudden and unexpected**. The main point of the trap is that the victim is unsuspecting to the very last minute, just like the people of Israel who believe that no evil will befall them. The parallel between the bird which fall[s] (*npl*) as a snare springs from the ground (*’ādāmā*) and the virgin Israel who has fallen (*npl*) on her land/ground (*’ādāmā*) in **5:2** underlines even more strongly the point for the reader of the book (**Fleischer** 2001: 168). The *’falling’* to the earth (*’eres*) in **3:5a** also anticipates the *’falling’* of the horns of Bethel’s altar to the ground/earth (*’eres*) in **3:14**.

- d. (:6) Example of Arousal of Fear – Announcement of Coming Divine Judgment Should Arouse Fear
*“If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble?
If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?”*

John MacArthur: The Lord posed a series of questions to show that, as some things are certain in nature, surely nothing happens in Israel that is outside His sovereignty. Certain actions have certain results! The Lord had spoken a word, and therefore the prophet was to speak, and the people were to listen with trembling. Instead, they tried to silence the prophet (**cf. 2:12; 7:12,13**).

Lloyd Ogilvie: Calamity in the city, in our lives, through other people, or because of our sins, are sometimes used by the Lord to alert us to the fact that we have refused to walk humbly with Him toward His destination for us. When trouble strikes, it is a trumpet call to reestablish our walk with Him. Of course, sometimes we get into trouble because

we are walking with the Lord doing what love requires. But we know the difference between corrective trouble and persecution for righteousness sake. Our daily conversations during our walk with the Lord make that abundantly clear. The question, “Lord what are you trying to say to me in what’s happening to me?” never goes unanswered—if we are listening.

2. (:7-8) God Has Roared in Judgment

a. (:7) Purpose of Prophetic Revelation

“Surely the Lord God does nothing

Unless He reveals His secret counsel To His servants the prophets.”

John Goldingay: Amos’s other big theological statement is that God doesn’t do anything without revealing it ahead of time. It’s one of the ways he shows that he’s God. He has the capacity to say what he intends to make happen, then to see that it happens, then to say “You see, it happened as I said.” In **Isa. 40–48** it is a key argument for the recognition that Yahweh is God. It’s also an expression of his compassion, because part of the point about the revelation is to get his people to turn back to him so that he doesn’t need to implement his plan when it’s negative.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The claim of **3:7** is that Amos’s words are a public proclamation of the hitherto secret decisions of the divine council as to how the Lord will deal with Israel.

J. Vernon McGee: It has always been God’s method to reveal information to those who are His own concerning future judgment. You will recall that during Noah’s day, God told him of a coming flood judgment and gave Noah 120 years to warn his generation. But the world did not heed his message. Also, remember that God let Abraham know ahead of time regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is a good thing He did that, because if He had not, it would have given Abraham a wrong viewpoint of the almighty God. It has always been God’s method to reveal such things to His own. When He was here in the flesh, He told His disciples, *“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you”* (**John 15:15**). There are many examples of this throughout the Bible. He gave a forewarning to Joseph in Egypt of the seven years of famine that were to come upon the earth. Also, Elijah was forewarned of the drought that would come upon Israel. He walked into the courts of Ahab and Jezebel to announce to them that they were in for a drought—*“. . . As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word—[and I’m not saying anything!]”* (**1 Kings 17:1**). Then he walked out of the court and dropped out of sight for over three years. Since it is God’s method to warn of impending judgment, our Lord told His apostles, when He was gathered with them on the Mount of Olives, that Jerusalem would be destroyed—not one stone would be left upon another.

It is God’s method always to **give a warning of impending judgment**, and that is all that Amos is doing here although his contemporaries are very critical of him. Folk just

don't want to hear about judgment. They would much rather hide their head in the sand like the proverbial ostrich. Some people will not even go to a doctor because they do not want to know that something is wrong with them. The human family does not want to hear the bad news of judgment which is coming. If you preach and teach the truth, they will say you are a pessimist, a killjoy, a gloom-caster. However, God follows the principle that for every effect there is a cause, and God sends judgment only upon a sinning people.

Gary Smith: The implications are too obvious to miss. Why has Amos given this news about God's plan to destroy Israel? He has not dreamed these ideas up out of the blue. God has revealed them to the prophet because he intends to act in the near future, and he desires to have one of his servants warn those he will judge.

- b. (:8) Proper Response to Prophetic Revelation
 - 1) Response of the People
"A lion has roared! Who will not fear?"
 - 2) Response of the Prophet
"The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?"

Warren Wiersbe: At this point, the people were probably saying, "Who is this rustic farmer that he should preach to us and claim to be God's prophet? What kind of authority does he think he has?" Amos even dared to preach uninvited at the king's chapel at Bethel, where King Jeroboam's chaplain told Amos to go home and preach in Judah (7:10-16).

Amos replied to their ridicule by arguing from effect to cause. If two people want to walk together, they have to appoint a time and place to meet (**Amos 3:3**). If the lion roars, it's because he's caught his prey (v. 4). If a trap springs, it means the bird has been caught (v. 5); and if the people in a city are terrified, it's because the trumpet has blown, warning them of danger (v. 6). These are obvious facts of life that any thinking person would acknowledge. When a prophet proclaims God's Word, it's because the Lord is about to do something important and wants to warn His people (3:7).

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The issue is not finally the prophet's obligation to prophesy but rather the **inevitability of the word of catastrophic judgment**. It is a sure and solemn word spoken by the sovereign Yahweh. He is the one who communicates his will through the prophets (**2:11-12; 3:7**), the one who will bring the enemy against the land (**3:11**), and the one who swears by his very person that national calamity is coming (**4:2**).

Robert Martin-Achard: Conclusion: the fact that Yahweh has spoken had the immediate consequence that a prophet has arisen in the land. Amos here defends his ministry and at the same time suggests that, since he has intervened, it is Yahweh himself who has decided to speak forth his word. Thus people must take seriously the presence in the northern kingdom of Yahweh's witness.

Billy Smith: The style shift in **v. 8** alerted Amos's audience (reader) that he had reached the **climax**. He turned from hypothetical situations (**vv. 3-6**) to statements of fact. “*The lion has roared*,” the first statement of fact, is the cause of “*fear*.” Here the lion's roar strikes fear in humans, “*who will not fear?*” The effect of the lion's roar in **v. 4** was on other animals. Since “*the lion has roared*” is parallel to “*the Sovereign LORD has spoken*”, **both expressions refer to God**. This usage accords with the parallel statements in **1:2**, “*The LORD from Zion will roar, and from Jerusalem he will give his voice*” (author's translation).

Amos had heard the lion's roar of the Lord's judgment upon Israel. That roar struck “*fear*” in Amos. He knew the lion's roar signaled a kill. Amos spoke God's message in Israel because he had heard the Lord speak. The prophet's message was not his own. He only spoke what he heard the Lord speak. With this rhetorical unit Amos would justify his appearance in Israel as spokesman for God. **S. Paul** captures Amos's point: “The prophet speaks when commanded but, once commanded, must speak.” **Gitay** explains the significance of this point as adding to Amos's credibility. Amos did not enjoy his task of conveying unpleasant words. He was simply “one of the audience, one who [had] no choice but to prophesy.” **D. Hubbard's** concluding paragraph on the unit contains a striking statement about how Amos “won his points”: “He has done so by leading his hearers through a catechism of common-sense questions to his double conclusion that reinforces all that he said in the beginning verses of this chapter: Yahweh will bring disaster on his people (**v. 6b**), and Amos has no choice but to announce it” (**v. 8b**).

C. (:9-10) Invoking Witnesses to God's Judgment against Samaria for Idolatry, Violence and Materialism

1. (:9) Eyewitnesses of Incriminating Oppression

“Proclaim on the citadels in Ashdod and on the citadels in the land of Egypt and say, ‘Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see the great tumults within her and the oppressions in her midst.’”

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The choice of peoples is interesting. Ashdod, one of the Philistine city-states, was singled out for judgment earlier. Its transgression was trafficking in those captured in war (perhaps Israelites) as slaves to Edom, another foe of Israel (**1:6-8**). Egypt, of course, was the ultimate symbol of oppression and the one from whom Israel had been redeemed (**2:10; 3:1**). To invite these two nations that had mistreated the people of God to verify Yahweh's assessment of Israel and watch his punishment is the height of irony—and an indication of the depth of Yahweh's disappointment. . .

“*tumults*” -- communicates the immense dismay experienced by the disadvantaged in the capital city (cf. **Ezek 22:5-6; Prov 15:16**).

James Mays: Amos pretends to issue a summons to heralds authorizing them to carry an invitation to the city-state of Ashdod and the great empire of Egypt as a highly dramatic and ironic method of commanding the attention of his listeners. This introduction

creates the atmosphere of preparation for a state visit. Prominent men from these neighbouring states are to come and see what Samaria is like! . . . Since the invitation to Samaria is sent to the residents of strongholds in Philistia and Egypt, the upper classes from these foreign states are summoned to Israel to learn that these Israelites have outstripped them in the practices of their own culture. Like a great crowd of witnesses they are to assemble on the mountains around Samaria and see for themselves.

Allen Guenther: The eyewitnesses will see great tumults within her. Israel's way of life has brought social unrest and confusion (cf. **Prov. 15:16; 2 Chron. 15:5**). Her communal life is no longer ordered by charity, compassion, or concern for fellow Israelites. Distrust, unrest, and anxiety rule a people meant to live in harmony. Trust between God's covenant partners has vanished, leaving uncertainty and social chaos in its wake. Israel has transformed Edenic tranquility into turmoil.

Within Samaria, the capital, oppressions are the order of the day. The context of the same word in Jeremiah points to oppression as the misuse of economic power: "*Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed*" (**Jer. 22:3**; cf. **Prov. 28:16; Isa. 33:15**). Extortion prevails. In the following lines (**Amos 3:10**), these money-grubbers and land-grabbers are described as those who hoard plunder and loot in their fortresses. Or more aptly put, They store up the product of murder and robbery in their palaces.

Thomas McComiskey: Amos summons the Egyptians and the Philistines of Ashdod to witness the oppression going on within Samaria. Amos may have named these particular nations because of their past oppression of Israel. The Egyptian bondage and recurrent Philistine oppressions in Israel's early history were not forgotten. So now Amos summons these oppressors to witness the violence being perpetrated by the rich and powerful of Samaria against their own poor neighbors—a kind of oppression that would surprise even the pagan nations. Amos's rhetoric shows that Israel is as violent as they were.

2. (:10) Enslaved to Violence and Devastation

"But they do not know how to do what is right," declares the LORD, "these who hoard up violence and devastation in their citadels."

Thomas McComiskey: The word "right" (*nekōhâ*) has the basic meaning of "straightness." Their moral sense has become so warped that the concepts of right and wrong are totally blurred.

Trent Butler: Israel used violence and destruction of the poor to gain their wealth and then carefully hid the money away in the strongest military fortress, thinking it was safe from all intruders. God had another thought. What they hid was not wealth but violence and destruction—two sins that God must punish (**Ezek. 45:9**).

Warren Wiersbe: In his day, the Prophet Isaiah called heaven and earth to witness against Judah (**Isa. 1:2**; see **Deut. 30:19; 31:28**); and Amos summoned the Gentile nations to witness against the Northern Kingdom of Israel whose capital was Samaria. The sin of Israel was so great that it even appalled the pagan nations; for, after all, Israel was sinning against a flood of light (**1 Cor. 5:1**).

Amos called for the Philistines (“*Ashdod*,” **Amos 1:8**) and the Egyptians to witness what was going on in Samaria (**v. 9**). The leaders of Israel weren’t interested in obeying God’s Law and helping the less fortunate. Rather, they were eagerly and unjustly robbing the poor and amassing as much wealth as possible. They built costly houses, filled them with expensive furnishings, and lived in luxury while the poor of the land suffered (**3:15; 4:1; 5:11; 6:4-6**).

What a terrible indictment: “*They do not know how to do right*” (**Amos 3:10**, NIV). They were so bound by their greed and idolatry that it was impossible for them to do what was right.

James Mays: The norms which ought to govern the affairs of men in Israel under Yahweh had dropped out of sight and consciousness among Samaria’s leading citizens. The older ways of social life in Israel had been displaced by Canaanite social custom. Amos is no ascetic in his attack on the residence-towers, nor simply an Israelite chauvinist attacking foreign ways. What is alone of moment to him is the departure from an order of society which was formed according to Yahweh’s will and which maintained every Israelite one with the other in a system of mutual responsibility. In Samaria the strongholds had become treasuries in which the powerful stored away the profits of ‘violence’ against others and of ‘destruction’ of rightful custom (cf. violence and destruction in **Jer. 6.7; 20.8; 48.3; Ezek. 45.9; Hab. 1.3**. This series of texts which combine the words indicate that the two synonyms became a single expression in the prophetic vocabulary for the **collapse of normal conditions**).

Thomas Constable: 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, hoarded material wealth. Now the wealthy foreigners, infamous for their own similar sins, would see that the Israelites behaved even worse in their citadels.

II. (:11-15) JUDGMENT DECREED – COMPREHENSIVE JUDGMENT – EXTENDING TO THEIR PRECEIVED INVINCIBILITY, THEIR MAN-MADE RELIGIOUS SYSTEM AND THEIR DECADENT OPULENCE

A. (:11-12) Punishment by Foreign Conquerors

1. (:11) Samaria Conquered and Looted

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘An enemy, even one surrounding the land,

Will pull down your strength from you And your citadels will be looted. ”

James Mays: ‘*Therefore*’ binds the city’s deeds to its doom. What Samaria’s leading citizens perpetrated within their own city will be visited upon them within the international society. The punishment is described by a little **narrative of defeat**. A foe will encompass the land, bring down the city’s defence system, and plunder its residences. The three measures of the line sketch in terse staccato sentences the stages of a military campaign: **invasion, siege, and looting**. The foe is not identified. It is generally assumed that the Assyrians are in mind. But Amos never mentions Assyria in his preserved speeches. Were the hearers to assume that Egypt and Ashdod who come to inspect would remain to conquer a city whose internal condition portrayed a fatal weakness? In any case, the foe is the instrument of Yahweh’s announced decision, the fulfilment of his word. It is Yahweh who makes himself the foe of his people Israel in judgment on the enmity of Israelite against Israelite. What matters in the prophetic view is that history transacts the judgment of Yahweh who rules over all nations (**9.7f.**).

2. (:12) Evidence of Destruction

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Just as the shepherd snatches from the lion’s mouth a couple of legs or a piece of an ear, So will the sons of Israel dwelling in Samaria be snatched away-- With the corner of a bed and the cover of a couch!’ ”

James Mays: The imagery of the comparison is drawn from the work of the shepherd who, in pasturing his flocks across wide, uninhabited hill country, had frequently to face the raids of marauding wild beasts (e.g. **I Sam. 17.34f.**). According to the customary legal tradition of Israel and the surrounding cultures, a shepherd had to give evidence to the owner of the sheep, when any of the flock had been captured, by producing what was left of the carcass. He had not stolen or sold it, for here was proof! In the collection of legal stipulations in **Ex. 21–23**, there is a case-law which deals with the responsibility of a shepherd or herder to the owner (**22.10–13**). **22.13** says: ‘*If it [one of the sheep or cattle] is torn by beasts, let him bring it as evidence; he shall not make restitution for what has been torn.*’ A similar law appears in the Code of Hammurabi: ‘*If a visitation of god has occurred in a sheepfold, or a lion has made a kill, the shepherd shall prove himself innocent in the presence of the god, but the owner of the sheepfold shall receive from him the animal stricken in the fold.*’ This legal custom lies behind the saying. Israel’s deliverance will be like that of the poor beast whose remains only serve as **evidence of destruction**. The rescue of evidence proves that rescue came too late—surely an ironic thrust! The saying does not promise the survival of a remnant, however small and wounded, after the coming judgment, but rather shatters any hope of rescue. The oracle may well have been given in answer to those who disputed the doom prophesied by Amos in the name of the deliverance which Israel expected from Yahweh as a matter of course. ‘Is it deliverance you expect, O Israel! Well, here is what your “deliverance” will be like—the rescue of a corpse’s shredded remains, a deliverance that means nothing to you!’ For other instances of the dispute-saying in Amos, cf. **3.2, 3–8**.

Thomas McComiskey:: As the remaining parts of the slaughtered animal attest to its destruction, so the broken remains of the wealth of Israel will be a pathetic witness to the complete destruction of that kingdom.

B. (:13-15) Punishment of Center of Worship and Houses of Opulence

(:13) Summons to Hear God's Word of Judgment

*"Hear and testify against the house of Jacob,"
Declares the Lord God, the God of hosts."*

Robert Martin-Achard: Yahweh is about to conduct an attack upon the religious centre of the northern kingdom (v. 14) and on what constitutes the glory of the leaders of the state—their rich homes (v. 15). The prophet means here the sanctuary at Bethel, a fact which a note at v. 14b makes explicit. He indicates that on the day when God will render the account to his people every source of security will be removed; the horns of the altar, pledge of the right of asylum where even the guilty can find refuge if he but seizes hold of them (**Exod. 21:12–14; 1 Kgs. 1:50; 2:28**), shall be smashed just as the winter and summer houses, covered over as they are with ivory, shall collapse in ruins, smitten by Yahweh. In excavations made in Samaria ivory decorations have turned up revealing that the rich loved to decorate their various residences.

Billy Smith: The integrating word in this section is “house” . With this term reference is made to (1) Israel as the covenant people of God; (2) Bethel (“house of God”), the primary royal shrine in the Northern Kingdom; and (3) winter and summer houses, houses of ivory, and the mansions, indicators of the wealth and extravagance of Israel's leaders.

1. (:14) Punishment of Bethel = Center of Worship

*"For on the day that I punish Israel's transgressions,
I will also punish the altars of Bethel;
The horns of the altar will be cut off, And they will fall to the ground."*

James Mays: The judgment of Yahweh will strike two foci—temple and mansion. The two furnish a virtual paradigm of Amos' conception of Yahweh's incursion against Israel. The temple is the centre of **religious life**; the mansions are the incarnation of Israel's **social economy of luxury built on exploitation**. Indeed the entire saying turns on the catchword ‘house’: house of Jacob, house of God (Beth-El), winter house and summer house, ivory house and great house. What Israel had built stands as the manifestation of the nation's rebellions. The devastation of these houses is the actualization of Yahweh's ‘no’ to Israel's cult and culture. Bethel was the pre-eminent religious centre of Israel in the time of Jeroboam II (7.10–13). It draws the prophet's denunciation in a special way (cf. the commentary on 4.4f.; 5.5f., 21–24; 7.9; 9.1–4). Because the very worship carried on at Bethel was at root a rebellion against Yahweh (4.4) the central focus of its cult, the altar (9.1; 2.8) was doomed.

2. (:15) Punishment of Houses of Opulence

"I will also smite the winter house together with the summer house;

*The houses of ivory will also perish And the great houses will come to an end,
Declares the LORD.”*

Allen Guenther: The second summons to the witnesses invites them to hear the pronouncement of judgment based on the flagrant sinning they have evidenced (**3:13**). The punishing word comes from the Lord of heaven’s armies.

Once more the message strikes at Israel’s securities and her comfortable living. The judgment will eliminate the many altars of high places in Bethel, where the Israelites thought that by multiplying offerings, they were assuring themselves forgiveness for their sins and protection by the Almighty (**3:14b**). In fact, even the horns of the altar at Bethel will be cut down as by some giant sword. The significance of destroying these horns lies in their judicial function. The corners of stone altars project upward, serving the fugitive who grasps them as a final sanctuary from which to plead for grace (**Exod. 21:13-14; 1 Kings 1:50**). A murderer, however, was to be torn away from the altar and executed (**Exod. 21:14; 1 Kings 2:28-34**).

When the Israelites in desperation flee to the altar to claim sanctuary, they will find the horns missing. Their deeds warrant no more grace. In that judgment day, their well-built winter homes and summer cottages will become rubble (**Amos 3:15**).

Billy Smith: 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.

Warren Wiersbe: Amos announced that the kingdom of Israel would fall to an enemy and the great city of Samaria would be plundered. This happened in 722 B.C. when the Assyrians invaded Israel. The people of Israel had plundered one another, but now a pagan Gentile nation would plunder them. We reap what we sow.

To illustrate what would happen to Israel, Amos borrowed from his experiences as a shepherd. According to **Exodus 22:10-13**, if a lion takes a sheep and tears it to pieces, the shepherd had to bring remnants of the sheep to prove that it was truly dead (see **Gen. 31:39**). This would assure the owner of the flock that the shepherd wasn’t stealing sheep and lying to his employer. By the time Assyria was through with Israel, only a small remnant of the people would be left. The lion was about to roar! (**Amos 1:2; 3:8**)

According to **2 Kings 17:5ff**, the Assyrians killed some Israelites, took others captive, and then brought into the land captives from other nations, thus producing a people with diverse racial and religious backgrounds. The surviving Jews in the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom married people who were not Jews, and this produced the people we know as the Samaritans. The “pure” Jews rejected this new “mongrel race” (**John 4:9**); so the Samaritans set up their own temple and priesthood and established their own religion, which the Lord rejected (**vv. 19-24**).

Amos made it clear that the invasion of the Assyrians was a work of God, for He was punishing Israel for her sins (**Amos 3:14**). Why? Because of their selfish luxury and their impudent idolatry. The people resting on their ivory beds in their expensive mansions would be stripped and led off as prisoners of war. The wealthy who had both summer and winter houses would have no houses.

When the Jewish kingdom was divided after the death of Solomon (**1 Kings 12**), King Jeroboam of Israel didn't want his people going to Jerusalem to worship, lest they go to Judah and never return to Israel. So he established shrines with golden calves at Dan and Bethel, set up his own priesthood, and encouraged the people to worship in Israel. Contrary to the Law of Moses, the king also allowed the people to visit local shrines, where it was more convenient to worship whatever god they chose.

Amos announced that the Lord would destroy the royal chapel at Bethel (**Amos 7:13**), which indicated that Israel's entire man-made religious system would be demolished. Nobody would be able to lay hold of the horns of the altar and claim protection (**1 Kings 1:50-53**), for the horns would be cut off.

Thomas Constable (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. Even some ancient kings did not possess two houses.

Trent Butler: Israel's upper classes had so oppressed the poor that they could afford luxurious houses. These fancy houses apparently had an upper floor equipped to catch cool breezes for hot times and a lower story with a heating system to protect against the cold. Or the rich may have had what only kings could generally afford—a summer house in the hills and a winter house in the valleys. These mansions would feel the heat as God's fire ruined them. No matter how much money and effort were put into importing ivory for decorative inlays, wealth and power could not protect the owners against God's certain judgment.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where do we try to give ourselves an exemption from accountability for sin?
- 2) How can we improve our capacity to receive and obey God's revelation and respond to His warnings?
- 3) How does giving in to sin sear the conscience and obscure our discernment between

what is right and wrong?

4) How do people try to hide behind religion to escape God's judgment?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tchavdar Hadjiev: Is this passage a call to repentance or a proclamation of judgment? In other words, is Amos like the trumpet of **verse 6**, which warns people to hide behind the city walls and escape the danger? Or is the disaster about to befall the city now inevitable and all the trumpet blast does is to underscore that bitter inevitability? The passage meant both of those things in different historical periods. It is likely that in the initial stages of Amos's proclamation the main goal was to persuade the audience and bring it to repentance. As the opposition hardened and especially after the disaster became a reality, the prophetic word served as a witness against Israel's unrepentant spirit and an explanation for its doom. God's mercy is manifest in the fact that through the prophetic ministry the 'secret' of divine judgment is out in the open, and people can do something about it if they have the good sense to respond appropriately.

Robert Martin-Achard: We should note the part played by the God of Israel in this catastrophe. He devastates like an earthquake. Amos keeps pursuing this idea. Thus he ends this **chapter 3**, as he did the preceding one, with a **vision of ruin**. Everything on which the pride of Israel built its security has been removed. God's '*visit*' (from the verb *paqad*, to visit, to inspect, whence to call to account, to punish) evoked at the beginning just as at the end of this collection (**3:2, 14**) signifies in a concrete way a **catastrophe** without precedent for the northern kingdom.

Alec Motyer: Amos depicts for us a powerless nation and a powerless church. Nationally they can point to their strongholds (**3:10**), but when the enemy surrounds the land your strongholds shall be plundered (**3:11**). Ecclesiastically they are equally defenceless. **Verse 14** reflects the pagan supposition that to cling to the horns of the altar gave a person (whatever and whoever he may have previously been) sacrosanctity, but in the day when such asylum is most grievously needed they will find that even the imagined refuge has failed them: the altar will have no horns.³ With the neatest possible touch Amos exposes the wholesale failure of their religion as a protection against disaster. If we translate Bethel in **verse 14** we get the following interesting sequence: '*... house of God... winter house... summer house... houses of ivory... great houses...*' Where religion is powerless everything is powerless; when the house of God falls no house can stand.

But in all this powerlessness, **it is the Lord who is their enemy**. They are powerless because they have lost Him. The encircling foe of **verse 11** is followed by an illustrative use of attack by a lion (**12**). Amos draws no conclusion but leaves us to make our own comparison with Part One of his book. The encircling foe speaks of the enmity of their Lion-God. In **verses 14 and 15** the wording is direct: *I punish... I will punish... I will*

smite... The **vengeance of the covenant** is a reality, and we would do well to ponder what it is which alienates God from His people and renders them helpless before their foes.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The American Express Company has the slogan, “Membership has its privileges.” In an ultimate sense, **our election by God has life’s greatest privileges.** To be elected by the sovereign grace of God is to be chosen and called to be His person, to be the focus of His love, providential care, and timely interventions. The privilege of belonging to God also has rigorous responsibilities. We are elected to fulfill God’s purposes. Our lives are to be a theocracy under His reign. We are to seek first to know and to do His will and to glorify Him as Lord of all.

Gary Smith: This paragraph begins the second series of oracles (**3:1 – 6:14**). In these messages Amos attempts to persuade his audience to believe the disastrous news that he just announced in **2:6–16**. **God will indeed defeat Israel**, his chosen people, because of their rebellious acts.

Since Israel is a strong nation at this time, it would be natural for his listeners in Samaria not to believe what Amos is saying. Some perhaps think that their minor acts of oppression are not really that bad; it is culturally acceptable behavior in that day. Others may be doubting whether the punishment will really be as bad as Amos pictures. Can an enemy actually destroy their strong fortresses? Israel is, after all, a strong nation, a winner, a rich people with a powerful army. A few probably think that this will never happen because the people still do worship God at the temple at Bethel. Moreover, God had blessed them with freedom and prosperity. How could anyone believe this crazy foreign prophet from Judah?

Amos attempts to convince his audience of the truthfulness of his words from God by verifying what God has said to him: **The nation will be destroyed.**

Anthony Petterson: Amos announces God’s punishment on his chosen people Israel. They are his family, whom he saved out of Egypt (cf. **2:10**). God has a special relationship with them, which they presumed gave them immunity from his wrath. Instead, their great privilege gave them greater responsibility. God will punish them for all their sins (cf. **2:13-16**). Amos illustrates from the natural world that there is an activity or event that brings about an expected result (**3:3-6a**). Once the logic is illustrated, Amos proceeds to show that the Lord causes the coming disaster (**v. 6b**). Furthermore, Amos’s prophecy (result) comes because the Lord has spoken, revealing his plan (**vv. 7-8**). Using the same logic, the people are to fear the Lord (result) because he has roared like a lion in judgment (**v. 8**; cf. **1:2**).

God chose the nation of Israel to make his glory known to the nations. As Israel lived out the requirements of the Mosaic covenant, God’s character would be on display. But Israel has broken the terms of the covenant. Now God gathers the nations to witness the sins of Israel and to testify against them. The leaders in the Philistine city of Ashdod (cf. **1:8**) and in Egypt are called to assemble on the mountains of Samaria to

view events taking place inside the city of Samaria (the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel). Israel's oppressors now witness the oppression within Israel, and it is violent and ugly (**3:9-10**). Despite its privilege, Israel is worse than the nations. God will punish his people by an enemy conquest (**v. 11**). The effects will be utterly devastating, with only scraps retrieved of what had been (**v. 12**). After witnessing Israel's sin, the leaders of Ashdod and Egypt are now to testify against Jacob/Israel. God announces he will destroy the corrupt worship at Bethel. He will also tear down the luxurious houses of those who had presumably profited through plunder, looting, and oppression (cf. **vv. 9-10**).

TEXT: Amos 4:1-13

TITLE: SECOND MESSAGE OF CONDEMNATION AGAINST ISRAEL –
JUDGMENT COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED BY REPENTANCE

BIG IDEA:

JUDGMENT MUST FOLLOW WHEN GOD'S PATIENCE AND FORBEARANCE WITH HIS STUBBORNLY REBELLIOUS PEOPLE HAVE REACHED THEIR LIMIT

INTRODUCTION:

Alec Motyer: Basically the word translated 'holy' throughout the Old Testament seems to have the meaning 'separate', or 'different'. Unfortunately these are both comparative words. They provoke us to ask 'separate from what? different from what? other than what?' But 'holy' is not comparative. It expresses that distinct, positive 'something' which makes the gods belong to their own class of being. We, for example, would find it inadequate to try to define 'man' in terms of what makes him different from 'dog'. We would want to say that there is much more to it than comparisons can express, that there is a whole realm of positive, unique distinctiveness which comparisons cannot catch. In the same way, 'holy' is not a word for the way in which God or the gods are different from men but is a word for that basic uniqueness, that positive speciality, which is the ground of all actual differences. And the 'holy woman' earned her title by the fact that her 'dedication' (see RV mg.) had brought her to belong to that other, different, special sphere of things.

Thus 'holiness' is that which makes God what He is. It is 'not a word that expresses any attribute of Deity but deity itself' . . .

Holiness therefore both makes the Lord what He is (God) and also what He distinctively is (the God of utter moral perfection). In both these ways, and in every way, it is His inmost, utmost and uppermost being. It is what makes Him uniquely distinct from man, and what marks Him out from all other claimants to be God. . .

Amos has gathered his facts; he now allows them to assemble into sharply focused pictures, the first in a wealthy Samaritan home (4:1-3) and the second in the well-attended shrines at Bethel and Gilgal (4:4, 5). The point in each case is the same: all is organized by self for self.

Robert Martin-Achard: This chapter begins with a **summons** as do 3:1 and 5:1, and concludes with a portrayal of **Yahweh's irresistible might (v. 13)**. Israel must now get ready to meet it (v. 12), since she has paid no attention to the warnings which her God has offered her (vv. 6 ff). The chapter is composed of three elements:

- (a) an oracle of judgment upon the great ladies of the city (vv. 1-3);
- (b) a kind of parody upon priestly instruction (vv. 4 f);
- (c) a long pericope exhibiting a rhythmical refrain (vv. 6b, 8b, 9b, 10b, 11b),

which concludes with the announcement of a final confrontation between Yahweh and his own people (vv. 6–13).

Allen Guenther: Persistent Patterns of Sinning

Oracle 1: Conspicuous Consumption, 4:1-3

4:1-2a The Socialite Sinners

4:2b-3 Led Out by the Nose

Oracle 2: Invitation to Sin, 4:4-5

4:4-5a Priestly Invitation

4:5b Sarcastic Punch Line

Oracle 3: Incomplete Repentance, 4:6-11

4:6-11 I Did...

4:6-11 Yet You Did Not...

Oracle 4: Watch Out! 4:12-13

4:12 Get Ready!

4:13 God's Awesome Identity

Bob Utley: Notice the structure of this chapter.

1. Amos addresses the wealthy women of Israel (i.e., all exploitative elements of Israeli society), **Amos 4:1-3**
2. YHWH's sarcastic response to their religiosity, **Amos 4:4-5**
3. YHWH's sending of the covenant curses of Deut. 27-29, but they still will not repent, **Amos 4:6-11**
4. YHWH's threat of personal, temporal visitation (i.e., the Day of the Lord), **Amos 4:12**
5. Amos' doxology to God as creator, and therefore, rightful judge, **Amos 4:13**

I. (:1-11) JUDGMENT DESERVED FOR IDOLATRY AND OPPRESSION

A. (:1-3) Humiliating Deportation due to Decadent Opulence

1. (:1) Target of Judgment

a. Call to Attention

*“Hear this word, you cows of Bashan
who are on the mountain of Samaria,”*

J. Vernon McGee: Bashan is a territory on the east of the Jordan River between the mountains of Gilead in the south and Mount Hermon in the north. It was settled by the three tribes that stayed on the wrong side of Jordan, and it was part of the northern kingdom of Israel. It was a very fertile area and noted for its fine breed of cattle. The cows of Bashan were strong and sleek in appearance because of the lush grazing lands.

Thomas McComiskey: Amos begins this new judgment oracle with a call to the upper class women of Israel to hear God’s condemnation of their oppression. The region of Bashan (located in Transjordan on both sides of the Yarmuk River) was known for its well-fed cattle (**Ps 22:12; Eze 39:18**), and Amos sarcastically likens the women of Samaria to these plump cattle that grazed in the rich uplands of Bashan. Amos accuses these rich women of oppressing the poor, just as he accused the male leaders of society. These women may not have been directly involved in mistreating the poor, but their **incessant demands for luxuries** drove their husbands to greater injustices. Their demand “*Bring us some drinks*” creates a vivid picture of their indolence.

b. Condemnation for Oppression and Opulent Living
*“Who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,
Who say to your husbands, ‘Bring now, that we may drink!’”*

Here Amos condemned the opulence of the women of Samaria who were as greedy and insensitive as their husbands.

Billy Smith: The basic charge against the “*cows of Bashan*” was **exploitation of the poor**. Three plural participles describe their indirect methods of getting what they wanted: “*the ones oppressing the poor*”; “*the ones striking the needy*”; “*the ones saying to their husbands*.” The imperative “*bring*” addressed to the husbands reveals the indirect methods employed by the women. They nagged their husbands to “*bring*” more and more to satisfy their thirst. Thus, while pagan worship may be in the background, it is more likely the term “*cows of Bashan*” was simply a figure for women whose every desire was being abundantly met. In turn the lords exploited the poor, taking their meager material wealth to satisfy the insatiable desire of their women. . .

Use of the imperative “*bring*” indicates the strong will and determination of Samaria's court women to satisfy their indulgent appetites. Their demand for an indulgent lifestyle led to oppression of the poor to support that lifestyle.

John Goldingay: What they themselves do is put pressure on their husbands (sardonically called their “*lords*”—not a usual word to describe husbands) so that the capital’s economic system keeps making people pay taxes in the form that works well for the women, and for the men (again cf. **2:8**).

Alec Motyer: If we are to find a distinct emphasis in each of these descriptions, the first points to self-concern, whereby even the poor must lose their little all to satisfy the needs of the lady of the manor; the second points to self-importance, whereby everyone of lower rank must accept a conscript’s place in the army serving the cause of the ‘big house’; and the third (how Amos must have enjoyed the irony of calling the husbands of these matriarchs ‘*their lords*’—as the word literally is, see RV. It is clear who lorded it in these marriages!) points to self-determination, whereby no-one can side-step the mandate of the mistress.

Bob Utley: This phrase has two VERBS of command. . . These women had been indulging in luxury to the point that alcoholism and greed were the normal way of life. Their motto would have been "more and more for me at any cost" (i.e., the essence of the Fall)!

2. (:2-3) Terror of Deportation

- a. (:2a) Certainty of Deportation Confirmed by Oath Formula
"The Lord God has sworn by His holiness,"

Billy Smith: "*Has sworn*" (v. 2) is an **oath formula** and is more forceful than the messenger formula ("*thus says the LORD*") as the procedure for announcing judgment. "*His holiness*" refers to God's essential being and to a quality of his character. As surely as God is separate from humankind, his verdict on the court women of Samaria was to be executed (cf. **Ps 89:35**).

Alec Motyer: In his great oath the Lord, specified as '*the sovereign Yahweh*', commits the whole unique resource of His nature to the complete reversal and destruction of this order of things. It seems that there is no room in His world for life organized on a self-basis.

- Status will be lost in subjugation, for they shall take you away (**4:2**),
- bodily comfort lost in the excruciating hooks and cords of the captive (**2**),
- security lost in the downfall of the city whereby it will no longer be necessary to go out by the gate, for everyone can walk confidently straight ahead knowing that the wall has been breached into non-existence (**3**).

Thomas McComiskey: The holiness of God is not a transferable divine energy but the absolute separation of God from anything secular or profane. When God swears by his holiness in **Psalm 89:35**, it is a guarantee that he will not lie, because doing so would be a violation of holiness. When he swears by his holiness in **Amos 4:2**, he guarantees that the judgment will become a reality, because the holy God does not lie, nor can his holiness allow sin to go unpunished.

- b. (:2b) Cruelty of Deportation

"Behold, the days are coming upon you When they will take you away with meat hooks, And the last of you with fish hooks."

James Mays: '*Behold! Days are coming ...*' is one of the formulae of prophetic 'eschatology' (**8.11; 19.13; I Sam. 2.31; II Kings 20.17; Jer. 7.32** and 12 other times in Jer.) used to designate the imminent inbreaking time when Yahweh would effect his great setting-right, whether for woe (**8.11**) or weal (**9.13**). In Amos '*the coming days*' are the '*day of Yahweh*' (**5.18**) in which the one true Lord will be the terrible circumstance exclusively determining Israel's experience.

John Goldingay: To say that "*days are coming*" is to speak of a time that is on its way, which will bring something quite new (it may be bad news or good news: cf. **8:11; 9:13**) and which is certain to arrive, without committing oneself to a time frame but

with an implication that **a response is needed now**. Otherwise, the women's fate will mirror an event that they and Amos were evidently familiar with—the catching of fish in the Mediterranean or in Kinneret, or their arrival in a place such as Samaria.

Gary Cohen: After He follows imagery of heavy, splendid, lazy cows with an oath of certainty, the Lord enunciates the violent fate that awaited the women of Samaria when the Assyrians would invade. The horrible picture of the gashing meat hook, with all its implied tearing and ripping, comes as a sharp contrast to the lazy life of the well bred cow. This portrayed well the savagery of the Assyrian siege, with its breaking down of walls, taking women captive, and dragging them screaming out of their houses. The fishhooks picture a more gentle, baited allurements, but still an action that would end in a violent tug with painful tearing. Perhaps the fishhook describes the later invasions that would eventually empty Samaria and leave it an abandoned, ruined city. The fishhook metaphor, following the meat hook as it does, also fits the view that Sargon II's first invasion in 722-721 B.C. took only about 27,000 of the inhabitants out, whereas later Assyrian monarchs soon completed his damage and finished implementing the policy of moving the population. . .

The announcement that the women would not leave the city by the ordinary means of going through the gates is a further description of the violent judgment that would befall them. Gaping holes and breaks would be made in the city's walls, and the captives would be led out of those openings nearest to them.

c. (:3) Casting Out of Deportation

*“You will go out through breaches in the walls,
Each one straight before her, And you will be cast to Harmon,
declares the LORD.”*

Robert Martin-Achard: The punishment will be in proportion to these shameful deeds (**vv. 2bf**). These ‘high-born ladies’ will be seen to depart one after the other, through breaches in the walls of a town in ruins, one that has been destroyed by an enemy, or perhaps by some form of earth tremor. But they will not go out as free women, neither they nor their servants, nor their offspring (*aharitken*, those who come after you, who are behind you; others translate the same word by ‘*their bottoms*’!). They will be led, like obstreperous beasts goaded by blows (or, according to other commentators, with hooks). They will be dragged away like long files of prisoners, bound to each other by chains bored through the nose, such as one can see in Assyrian reliefs. Other translations again suggest that the women of Samaria, or their dead bodies, will be carried out with hooks or pruning-hooks.

If the details of the punishment of the grand ladies of Samaria are not clear to us, it is certain that the prophet reserves for them a fate both **humiliating** and **painful**. They are to be led off with blows from steel-tipped clubs, packed together like sardines, or chained like captives. Thus they will be driven or transported in the direction of Hermon (according to the Greek), which marks the northern limit of the northern

kingdom on the other side of the Jordan. So Amos hints here perhaps (v. 3) that the female inhabitants of Samaria will be deported (**Amos 5:27**).

B. (:4-5) Sacrilegious Worship – Religious Rites without Heartfelt Repentance Sacrifices – Tithes / Thank Offerings / Freewill Offerings

1. (:4a) Call to Hypocritical Worship

“*Enter Bethel and transgress; In Gilgal multiply transgression!*”

Gary Smith: The prophet sarcastically calls for more sinful worship at Israel’s temples (**4:4–5**), an obvious put-down of what has been happening in their “wonderful” worship services. . . This paradoxical statement reveals the value of the people’s useless praise. Their sacrifices do not bring forgiveness of sin but add to the people’s sinfulness before God.

Billy Smith: The form of these two verses is that of a **priestly call to worship**. A typical priestly call would have directed the worshiper to come to the shrine to seek God and to find life (**5:4, 6**). The audience must have been shocked when Amos invited them to come to the worship site to sin. They would immediately recognize the sarcasm in this parody as an accusation for doing not what the Lord requires but rather the very things that are detestable. . .

He was not calling them to do something new but ironically to continue their sinful worship. The following verses show that the ritual itself was not at fault. They were bringing the prescribed sacrifices, even freewill offerings and tithes. Where they were at fault was in making their rituals an end in themselves when they were meant to be a means toward and an expression of fellowship with God. . .

The law prescribed daily offerings (**Lev 6:8-13**) and a special tithe every three years for the benefit of the Levites (**Deut 14:28-29**). Leavened bread as well as unleavened was to be brought with the thank offering (**Lev 7:11-13**), which along with the freewill offering was voluntary. The thank offering was brought either in anticipation of or gratitude for a deliverance of some kind. The freewill offering was to be an expression of gratitude for God’s goodness more generally. These were both types of peace offerings, unique in that the worshiper was to share in the sacred meal.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Again Amos shocked and stunned his audience. He could not have used a more harsh term than *transgress* to describe what the people were planning to do in the sanctuary. The word *transgress* (*pāša*) means “*to break with.*” It is the same root used to describe the plot of Joseph’s brothers to kill him (**Gen. 50:17**) or for rebellion. Amos uses the word here to jar the people with the fact that it is a sin to carry on with rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices, when they have not obeyed Yahweh. The religious observances were totally separated from true worship of Him and obedience to Him. Nothing is more godless than worship that follows traditional procedures without an encounter with God Himself or any accountability to His commandments or obedience to His moral requirements.

Thomas McComiskey: Bethel was the chief religious sanctuary of the northern kingdom. In the premonarchic period, it once housed the ark of the covenant and was one of the locations in the circuit followed by Samuel in his work as judge (**1Sa 7:16**). Shortly after the division into two kingdoms, Bethel was established as a sanctuary by Jeroboam I to provide an alternative center to Jerusalem (**1Ki 12:25 – 13:34**). In the time of Amos, Bethel was known as “*the king’s sanctuary*” (**Am 7:13**). It thus may have been the scene of royal as well as religious pomp. . .

Gilgal was another Israelite sanctuary in Amos’s time (**5:5**; cf. **Hos 4:15; 9:15; 12:11**). Lest the people think that Bethel, with its pagan heritage, should be the only sanctuary that bears an onus, the prophet includes Gilgal.

Trent Butler: **Gilgal** near Jericho had an equally illustrious history. There the Israelites under Joshua set up their first campsite and worship site in the promised land (**Josh. 4:19–20**). The nation's entire male population received circumcision there, and the people celebrated Passover for the first time in the new land. This identified them once again as the obedient people of God, distinct from the murmuring generation of the wilderness years (**Josh. 5:2–12**). But somewhere along the way, Gilgal became a center of false worship and met prophetic condemnation, betraying its historical beginnings (**Hos. 12:11**).

2. (:4b) Call to Offer Sacrifices and Tithes
“*Bring your sacrifices every morning, Your tithes every three days.*”
3. (:5) Call to Offer Thank Offering and Freewill Offerings
“*Offer a thank offering also from that which is leavened,
And proclaim freewill offerings, make them known.
For so you love to do, you sons of Israel, ’ Declares the Lord God.*”

John MacArthur: Though prohibited from most offerings, leaven was required as a part of the thank offering (**Lv 7:11-15**).

Thomas McComiskey: It is possible that Amos here represents the current-day practices prescribed for pilgrimage to the cultic centers; but it is also possible that he is using hyperbole to show the futility of offering many sacrifices and tithes. This latter view seems to reflect the intent of the passage, because Amos says, “This is what you love to do.” It is as though he is telling them that even if they sacrifice every morning and tithe every three days in order to have something to boast about, in the end they are only engaging in acts of rebellion against God.

James Mays: a charge that the sacrificial cult has nothing to do with Yahweh. It is not the Lord, but the self of Israel which is the ground of their worship. The people themselves have displaced the Lord as the central reality of cult. However pious and proper all their religious acts, the sacrifices and offerings are no submission of life to the Lord, but merely an expression of their own love of religiosity. The cult of Bethel and Gilgal has become a breaking with Yahweh because it evades rather than enforces

the Lord's rule over the nation. It flourishes on an affluence gained by violence against the poor (2.8); it produces a passion for neither justice nor righteousness (5.24).

C. (:6-11) Five Historical Scenarios of Stubbornly Spurning God's Fatherly Discipline – 5 Covenant Curses

Key: “‘Yet you have not returned to Me,’ declares the Lord.”

Gary Smith: This paragraph is divided into five short sections by the concluding phrase, “‘yet you have not returned to me,’ declares the LORD” (4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11). By the repetition of this phrase, Amos hammers home the central message that the Israelites do not have a proper relationship with God. The paragraph is also unified by the recitation of five different curses God has already brought on the nation (no food, no rain, no crops, no life, and his overthrowing of them). These are the **covenant curses** God said he would bring on the nation if they disobeyed him (see **Lev. 26; Deut. 27–28**).

Alec Motyer: The **troubles of life** are spread before us here by Amos: troubles caused by deprivation (famine and drought), troubles caused by infliction (blight and epidemic), troubles caused by opposition (war and earthquake)—all the troubles of life are there in principle, falling into one category or the other. Right at the centre is one of the things that worries us most of all: **troubles apparently falling by chance**—rain here, drought there, seemingly haphazard, luck for one, ill-luck for the other (4:7b, 8). But over them all the first person singular of divine decision and action. Everything on earth comes from a God who rules and reigns in heaven.

Thomas McComiskey: The point of vv.6–11 is that the Israelites have become **spiritually hardened**. Because Amos does not want his hearers to forget this fact, he states five times, “‘Yet you have not returned to me” (vv.6, 8–11).

James Mays: The **catalogue of calamity** is based upon episodes of disaster through which Israel had passed. The validity of citing these events as deeds of Yahweh rested, first of all, upon their actuality in the experience of the audience. By their nature nothing can be said about them as historical occurrences except that they all represent the type of misfortune which happened from time to time in Syria-Palestine. Famine, drought, crop-failure, war, contagious disease, natural calamity, all punctuate the story of peoples in that region. . . The raw material for Amos' narrative certainly lay at hand in the experience of a people for whom life was often nasty, brutish, and short. One need not assume that these misfortunes were either contiguous or contemporary. The audience would remember such calamities in their own time or in the days of their fathers.

The striking feature of the narrative is its presentation as a Yahweh-history. The God of Israel speaks in first-person style and proclaims these disasters as his own deeds in the past. Amos uncovers and articulates a dimension of Yahweh's dealing with Israel which stands in stark contrast to the deeds of the classical salvation-history which was proclaimed in the cult and heard as a message of salvation. The proclamation of the Exodus, the leading through the Wilderness and the Conquest was heard as a promise of

protection and benevolence. But Amos' history spoke of the very opposite of security and blessing. His oracular narrative takes the separate sporadic hardships of Israel's life in Canaan and makes them coalesce into a continuous cohesive record in which Yahweh's personal dealings with Israel are disclosed. And it is a history with a rationale. Its purpose is insistently stated in the refrain which interprets the disasters as Yahweh's quest for Israel's return to him. The cogency of reciting this narrative as a record of Israel's failure to respond to Yahweh presupposes that Amos had a basis for recognizing the blows as the personal overtures of Yahweh, and that the people should have recognized them as such and responded.

Allen Guenther: God chronicles the history of repeated attempts to recall Israel from her ignorance, disobedience, and pride. These are acts of the covenant by which God intended to wake up and call back a rebellious people. The Lord threatened his people with punishments if they rebelled (**Lev. 26:14-46; Deut. 28:15-68**). Heaven and earth, acting as the two witnesses, would cast the first stone against this disobedient people (cf. **Deut. 4:26; 17:1-7; 30:19; 31:28**). Creation acts as God's agent, though in that action, creation also suffers for the sins of human alienation. God, the effective Agent, draws on the rest of the created world to witness against this disobedient people. So while famine, drought, plant diseases, plagues, and earthquakes serve to mediate punishments, in the Lord's hand these judgments become invitations and incentives to repentance. Even the most severe judgments are motivated by the desire to restore rather than to destroy the nation (**Jer. 18:1-11**).

1. **(:6) Discipline of Famine** – no food to eat
“*But I gave you also cleanness of teeth in all your cities
And lack of bread in all your places,
Yet you have not returned to Me,*’ declares the LORD.”

Billy Smith: Famine was a common event in the ancient Near East. Here the famine is brought by God as a warning to the people, but they did not heed the warning. “*Empty stomachs*” is literally “*cleanness of teeth*.” “*Lack of bread*” is the reason. Taken together the two expressions experientially describe a famine. A literal translation reveals the emphasis on God as the causative agent in the calamity: “*And also I, even I, gave to you cleanness of teeth*.” Both phrases affirm the **reality of a famine**. The verb translated “*returned*” is the primary word for repentance in the Old Testament. Famine should have driven Israel to repentance and return to God, but it failed to elicit that response.

Trent Butler: *Yet you have not returned to me.* Here is Amos's chorus (**4:6,8–11**). **Deuteronomy 4:29–31** and **30:1–10** showed Israel how to respond to God's judgment. God's discipline has a strong purpose—to lead his people to repent, to turn away from their frivolous, God-ignoring lifestyle, and to turn back to a God-fearing lifestyle. Israel refused to recognize God's sovereignty. They thought they could get away with worship the way they planned it and live the way they enjoyed it. Famine just called for more and better offerings in their kind of worship. But famine should call them to feast on God's Word and seek God's will. If not, the call to worship continued to be a call to sin

and thus a call to judgment.

2. (:7-8) Discipline of Drought – Providentially withholding or providing Rainfall
*“And furthermore, I withheld the rain from you While there were still three months until harvest.
Then I would send rain on one city And on another city I would not send rain;
One part would be rained on, While the part not rained on would dry up.
8 So two or three cities would stagger to another city to drink water, But would not be satisfied;
Yet you have not returned to Me, ’ declares the LORD.”*

Gary Cohen: Withholding rain (vv. 7-8). “Three months until harvest” would be at the time of the latter rains, late February through April, at the very time when rain was most needed to produce good crops (**Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:23**). God also selectively withheld the rain from certain cities. Few things would be as heart searching as having one’s fields in a drought while others in the same region were having rain.

3. (:9) Discipline of Disease and Plagues upon the Crops
*“I smote you with scorching wind and mildew;
And the caterpillar was devouring Your many gardens and vineyards, fig trees and olive trees;
Yet you have not returned to Me, ’ declares the LORD.”*
4. 4. (:10) Discipline of Defeats in War – the stench of dead bodies in the Camp
*“I sent a plague among you after the manner of Egypt;
I slew your young men by the sword along with your captured horses,
And I made the stench of your camp rise up in your nostrils;
Yet you have not returned to Me, ’ declares the LORD.”*
5. 5. (:11) Discipline of Devastating Destruction – cf. Sodom and Gomorrah - yet rescuing a small remnant
*“I overthrew you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,
And you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze;
Yet you have not returned to Me, ’ declares the LORD.”*

Billy Smith: **Total destruction** was conveyed by the reference to the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. **Deut 29:22-24; Jer 20:16**). Israel, like Lot and his family, was like a brand snatched from the fire, fortunate to be alive. But even Israel's narrow escape did not turn them toward God. Secular society sees only natural phenomena when various calamities adversely affect people. God's people correctly inquire about the possible purpose of God in such calamities. Always the right question to ask when people are hit by destructive calamities is, “What does God want to see happen as a result of the calamity?” Is repentance the appropriate response?

Thomas McComiskey: referring to violence suffered by certain Israelite cities during the Syrian incursions. The account of them in **2 Kings 13:1-9** refers to a “deliverer” (v. 5) who restored the conquered people to their homes. The analogy of the stick snatched from the fire aptly describes the conquered towns that might have been lost forever to Israel but were “snatched” from the fire of conflict and restored to their inhabitants because of the intervention of this unnamed “deliverer.”

II. (:12-13) JUDGMENT DECREED – HOPELESSNESS OF ISRAEL ESCAPING GOD’S JUDGMENT

A. (:12) Prepare to Meet Your God

*“Therefore, thus I will do to you, O Israel;
Because I shall do this to you, Prepare to meet your God, O Israel.”*

Robert Martin-Achard: Yahweh’s patience with his own people has its limits; the hour of judgment has come (v. 12). This verse makes a clear announcement of the judgment upon the guilty, without entering into details.

Thomas McComiskey: The command “*Prepare*” should not be understood as a plea for the people to repent. The die was cast. They did not turn to God when he chastised them (vv. 6-11), and now Amos held out no hope for their full-scale repentance. The words seem nothing more than an imperative for the people to get ready for the national calamity about to befall them.

James Mays: In some of his sayings Amos points to his expectation that in the impending judgment Yahweh will act directly and personally, that its central reality will be a theophany. The day of Yahweh would be a climax whose finality transcended the ineffective chastisements of the past (5.18–20). Yahweh would pass by his people no more (7.8; 8.2); instead he will pass through their midst (5.17). In his identity as Lord of the covenant, ‘your God’, Yahweh will confront his people. They will not return to him, so he will come to them in a **terrifying historical theophany** so inexorable that no Israelite can avoid it (9.1–4) and so awesome that none can mistake it (2.13–16)—not in a sanctuary, but in history—not for covenant-making, but for judgment. The cultic summons is displaced and applied to history, just as the curses were in vv. 6–11. The summons to ‘*prepare to meet your God*’ is in actuality an **announcement of judgment day**.

B. (:13) Know the Capabilities of Your God – What do you learn about God:

Allen Guenther: That it is a hymn is established formally. A hymn focuses on the name of God (Yahweh), and uses participles (at least initially) to denote the characteristics of this God who is addressing Israel (4:13; cf. Ps. 103:3-9; 104:2ff.). The God who confronts Israel is no petty deity. All domains of human existence are under his control. He is not at Israel’s beck and call, nor can anyone manipulate him into serving Israel.

No, God addresses his people as Lord and comes to them in his own time and way. The best Israel can do is to *prepare* (**Amos 4:12**; cf. **Exod. 19:11**) to meet their God.

The hymn (**Amos 4:13**) extols the majesty of God in the language of creation and of the Sinaitic covenant. The presence of God is the ultimate hope for a trusting people. When they reject the God of Sinai, they need to remember that he is the One who forms the mountains, brings the breath of nature (wind) and of humankind (spirit) into existence, and discloses his most intimate thoughts to those who love him (cf. **Gen. 18:17**; **Amos 3:7**).

In addition to being Creator and to revealing himself, God acts as Judge within the world. He makes the morning darkness and superintends the affairs of individuals and nations from his vantage point on the heights of the earth. When God steps onto the mountaintops, the earth trembles (**Exod. 19:18**; **Ps. 68:7-8**). This word from Amos irresistibly leads us to God's self-disclosure at Sinai. Now, however, God addresses his people with what appears as a final appeal. Though the precise nature of the judgment remains hidden in the threat, the metaphor of an earthquake dominates the scene.

1. From His Role as Creator and Ruler of Nature
"For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind"
2. From His Role as Revealer
"And declares to man what are His thoughts,"
3. From His Role as Judge
*"He who makes dawn into darkness
And treads on the high places of the earth,"*
4. From His Essential Character
"The LORD God of hosts is His name."

Tchavdar Hadjiev: This is the first of the three 'hymnic fragments' in the book of Amos (**5:8-9**; **9:5-6**) which are united by their common use of participles to describe God, the shared theme of creation and the recurring cultic formula *the Lord . . . is his name*. The hymn paints an awesome and terrifying picture of the God whom Israel is about to meet (**v. 12**). The five participles correspond to the five occurrences of the refrain you did not return to me. The power of the Lord is demonstrated first and foremost in acts of creation. He is the one who forms the solid, immovable mountains, as well as the fleeting wind. Both stability and dynamic motion emanate from him. He has complete control over Israel's universe. The third participial phrase, which occupies the centre, could be translated '*declares to mortals their thoughts*' (nab); in other words, he brings to the surface the hidden plans and desires of human beings. Most scholars, however, prefer reveals his thoughts to mortals – that is, God not only controls the created world but communicates with humanity (**3:7**). Makes the morning darkness is unsettling. Whether it refers to a solar eclipse (**Paas 2003: 277**) or to clouds and smoke hiding the morning sun (**Hubbard 1989: 162**) the phrase does not depict the normal rhythm of day

and night and carries ominous overtones. Treads on the heights of the earth (**Job 9:8**; **Mic. 1:3**) depicts a divine march and the subjection of the earth to the authority of its creator. The hymnic conclusion evokes a **sense of awe** with its picture of **unstoppable divine power**.

Lloyd Ogilvie: **Verse 13** follows with a magnificent self-disclosure of Yahweh's might and majesty. He is in control of everyone and all things. He shapes the mountains, creates the spirit of man (*rûah*, "wind," also "spirit, breath"), reveals His thoughts ("*his plan*," *śēhō*), His will, and His law. Yahweh asserts His power above the false gods of the Baal cults. He alone can control the revolution of the earth around the sun for He is sovereign of the whole universe. The "*high places of the earth*" refer to claims made for Baal Shamem who was touted as taking the high places of the land. Yahweh, not a diminutive Canaanite false god, is Lord over all creation. "*The Lord GOD of hosts is His name*." Yahweh is not one god in the pantheon of syncretistic religion, but the only God of heaven and earth. When Israel lost the sense of awe and wonder of true worship, she began to lose everything else.

Thomas McComiskey: 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.

Robert Martin-Achard: What strikes us in this confession that ends **chapter 4** is the omnipresence of Yahweh, his unceasing activity, his universal sovereignty. It is with such a God then that the Israelites are to meet!

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How could Christians in prosperous American be called fat cows who graze in pastures of false security and ignore the plight of the oppressed?
- 2) Where is our worship characterized by external rites rather than heart obedience?
- 3) How does God respond when our worship no longer focuses attention on Him?
- 4) How has God brought discipline into your life and how have you responded?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jorg Jeremias: **Amos 4:1–3** is an internally rounded off oracle of judgment in elevated

prose reflecting oral discourse with much more immediacy than most of the other sayings of Amos that have come down to us. With its harsh pronouncement of judgment, it rounds off the composition in **Amos 3:9 – 4:3**, and in addition relates the reproaches of oppression (**3:9–11**) to the excessive luxury (**3:12, 15**) in the preceding sayings.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: This section is a detailed exposition of the main point established in the Israel oracle (**2:6–16**). The social injustice practised by the leading circles in the capital of Samaria will inevitably lead to a military defeat. The luxury of the ruling class financed by this injustice comes more sharply into focus (**3:15**). There is also a growing sense of confrontation and debate between the prophet and his audience (**3:12**), following on from **3:1–8**. The brief mention of the altar of Bethel (**3:14**) at the very centre of a passage dealing predominantly with Samaria highlights another central concern of the book: the indissoluble link between the abuse of royal power and the tainted religious worship.

Anthony Petterson: God continues to announce punishment on those in Samaria who live comfortably but oppress the poor and needy (cf. **3:9**). Bashan was a fertile area in Transjordan, known for its fattened cattle (e.g., **Dt 32:14; Ps 22:12**). The descriptions picture women who care only for themselves. God swears by his own character that he will bring devastation on Samaria. The image in **Amos 4:2-3** is of captives being exiled after conquest, but the Hebrew of **v. 2b** is very difficult to translate due to unique words. With cutting irony, Amos calls on the people to continue in their religious hypocrisy – multiplying their sin and their extravagant sacrifices in which they boasted (**vv. 4-5**). They love impressing others more than pleasing God. Bethel, was where Jacob encountered God (**Ge 28:19**), and Gilgal was Israel’s base on the way into the promised land (**Jos 5:9**). They are now associated with false worship (**Am 5:5**).

Under the terms of this covenant relationship God had with Israel, when the people disobeyed the Lord, he would send various disasters to they might realize the error of their ways and turn back to him. This is because God fundamentally desires a close relationship with his people. These disasters are known as covenant curses and are recorded in **Leviticus 26** and **Deuteronomy 27-28**. This section of Amos recounts the various covenant curses God had sent throughout Israel’s history, yet in each instance the people did not return (stated five time). The curses include famine, drought, blight and mildew, locusts, plagues, military defeat, and acts of supernatural judgment (**Am 4:3-11**). Because the people failed to pay attention to God’s numerous warnings by not repenting of their sin and returning to him, they must now prepare to meet him in a future, unspecified judgment. The God whom they will meet in judgment is the mighty Creator, who has revealed his purposes to humanity (cf. **3:7; Ro 1:18-20**). The name “*God Almighty*” can also be translated “*God of hosts*” where the “*hosts*” are his armies – heavenly and earthly (cf. **Am 3:13**). This title also speaks of his power to judge. Israel should be very afraid.

TEXT: Amos 5:1-17

TITLE: *THIRD MESSAGE OF CONDEMNATION AGAINST ISRAEL – JUDGMENT WILL BE SEVERE AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE PERSISTED IN SIN – PART I*

BIG IDEA:
FUNERAL LAMENT: JUDGMENT DESERVED FOR FAILING TO SEEK AFTER GOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION:

Ray Stedman: Now this is the reason this book is so loved by the liberal; Amos is called the prophet of social justice, the man who demanded that man treat their fellow-man rightly. Liberals love this book because of these thundering pronouncements against the social evils of Amos' day -- and rightly so. God is always disturbed by social injustices. But what the liberals seem to miss in this book is Amos' appeal to these people. He doesn't just say to them, "Now stop doing these things." He does say that, but that isn't all he says. It is how to stop doing these things that is the important message, and you will find it plainly given twice in **chapter 5**:

**“For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel:
‘Seek me and live.’” [Amos 5:4 RSV]**
["Don't go to Bethel. Don't go to those golden calves. Seek me and live."]

**“Seek the Lord and live,
lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph.” [Amos 5:6a RSV]**

What is the answer to the wandering heart? The answer isn't just to clean up your life. It is to come back to God. It is to repent and to think again. Turn. Come back to the Lord of your salvation. Call upon him. Ask him to set you back on your feet and straighten out your life. That is the answer. That is always God's appeal. Come back into a relationship with one who loves and in patience tries to awaken us and bring us back to himself.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The opening exhortation of **chapter 5** signals the beginning of a new part of the book. This section begins with a lament over the defeated nation and closes with howls of grief in every place. It is a picture of terrible judgment and its aftermath. This literary setting determines the mood and movement of the next two sections, **5:18–27** and **6:1–14**. Both are introduced by woes and reinforce the tone set here. They also push the descriptions of judgment to new vistas: the exile of the nation and its leaders (**5:26–27; 6:7**), the destruction of the capital city (**6:8–11**), and the oppressive presence of a foreign power in the land (**6:14**).

Several decades ago, **de Waard** recognized a chiasm in **5:1–17**, and his proposal has found wide acceptance. It reads (captions mine):

- A Lament for Israel (vv. 1–3)
 - B Seek Yahweh and live (vv. 4–6)
 - C Warning to Israel (v. 7)
 - D The power of Yahweh to create (v. 8a, b, c)
 - E “Yahweh is his name” (v. 8d)
 - D’ The power of Yahweh to destroy (v. 9)
 - C’ Warning to the powerful (vv. 10–13)
 - B’ Seek Yahweh and live (vv. 14–15)
- A’ Lament for Israel (vv. 16–17)

Allen Guenther: [Different titles for same chiastic symmetry]

It’s Your Funeral, 5:1-3

There’s One Way Out, Maybe, 5:4-6

Cause of Death, 5:7

God’s in Charge: I AM! 5:8-9

Cause of Death, 5:10-13

There’s One Way Out, Maybe, 5:14-15

It’s Your Funeral, 5:16-17

Thomas Constable: [5:1-17] The **structure** of this message is chiastic, 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

Trent Butler: Seek God and Live

The prophet invites the people of Israel to a sneak preview of their own funeral. Their hope for life is to seek God rather than traditional worship places. They must forsake a system of justice that no longer works and implement one that rolls down for everyone. They cannot count on the Day of the Lord coming, since it will bring darkness and death, not light and life. Those enjoying the “good life” for the moment will soon face God’s eternal judgment.

MAIN IDEA: Religion impacts daily living; people demonstrate their faith in God by compassionate, consistent, godly behavior focused on a relationship with him.

Robert Martin-Achard: This chapter, which opens with a song of lamentation (vv. 1–3) and ends with a threat of deportation for the Israelites (v. 27), and in which the prophet outlines various misfortunes that will happen to them (thus vv. 16 f and vv. 18 f), is probably the **most important** in Amos’ book. In it we find a list of the characteristic themes arrived at by the prophet such as the trial of Israelite society given over to

injustice (particularly vv. 10 ff), the rejection of the worship that Israel offers her God (vv. 21 ff), and the radical calling into question of the Israelites' hope (vv. 18 ff). Once more the prophet adopts the contrary opinion to that of his questioners and turns their most cherished traditions upside down.

This chapter is divisible into four parts: vv. 1–3; 4–17; 18–20; 21–27.

J. Vernon McGee: The previous chapter closed with a bang, with a note of finality. It would seem as if God had closed the door, that judgment was inevitable, and that there was no hope for Israel at all. Although **chapter 5** reaches into the future and makes it very clear that God will punish them for their iniquity, in the first fifteen verses God pleads with Israel to seek Him so that judgment can be averted. As long as He did not bring that final stroke of judgment, their captivity, there was hope for them.

(:1) LITERARY GENRE = FUNERAL LAMENT

“Hear this word which I take up for you as a dirge, O house of Israel.”

Cf. Lamentations of Jeremiah

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Laments are a response to loss of a loved one or friend (**2 Sam 1:17–27; 3:31–35**). The Old Testament contains various terms for mourning and offers glimpses of customs associated with grief in ancient Israel, such as tearing garments, wearing sackcloth, shaving the head (**8:10; 2 Sam 3:31**; cf. **Gen 37:34–35; 2 Sam 1:11–12; Mic 1:16**), chanting or singing (**8:10; 2 Chr 35:25**), and the wailing of professional mourners (**5:16–17; Jer 9:17, 20 [MT 9:16, 19]**). Prophetic literature, however, often uses the *qînâ* to anticipate destruction and death instead of to mourn what has already occurred. So, too, in Amos. Though Israel has already experienced loss (see the OAN; **4:6–11**), this lament concerns the effects of a major judgment yet to come. . .

What is the tone of this lament? Is it ironic and condemnatory—a warning of the horror that awaits the nation because of its sinful stubbornness? Or is this an expression of sadness at the suffering that is coming? The latter may be the better option.

Billy Smith: Singing a funeral song about Israel implied that **the nation was dead**. That understanding must have stunned the audience, since the nation then was strong and prosperous. What that use of language suggests is that the future death of the nation was so certain Amos saw it as an accomplished fact, and it made him grieve. Once God declares war on a people, they are as good as defeated. Having just declared the destruction of Israel, it was appropriate that Amos should lament (cf. **3:11–12; 4:2–3, 12**).

I. (:2-3) TRAGIC FALL OF ISRAEL

A. (:2) Beyond Help

*“She has fallen, she will not rise again—
The virgin Israel. She lies neglected on her land;
There is none to raise her up.”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Finally, virgin Israel is a startling metaphor that here appears for the first time in the Old Testament. This same phrase also occurs in **Jer 14:17; 18:13; 31:4, 21** (cf. **14:17; 46:11**), and similar combinations are used of Zion (**2 Kgs 19:21; Isa 37:22; Lam 2:13**), Judah (**Lam 1:15**), Sidon (**Isa 23:12**), Babylon (**Isa 47:1**), and Egypt (**Jer 46:11**). Its grammatical form is a construct, although “virgin” and Israel can be taken in apposition—that is, “*the virgin that is Israel.*” This is a reference to the Northern Kingdom, although some argue that the capital city of Samaria is in view. In passages like **Jer 31:4, 21**, however, the reference is clearly to more than a city. The rest of the chiasm of **5:1–17**, as well as many descriptions of the rest of the book, have the entire nation in view.

What does virgin connote in this context? While some relate the context of war in these verses to the idea that this young woman (Israel) has been violated, most commentators interpret this as a reference to **a maiden being cut down before reaching full maturity as a fruitful mother and wife** (cf. **Judg 11:37–40**). The image of the discarded body of a dead maiden may have evoked a sense of horror and sadness. If she lies dead with no one to carry her away for burial, one wonders if the scene might suggest that neither are there any comforters to console whoever might mourn her loss (**vv. 16–17**). To face the death of a loved one without a comforter would make a terrible situation even more tragic (e.g., **Gen 37:35; Job 2:11–13; Lam 1:2, 9, 16–17, 21**). If this continues the expression of God’s own sorrow, the verse is even more impactful.

Gary Cohen: Israel evidently did not rise again through moral repentance, because God did not spare her as He offered to do if she would but turn to Him (**vv. 4, 6, 14**). After Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. she never arose to be a nation again. Even in the Millennial age, after the Lord’s second coming, the Northern Kingdom still will not be restored as a separate nation. At that time, both she and Judah shall be united into one new Israel (see **Ezek. 37:15–28**).

Thomas McComiskey: “*Never to rise again*” need not mean that God has no future role for Israel in his redemptive program. This seems to be precluded by **Zechariah 12:10**. Amos is here suggesting that the northern kingdom will never be reestablished as a nation, but there will be a believing remnant through whom the promises will continue (**9:9–12**).

Jorg Jeremias: By already treating his listeners as dead persons, Amos wants to rouse them into recognizing the **hopelessness** of their situation.

B. (:3) Reduced to a Pitiful Remnant

*“For thus says the Lord God,
‘The city which goes forth a thousand strong Will have a hundred left,*

And the one which goes forth a hundred strong Will have ten left to the house of Israel.”

Trent Butler: Israel prided themselves in their victorious armies. God would let them march out to battle once more, but this would bring disaster. Nine of every ten soldiers would not return. This did not represent a remnant with hope. This represented defeat and destruction.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: This is a remnant (also at **5:15**), but as elsewhere, the remnant theme does not engender strong hope. The focus is on the paucity of survivors, damage reminiscent of **3:12** (cf. **2:14–16; 4:10; 9:8**). This terrible defeat is a direct contradiction of the nation’s imaginary’s conviction of divinely guaranteed victory.

II. (:4-15) THREE EXHORTATIONS TO SEEK AFTER GOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

A. (:4-5) Avoid Idolatry -- “Seek Me that You May Live”

“For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel, ‘Seek Me that you may live. ⁵ But do not resort to Bethel, And do not come to Gilgal, Nor cross over to Beersheba; For Gilgal will certainly go into captivity, And Bethel will come to trouble.”

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The unconditional call to seek Yahweh coupled with the announcement of comprehensive judgment, while hard to grasp, is not a contradiction in the prophetic mind (cf. **Zeph 1:2–3, 18; 2:3**). Israel is to seek him irrespective of its potential fate.

James Mays: *Seek* (*dāraš*) does not mean ‘inquire about’ or ‘search for’ something or someone lost or inaccessible. When Yahweh is the object, seek frequently means ‘turn to Yahweh’ (for help in a specific situation), and then by extension ‘hold to Yahweh’ (as a way of life). The prohibitions (**5a**) make it clear that *dāraš* involves a visit to a sanctuary; the Israelites were seeking Yahweh in Bethel and Gilgal. A series of texts in the Old Testament depict a specific procedural context for seeking Yahweh; in a situation of need for help or instruction, one went to a man of God or a prophet to secure an oracle of promise or direction (**Gen. 25.22; Ex. 18.15; I Sam. 9.9; I Kings 14.1ff.; II Kings 8.8f.; Jer. 21.2; Ezek. 20.1ff.**, etc.).^a When the Israelites heard Amos exhort them to seek Yahweh, they would have thought that this was precisely what they were doing in the sanctuaries. They were seeking Yahweh in expectation that he would bestow upon them a secure and prosperous life. They were coming to shrines at which Yahweh had been worshipped from ancient times to carry out the required ritual, quite possibly in an attitude of personal devotion, and they hoped to receive God’s help for special needs and blessing for their whole lives (for an idea of the content of ‘life’ as blessing, cf. the long description of the effect of blessing on those in covenant with Yahweh in **Deut. 30**). The radical distinction between ‘*Seek me*’ and ‘*Visit Bethel*’ would have left Amos’ hearers, probably pilgrims to the shrine, in puzzled shock—bid to seek Yahweh as a matter of life itself, but forbidden the very holy places where they

believed the Lord willed that they find him. What ‘*Seek me*’ as a word of Yahweh means when the shrines are excluded is left obscure and provocative. The emphasis lies on the prohibition of the current cult. What Amos had in mind as the right way to seek Yahweh appears in the similar exhortation in **5.14**, where ‘Yahweh’ is replaced as object of the verb by ‘good’: ‘*Seek good that you may live.*’

Billy Smith: The concept of **seeking the Lord** is a major theme in Chronicles, where it describes “how one was to respond to God and thus defined one who was a member of the believing community.” More than looking for God's help and guidance, it “stood for one's whole duty toward God” and entailed keeping God's laws. Every search for God through a prophet or in a house of worship should result in **doing right**, for seeking God ultimately **means living under his authority and in dependence upon his power.**

Alec Motyer: The first five verses of **Amos 5** consist of lamentation (**1, 2**), application (**3**, the ‘death’ of Israel will be by military decimation) and explanation (**4, 5**): it has all happened because the shrines [**Bethel / Beer-sheba / Gilgal**] were trusted to fulfil their promises and they could not do so, as we have just seen. In all the seeking after the shrines, the Lord Himself got left out.

But having looked at the message of the shrines we are in a position to understand the message of the dirge. It speaks of **death** where there should have been life: Fallen, no more to rise (**2a**). Here is the failure of Bethel: the house of God, the location of the promise ‘*God is in this place*’ as the giver of hope and new life, the one who can make the name ‘Israel’ a reality. Secondly, the dirge speaks of **abandonment** where there should have been companionship: the virgin Israel; forsaken..., with none to raise her up (**2b**). Here is the failure of the Beer-sheba promise ‘*God is with you*’. Israel has been carried off in death as a virgin who has never known the joys of married companionship and who, even in her virgin state, could find none to befriend her in the hour of need. Thirdly, the dirge speaks of **dispossession** where there should have been inheritance: Fallen,... forsaken on her land, with none to raise her up, the failure of the Gilgal promise, the people of God lying in defeat, dead, where in the heyday of Joshua’s Gilgal they had shouted in triumph over dispossessed foes.

B. (:6-13) Anticipate Fiery Judgment -- “*Seek the Lord that You May Live*”

1. (:6-9) Destructive Power of God’s Judgment

“Seek the LORD that you may live, Lest He break forth like a fire, O house of Joseph, And it consume with none to quench it for Bethel, ⁷ For those who turn justice into wormwood And cast righteousness down to the earth. ⁸ He who made the Pleiades and Orion And changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day into night, Who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the surface of the earth, The LORD is His name. ⁹ It is He who flashes forth with destruction upon the strong, So that destruction comes upon the fortress.”

Lloyd Ogilvie: vs. 6 -- The call to seek the Lord and not the degraded worship at the national shrines is reiterated in **verse 6**. Truly seeking the Lord was the only hope of surviving the devouring fire of the wrath of Yahweh that would destroy all of Israel including the shrine at Bethel.

Allen Guenther: *To seek (daraš, finite verb or infinitive) God or gods* means that a worshiper enters God's presence to ask for guidance or instruction (**1 Sam. 9:9; 2 Kings 22:13, 18**). One who seeks God goes into his presence and walks in his ways, doing his will (**Fs. 24:3-6; Isa. 55:6-9**). This encounter normally occurs at a holy place, though the focus is on the submission to God. One who seeks God from the heart can expect God to disclose himself and respond with salvation (**1 Chron. 28:8-9**). . .

The personal name of God, **Yahweh** (= the Lord), was first explained to Moses at the burning bush (**Exod. 3:14-15; cf. 6:1-3**) as "*I AM*." In context, the significance of the name appears to identify the Lord as the One who can be trusted to fulfill the covenant promise made to his people. God is present to act, usually and preferably for a people's salvation, but at times such as these, for judgment.

Within the **Amos 5:1-17** text, the mention of the name Yahweh draws attention to the two themes surrounding it. First, since God promised to ensure an orderly world after the Flood (**Gen. 8:21-22; 9:11-17**), he remains faithful to his covenant oath. The One who set the stars in their heavenly patterns, who regulates the sequences of day and night, who majestically loads the clouds with moisture from the sea and pours it out on the land (**Amos 5:8a-c**)-this One will keep covenant forever.

Yahweh is his name!

The other side of the meaning of the divine name is that the Lord will visit with judgment those who claim the name but refuse to observe his decrees of justice and compassion (**Amos 5:9; cf. 5:10-13**). Those who desecrate the name of the Lord will experience the faithfulness of God, the Judge. The Lord has promised blessings on obedience and judgments for disobedience (**Deut. 27-30**). If Yahweh is to live up to his name, fulfillment demands judgment.

Yahweh is his name!

The judgment is imminent unless Israel repents and returns to her covenant Lord. The people have not yet acknowledged that the funeral procession is for them. They continue to hold out the hope that God will still intervene on their behalf. God dashes that hope to the ground in the wailing crescendos of two woe oracles (**Amos 5:18-27; 6:12-14**).

Gary Cohen: Here "*the house of Joseph*" is addressed, and this is another title for the Northern Kingdom. Joseph's two sons were Ephraim and Manasseh, from whom sprang two tribes that became the two strongest among the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom.

Therefore those names together, and sometimes merely Ephraim alone, are synonymous with the Northern Kingdom (e.g. **Isa. 7:2**).

Jorg Jeremias: vs. 7 -- Here “*justice*” refers to the impartial application of the law “*in the gate*” (cf. vv. **10, 12, 15**), and “*righteousness*” to the corresponding behavior in daily life allowing the other person—and the weak in particular—to be treated justly.

Alec Motyer: vs. 7 -- But this fine hymn is bracketed about with references to a people who resist change. They come to Bethel (**7**) and they go from Bethel (**10-12**) totally unaltered. The failure, therefore, lay not in the Bethel promises, nor in the God of Bethel, but in the wilfulness which would not be transformed from lawlessness and transgression. **Amos’ exposure of a religion which leaves life untouched** could not have been more brilliantly accomplished. They go, they sing, they come away, and nothing, simply nothing has changed. Justice is still turned sour (**7a, 12c**) and righteousness is still overthrown (**7b, 12b**). It is an argument against those who wish to insert **verse 7** immediately before **verse 10** that in that position it becomes otiose. It adds nothing to the contents of **verses 10-12**. It is a supreme argument for the verse order as it is that it enables us to follow the worshipper through what was (if this hymn is a sample) a superb spiritual experience and see him emerge on the other side exactly the same person.

J. Vernon McGee: vs. 8 -- It is God who makes the rain fall. It is true that rainfall is controlled by the law of hydrodynamics, but who made the law of hydrodynamics? Who is the One who pulls the water up out of the ocean, puts it on the train (they call it a cloud), moves those clouds with the wind until they get to just the right place, then turns loose the rain? God is the One doing that, my friend. Amos says, “*The LORD is his name.*” In effect, he is saying to the people of Israel, “You have turned to idols, and your life does not commend your profession of a faith in the living God, the living God who is the Creator.”

Trent Butler: God's style of living—righteousness—was cast to the ground like rubbish. The court system depended on righteous men—the elders in the gate and the judges—to produce equity and fairness for all parties, rich or poor. Instead, the rich controlled the justice system, and the poor got only an opportunity to become poorer. Israel might go through the motions of worship. They did not seek God in doing so. Judgment loomed.

John Goldingay: The expressions signify that people with power and authority ought to make decisions in a way that expresses **faithfulness** in relationships with God and with the community. In practice, power tends to be exercised without faithfulness and thus to be overthrown and turned into something that tastes foul; **wormwood** is “the bitterest substance nameable, . . . comparable only to the taste of poison.” Faithfulness has thus been thrown over and trampled in the dust. Amos’ assertion applies not just to the authority exercised by the administration but also to the power exercised by all those who have it (e.g., heads of households). And working against the faithful exercise of authority is contradictory to having recourse to Yahweh—because faithful exercise of authority is integral to who Yahweh is.

James Mays: v. 9 -- Let none imagine himself invulnerable to Yahweh. To live in his universe is to be his dependent. To exist in history is to be subject to his power.

Gary Smith: In the second part of the hymn (5:9), Amos focuses on the application of God's power over the wealthy people in his audience. Today they may live securely in expensive mansions in strongly fortified cities, but soon God will flash destruction over these places and leave them in ruins (see 3:11, 14; 4:3–4; 5:11). This hymn supports Amos's persuasive attempt to convince the people that their relationship to God is central to their future. God has the power over life and death, and death will soon bring mourning and wailing to the nation of Israel.

2. (:10) Detesting Those Who Expose Injustice
*"They hate him who reproves in the gate,
And they abhor him who speaks with integrity."*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The interpretive challenge is to discern the **identity** of the individuals in this verse—both the subjects and objects of the verbs. To begin with, there is a group that shows deep antipathy (hate) toward those who challenge their unethical behavior. Apparently, these people control what goes on at the gate. They may represent multiple roles, such as elders, merchants, propertied men of standing in the community, or government officials, such as formally appointed judges. In other words, interrelated unscrupulous decisions and transactions—legal, commercial, and administrative—are at work as multiple unfair means and ends serve each other in an unequal distribution of social and economic power (cf. 2:6–8; 3:9–10; 8:4–6). **Injustice** permeates every sphere of the community and nation.⁴⁴⁴ Denouncing corruption at the gate is a recurring Old Testament theme (e.g., **Prov 22:22; Isa 29:20–21; Zech 8:16–17**), as is the hostility of the unprincipled toward those who correct them (**Prov 12:1; 15:10; 29:10**). The emotions of this rejection of critical voices are strong: *hate* and *abhor*. What would cause such rancor? Social class and clout? Economic gain? Irregular land acquisition? Political power? A combination of these factors? The text does not say, but the language underscores the strong dislike for anyone who might get in the way of those in control achieving their goals.

Gary Cohen: In ancient times the town elders often sat at the city gates to rebuke open sinners who entered or exited the city. In Amos's day apparently he and the elders did this kind of rebuking. They received hatred for it. The people should have been struck in their consciences and should have turned to God in true repentance. Perhaps that rebuking took place in the gates of Bethel, where many were entering to worship at the calf altar. (Cf. **Matt. 5:12; Luke 6:22; 21:17**.)

3. (:11-12) Detailing of Israel's Sins
"Therefore, because you impose heavy rent on the poor And exact a tribute of grain from them, Though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, Yet you will not live in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine."¹² For I know your transgressions are many and your

sins are great, You who distress the righteous and accept bribes, And turn aside the poor in the gate.”

Trent Butler: Amos became even more explicit in describing Israel's problem. The people who worshipped were the same ones who trampled on the poor and forced payment of grain. Israel's economic system depended on land staying in the hands of small landowners and within the same tribe. That was the way God intended it when he had Joshua distribute the land among the tribes (**Josh. 13–21**). Powerful businessmen changed all that. They got people into debt, took over their land to pay the debt, then forced the former landowners to work the soil for them and pay the largest share of the crop to rent the land.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Amos then contrasts the glory of Yahweh with the sinfulness of His people (**vv. 10–13**). This is a strange twist for a funeral oration. Instead of dwelling on the laudable qualities of the deceased, Amos lists Israel's social unrighteousness. All the charges the prophet previously made are now exposed as the cause of the nation's death. The poor were exploited. They were taxed for the aggrandizement of the wealthy and powerful. It was an evil time of bribery and the passing of hush money for even the prudent to keep silent about the injustice. The rich who profited at the expense of the poor and oppressed built stone houses and planted desirable vineyards. But with the death of the nation, these unrighteous people will not live in their houses or drink of the wine from their vineyards.

Gary Smith: **Justice is an outworking of God's character of holiness**, but the nation does not emulate him. They have changed the sweet experience of dealing with people based on righteousness into a bitter and evil thing through their mistreatment of those who are poorer or less powerful. By manipulating the courts through bribery, supplying false witnesses, and intimidating judges, the powerful political and business leaders are able to maintain their lifestyles and insulate themselves from accusations of unfairness. Amos laments these unbearable injustices. These rich people make life miserable for the poor, who suffer under them.

As a result, God will not allow the wealthy to enjoy the fruits of their crimes. They will not be able to live in their fine mansions built of expensively cut stones or appreciate the wine that comes from their well-groomed vineyards (**5:11**). They make others poor and homeless; now the same will be done to them.

4. (:13) Discretion Is Called for

*“Therefore, at such a time the prudent person keeps silent,
for it is an evil time.”*

J. Vernon McGee: In other words, a man in that day knew he could not get justice, and many good people were keeping quiet. It was the prudent thing to do because, if he had attempted to protest, it wouldn't have done him a bit of good. The tragedy of the hour in which we live is that we talk about the freedom of the press, the freedom of religion, and the freedom of speech, but there is not much of it left. The news media have

definitely become a brainwashing agency. It is true that only he who has money can get a public hearing today. As a result, we do have a silent majority in this country, because they know that their voices would not amount to anything at all. We are in a tragic day, very much like the day to which Israel had come.

Alec Motyer: Finally, in **verse 13** Amos implies that, had they been effectively in the presence of the God of Bethel, they would have sought to achieve a social order favourable to righteousness, but instead the social climate of the day threatened anyone who voiced an opinion contrary to its unrighteous and self-seeking ethos. Such was the rule of lawlessness (cf. on **6:3**) that a person feared to open his mouth to protest: prudence dictated otherwise. There may be a little more to it than just that, the silence of prudence. The word translated prudent could well mean ‘anyone who wants to get on’ or ‘succeed’. In this light we can easily see the sort of pressures society at that day was exerting: ‘You wouldn’t want to spoil your prospects, now, would you?’ It both silenced protests which might have been made for others who had been wronged and placed severe adverse pressures on the person who wished to steer a straight course for himself. It was a society which encouraged wrong-doing and discouraged standing for principle. When grace transforms a person it brings this aspect of life into focus: a determination to create a society in which righteousness dwells.

**C. (:14-15) Amend Your Ways and Appeal to God’s Grace –
“Seek Good and Not Evil, that You May Live”**

“Seek good and not evil, that you may live;

And thus may the LORD God of hosts be with you, Just as you have said! ¹⁵

Hate evil, love good, And establish justice in the gate!

Perhaps the LORD God of hosts May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.”

M. Daniel Carroll R.: For **Andersen** and **Freedman**, these two verses are the center of the book thematically and according to word count. The matters of justice, good and evil, and the exhortation to seek are foundational to its message. As in its corresponding passage, this pericope’s call to pursue the things of God is couched within a severe warning.

John Goldingay: Having recourse to Yahweh in worship involves having recourse to what is morally good in the rest of life, and it issues in Yahweh’s blessing and in the nation’s life continuing. It means that the affirmations made in worship about the Lord being with us (e.g., **Ps. 46**) can come true. Having recourse to what is dire (to despoiling the needy and countenancing faithless exercise of authority) means people are not really having recourse to Yahweh even though they think they are, and it will issue in death (see **vv. 16–17**).

To put it in different words (**v. 15a**), they need to hate and repudiate what is bad, morally and thus experientially, rather than repudiating the reprover mentioned in **v. 10**. And they need to love and be loyal to what is good in both aspects, rather than just expressing the love for worship mentioned in **4:5**. The concrete expression of that hatred/repudiation and love/loyalty will be to set up the exercise of authority at the gate

“so that all may see.” The reference to the exercise of authority complements the reference to the faithful person in v. 12; elsewhere in Amos the two expressions always come together (5:7, 24; 6:12). Each needs the other: faithfulness needs to be embodied in the exercise of authority; the exercise of authority needs to be undertaken with faithfulness. The exercise of authority that needs to be publicly established is the kind whereby the faithful person is found to be in the right, not falsely found guilty.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The general word *good* is defined as the practice of social justice in the gate. Instead of hating the one who reproves in the gate (v. 10) the Israelites are called to Hate evil, that is, all the practices of judicial corruption and economic exploitation denounced in verses 10–12 that result in the arrival of the evil time of judgment (v. 13). The repetition of the lengthy title *Lord, the God of hosts* adds solemnity to the call.

Billy Smith: The title for God here is literally “*Yahweh God of hosts*.” While the title “*Yahweh of hosts*” (“*LORD Almighty*”) occurs many times in Scripture, the longer designation used here is found only in Amos (4:13; 5:14-15, 27). It stresses that the God of Israel has **sovereign power over the affairs of earth and heaven**. If such a God were with them, at their side and on their behalf, they could be assured not only of military victory (cf. **Josh 1:9; Judg 1:22**) but also of true success and security (cf. **Hag 2:4**). But to offend such a God meant certain disaster. Just as seeking him and his ways meant life, failing to do so meant death.

(:16-17) CONCLUSION OF THE FUNERAL SONG – NATIONWIDE WAILING

“Therefore, thus says the LORD God of hosts, the Lord, ‘There is wailing in all the plazas, And in all the streets they say, Alas! Alas! They also call the farmer to mourning And professional mourners to lamentation.’¹⁷ And in all the vineyards there is wailing, Because I shall pass through the midst of you,’ says the LORD.”

Lloyd Ogilvie: Verses 16–17 conclude Amos’s funeral address with a grim picture of the wailing over the death of the nation. There will be wailing in all the streets. The grief will be so profound that there will not be enough professional wailers to express the grief. Even farmers from outside the cities will be called to add their voices to the multitude of anguished cries.

Jorg Jeremias: After all these enumerations of places of lament, and all the enumerations of those affected by grief, the brief justification—comprising only two words and once more confirmed in a concluding fashion as the words of Yahweh—comes as a crushing blow. It is not God’s absence that leads to Israel’s death, but rather: “*I will pass through the midst of you.*” With this uniquely formulated concluding sentence, the composition returns to the collective perspective of the beginning (“*maiden Israel,*” 5:2; cf. by contrast the plural imperatives “*seek . . .*” in vv. 4, 6, 14). This statement evokes two associations.

- The first is of a traditio-historical nature, recalling the departure event at the exodus as it is evoked anew in every Passover celebration; there Israel celebrates the fact that it was spared while Yahweh “passed through” Egypt and slew the firstborn. Now it is Israel itself that is threatened, and not merely its firstborn.
- The other association concerns Amos’ third and fourth visions, where the end of God’s patience and willingness to forgive are described with the same verb, though with a different preposition such that Yahweh now can “no longer pass them (i.e., Israel) by” (*‘ābar lē*: 7:8; 8:2). Amos 5:17 describes the alternative: the deadly act of “passing through the midst of” (*‘ābar bē*). If Yahweh acts thus, Israel is lost; its “end has come” (8:2). In this situation, the divine “perhaps” of 5:15 is Israel’s only hope.

Billy Smith: But what Amos did here, as frequently elsewhere (cf. 5:18–20), was to reverse completely the usual use of theophany. Instead of covenant renewal and confirmation of the Lord's promises, the appearance of the Lord was to judge disobedient Israel. The Lord himself was the one who stood behind the massive loss of life implied by the widespread mourning.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you pass the litmus test of salvation = that your life expresses the life and righteousness of God?
- 2) What parallels in tone are there between this passage and Jeremiah’s Lamentations?
- 3) How would you advise someone to seek after God?
- 4) What responsibility do Christians have to try to promote “justice in the gate”?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Allen Guenther: Amos 5 and 6 contain three sermons on related subjects (5:1-17; 5:18-27; 6:1-14). Israel’s religious veneer, her pride, and her blindness to the reality of her condition invite divine punishment. The prophet has argued that Israel has made no fundamental or permanent change in response to God’s corrective acts (4:6-13). They have exhausted the Lord’s patience by their superficial repentance and obstinacy. Therefore God decrees the ultimate consequence: death and destruction.

The funeral song (5:1-17) is followed by two prophecies of woe (5:18-27; 6:1-14). Together they form a death chant against a disobedient nation. Janzen has shown that

“woe” oracles were originally associated with funeral processions. The “woe” oracles reinforce the stress on death in this rush toward Israel’s meeting with God. . .

Social Justice: Justice seeks well-being by providing everyone equal access to livelihood and opportunity, regardless of status, power, or role in society. Justice is blind to color, clothing, and creed, since it concerns itself with society as a whole, and the powerless or repressed in particular. When God’s people promote justice, they align themselves with God’s intentions for society and for the world at large. Such justice even accepts escaped slaves and resident aliens, and pursues the welfare of the widow and orphan (**Deut. 23:15-17; 24:10-22; cf. Job 29:11-17; Luke 20:45-47; Acts 6:1-7; 9:32-43; James 1:27**).

God’s concern for justice and righteousness in the human community pervades the Scriptures. It transcends the limits of covenantal relations inasmuch as justice and righteousness express **respect for persons as persons**. These virtues are to prevail in the human community without regard to the existence of prior ties of affection or historic commitments based on preferred relationships. They are foundational expectations, core values. Paul presents them as the message of the gospel (faith in Jesus Christ) in addressing Felix, the governor (**Acts 24:24-25**). They are the substance of the Spirit’s conviction of divine expectations in all people: “*He will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness*” (**John 16:8-10**). Jesus himself reminded his disciples that greater privilege and enlightenment should translate into a righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees (**Matt. 5:17-20**).

Alec Motyer: This brings us, at the end, to the point at which Amos started his oracle. Take again the five points at which true religion manifests its reality in life:

1. love of God’s truth,
2. submission within the fellowship,
3. concern for God’s approval,
4. moral integrity
5. and social order.

These are not five rungs of a ladder up to heaven, five superlative good works meriting God’s approval in the bestowal of eternal glory. They are the five parallel evidences that a person has met the God of Bethel at the bottom of the ladder, whither He has come to reveal Himself, to speak and to bless. True religion is not a way to God but a way from God! It springs out of union and communion with God and seals its veracity in the display of a **fivefold transformation**.

Gary Smith: Commentators have derived different emphases in **5:1–17**.

- (1) Some make the call to seek God and repent the main emphasis, treating the laments as mere warnings to bring the people back to God.
- (2) Others make the laments predominant and treat the calls to seek God as empty offers of hope because the nation’s destruction is already determined.
- (3) Still others refer the laments to the nation as a whole but apply the calls to seek God to the righteous remnant that will respond to the prophet’s message (**5:14–15**).

This last alternative seems the best way to understand this passage because it maintains the validity of both the lament and the call to seek God. The prophet's purpose is to convince the nation that things are so bad that God will soon bury its memory, but in the process he persuades a few responsive people to seek God and live.

TEXT: Amos 5:18-27

TITLE: *THIRD MESSAGE OF CONDEMNATION AGAINST ISRAEL –
THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL BE DARKNESS NOT LIGHT -- PART 2*

BIG IDEA:

**RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE RITUAL -- GOD DESIRES JUSTICE AND
RIGHTEOUSNESS RATHER THAN VAIN RELIGIOUS SHOW**

INTRODUCTION:

Gary Smith: This section is divided into three paragraphs:

1. **5:18–20** addresses the sad state of Israel’s deceptive theology concerning the Day of the Lord,
2. **5:21–24** undermines the people’s false hopes in their unacceptable worship,
3. and **5:25–27** predicts their exile because some Israelites worship false gods.

These sections question the people’s basic beliefs about their relationship to God. This questioning does not raise doubts concerning the Israelites’ knowledge of temple worship or eschatological events but inquires about their deceptive approach to these topics. They have turned worship into something worthless and eschatology into escapism. It is a tragedy to hear that someone is tricked into believing in a baseless illusion, but it is especially regrettable to find out that religious people, who know biblical traditions and participate in religious services, have deceived themselves by constructing a theological perspective that twists God’s truth into a nonexistent mirage.

Allen Guenther: How could Israel have deluded itself so severely? What could have given rise to this separation of judicial integrity and religious ritual?

Three reasons may be proposed, with some tentativeness. First, they have separated moral responsibility from election privilege. Their defective concept of what it means to be the covenant people has far-reaching social consequences (cf. **Amos 3:1-2**).

Second, it appears that the monarchy has introduced some separation of the royal and religious courts. Presumably that would reflect a difference in the type of issues addressed by each. . .

Third, if the circumstance of eighth-century Judah resembled those of the Northern Kingdom, then taxation and property laws were being passed which favored the rich and disadvantaged the poor and the peasant landholders. Isaiah pronounces judgment on the legislators who established discriminatory laws and on the justices who favored the causes of the rich (**Isa. 10:1-2**). Dearman notes that these administrators were not accused of being derelict in their duty. Instead, they took “advantage of their positions to plunder the helpless for their own personal gain” (80). He argues, further, that the pattern of oppression condemned in Amos and Hosea mirrors Isaiah’s pronouncements.

Realists know that archaic laws and religious fervor are no match for pragmatism and decisive action. Furthermore, the priesthood of the Northern Kingdom had, from its first appointments by Jeroboam I, served the interests of the state. Only meddlers like Elijah dared oppose national policies. They had been silenced by royal decree...

In **5:18-27**, Amos addresses the issues of national priorities and moral posture. He announces the primacy of fairness, compassion, and virtue over worship. Sacrifices, prayers, celebrations – all these mean little unless they are expressions of one's love and obedience. That love and obedience can be felt, seen, and heard in maintaining integrity and community, in compassion and justice for the weak and the poor among the governed. God's people can exist without the elaborate trappings and rituals of worship. They cannot survive the drought of justice and righteousness. The Lord refuses to receive the prayers and sacrifices of uplifted hands when those very hands are stained by the mixed blood of cattle and covenant partners.

Thomas Constable: This lament also has a **chiastic structure**. It centers on a call for individual repentance [from unacceptable worship].

- 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**

M. Daniel Carroll R.: I propose that a **thematic chiasm** spans the entire ten verses. This is a heuristic suggestion that can be helpful in following the flow of the passage.

- A The day of Yahweh: unfounded longing (**vv. 18–20**)
- B The despised cult: unacceptable rituals (**vv. 21–23**)
- C The divine demand for justice (v. 24)**
- B' The despised cult: unlike the past (**v. 25**)
- A' The future reality: exile (**vv. 26–27**)

I. (:18-20) THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL BE A TIME OF EXTREME DARKNESS

A. (:18) Attacking Misconceptions of the Day of the Lord – Irony of Longing for Something Disastrous

*“Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD,
For what purpose will the day of the LORD be to you?
It will be darkness and not light;”*

Allen Guenther: The cry *Woe* or *Alas* is rooted in **mourning (1 Kings 13:30; Jer. 22:18b; Janzen)**. It marks the **presence of death**. The nature of that death has been anticipated in **verse 17-- I will pass through the midst of you, says the Lord**. The phrase echoes the description of the final plague brought against Egypt (**Exod. 12:12, 23**). God

will now be to Israel as he once was to Egypt. He will engage in a holy war against his own people. Consequently, the wailing of the Egyptians for their firstborn shall become the mourning cry of God's firstborn, Israel.

Gary Smith: Amos describes his audience as people longing for or yearning for the coming Day of the Lord (**5:18**). At first this sounds positive because this was seen as the day when God would vindicate himself and destroy his enemies. Why would the Israelites not long to see that day? Amos's audience views this day as the time when they will have a guaranteed victory over their enemies. They also have great expectations concerning what God will do for them when he establishes his divine kingdom on earth on that day.

When Amos, however, laments over those who want this day to come, many of his listeners probably wonder what is wrong with this crazy prophet. Why would anyone not look forward to the time when God will bless his people and defeat their enemies? Amos's answer to his rhetorical "why" question in **Amos 5:18b** reveals that he has a different conception of this day. He reverses his audience's understanding because he sees it as a day of darkness for Israel. Israel will suffer God's judgment with the ungodly because they are a sinful people, just like the foreign nations. They will experience the gloom and darkness of political defeat. Darkness symbolizes danger, hidden things that one cannot see, an absence of safety, and no divine protection (**Job 18:6; Ps. 27:1; Isa. 9:1–2; Lam. 3:2; Joel 2:10**). This must have seemed like a heretical statement. **Will God judge his own people?**

Lloyd Ogilvie: Amos spoke to Israel at a time when the people were seeking to escape God. As we have seen, they lacked evidence of justice and righteousness in their national life and in their daily living. They longed for the day of the Lord, thinking it would be an intervention of God to save them from their enemies. While trying to escape from the covenant claim of God on their national and personal lives, they took for granted the blessings of God. Amos warned them not to be so cocky about the day of the Lord.

Gary Cohen: **Keil** seems to have a better explanation, namely, that many in Israel knew the prophecy of **Joel 3**, which had spoken sixty years before of the Lord's coming to deliver Judah and Israel and to judge the nations that oppressed them. They looked upon God, much as Israel did in Jesus' time, as the one who would deliver the Jews automatically, as a racial right. They forgot the concomitant requirement that those who wished to be delivered had to call upon the Lord in repentance (**Joel 2: 32**).

Thomas McComiskey: The **day of the Lord** refers to the complex of events surrounding the coming of the Lord in judgment to conquer his foes and to establish his sovereign rule over the world. The people were looking forward to that day. Apparently they understood it as the time when Yahweh would act on their behalf to conquer their foes and establish Israel as his people forever. They regarded their election as the guarantee of the Lord's favor. But their moral vision is blurred. They fail to see the day of the Lord as the time when God will judge all sin—even theirs. They name the name

of Yahweh but do not obey his precepts. For these people, Amos says, that coming day will be one of darkness.

B. (:19) Illustrating the Unavoidable Disastrous Consequences of the Day of the Lord – False Security Exposed

Gary Smith: To help persuade his listeners of their misunderstanding, Amos illustrates the danger of this day with a rural example showing that the disastrous consequences of this day are inevitable (**Amos 5:19**). A person fleeing from one danger (a lion) will run into another (a bear). Those who finally reach the safety of home will not escape either, because something there will get them when they least expect it (a snake will bite them as they relax, leaning against a wall). There will be, in other words, no place to run or hide.

1. Illustration #1 – Devoured by a Ferocious Bear after Escaping Attack

*“As when a man flees from a lion,
And a bear meets him,”*

From the frying pan into the fire!

Reaching a place that seems safe but is still vulnerable to attack.

2. Illustration #2 – Bitten by a Poisonous Snake after Escaping Attack

*“Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall,
And a snake bites him.”*

Thomas McComiskey: But like the **false security** of the one who thinks he has escaped the lion and the one who is falsely secure in his home, the faithless Israelites will find that day to be a time of judgment for them. As a matter of fact, there is no hope for them in that day, for the day of the Lord will bring not one ray of light (**v.20**).

Jorg Jeremias: The two interwoven similes from the life sphere of a shepherd in **v. 19** are supposed to document this; each begins with the fortunate rescue of someone from the most extreme mortal danger (escape, return home to the protection of one’s own house) and ends in the unexpected, deadly actions of an animal. Together, they state that despite any previous experiences of deliverance—experiences with which Amos is just as familiar as are his self-confident listeners—only one thing is certain for Israel on the “*day of Yahweh*”: **sudden death**, however it might occur. (Concerning the **inescapability of death**, compare **2:14–16** and **9:2–4**.)

Hubbard: The illustrative parable makes it clear that darkness and light do not speak here of wickedness and righteousness but of disaster and safety.

C. (:20) Characterizing the Impact of the Day of the Lord as Darkness

*“Will not the day of the LORD be darkness instead of light,
Even gloom with no brightness in it?”*

Billy Smith: A constant danger for God's people is **false presumption** of how God's revelation relates to them. Often they see themselves as God's friends when in reality

they are God's enemies (cf. **v. 14**). Enthusiastic proclaimers of the Lord's return must be careful to identify correctly their relationship to God.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The narrative seeks to unsettle the prophet's audience by undermining their illusions of security. Its message is that the calm of the present is deceptive, and past deliverance is no guarantee of future safety.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The emphatic nature of the critique in **vv. 18–20** is underscored by extending the **contrast between darkness and light** further with another pair of descriptors: gloom and no brightness. The four descriptors in this verse appear in **Isa 59:9**. Darkness and gloom occur together prominently in the ninth plague in Egypt (**Exod 10:22**) and also in **Joel 2:2** and **Zeph 1:15**—all contexts announcing **disaster from the hand of God**. In contrast, light and brightness can describe the powerful presence of God, often in connection with his actions in defense or restoration of his people (e.g., *nōgah* in **Ps 18:12 [MT 18:13]; Isa 4:5; Hab 3:4, 11**; cf. **Isa 9:2 [MT 9:1]**). The nation has chosen poorly by believing a lie (**Isa 50:10**).

II. (:21-24) TRUE JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST REPLACE HYPOCRITICAL WORSHIP

A. (:21-23) Rejection of Hypocritical Worship

Gary Smith: Although God asked the people to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, and fellowship (peace) offerings in **Leviticus 1–4** and exhorted them to sing his praises (**Ps. 92:1; 95:1–2; 96:1; 98:1, 4–6; 100:1–2**), he does not accept mechanical offerings and rote songs that do not come from a heart of love and a commitment to act in righteousness.

1. (:21) Rejection of Hypocritical Worship via Special Celebrations
*“I hate, I reject your festivals,
Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.”*

Thomas McComiskey: The routine observance of the Levitical ritual is empty because the people lack the love, concern, and humble obedience to God that marks sincere profession of faith. Their religiosity is a mockery of true religion. Every aspect of their ritual is an act of disobedience because it ignores the heart of the Law—love for God and concern for others.

2. (:22) Rejection of Hypocritical Worship via Different Types of Offerings
*“Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings.”*

Billy Smith: “*Burnt offerings*” were sacrifices in which the entire animal was consumed on the altar and arose to God in smoke. “*Grain offerings*” could also be used of various sacrifices brought as a gift. “*Fellowship offerings*” were those in which part of the animal was consumed on the altar and part of it was eaten by the worshiper, thus symbolizing communion between the worshiper and God.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Citing three kinds of offerings conveys the completeness of Yahweh’s dismissal of Israel’s rituals, even as the preceding verse denounced Israel’s religious gatherings. It may be significant that in this verse, **no sacrifices for sin appear** (*ḥattā’t, ’āšām*), although the aforementioned rituals had a variety of functions. If the omission is deliberate, then it reinforces the self-serving nature of the nation’s worship (cf. **4:4–5**).

3. (:23) Rejection of Hypocritical Worship in Music

*“Take away from Me the noise of your songs;
I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.”*

Billy Smith: But the Lord's rejection of this religious activity could not have been expressed more strongly: “*I hate, I despise,*” “*I cannot stand,*” “*I will not accept,*” “*I will have no regard,*” and “*I will not listen.*” God rejected every aspect of Israel's worship. They were inundating him with rivers of religiosity when he wanted rivers of righteousness and justice (v. **24**).

Allen Guenther: No wonder God bursts upon the scene with such vehement words. The trappings of worship are all present: the best animals and vegetables, the instruments, the singing. But they revolt the Lord. Where are the just and righteous relationships? Where is the care for the needy? Whose eye catches the plight of the weak? Which ear is attuned to the cries of the forgotten and neglected of society? Justice has dried up, righteousness has evaporated. The stream bed of mutual care is empty of compassion and covenant fidelity. It is littered with smug piety, celebrative worship experiences, and generous offerings. Yet they are offensive to God.

John Goldingay: The combination of reference to sacrifice and song presupposes that Leviticus and Psalms belong together in Israel’s worship. There would be no sacrifice without sung praise and prayer, and there would be no sung praise and prayer without sacrifice; with Amos’s critique, which links the two, compare **Isa. 1:11–15**.

B. (:24) Demand for True Justice and Righteousness

*“But let justice roll down like waters
And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”*

Gary Smith: **Verse 24** exhorts the people to pay close attention to the implications of what it means to worship God. If you worship him, you must walk in his ways. If worship does not further the development of spiritual character, it may just be empty emotions. When worshipers offered sacrifices to God, they were supposed to confess their sins as they put their hands on the head of the animal being sacrificed (**Lev. 1–4**),

turn away from their past failures, and commit themselves to keep his guidelines for daily behavior. Since the Israelites are not doing these things, their sacrifices have no value. What should be a sweet-smelling aroma to God (3:5, 16) is becoming a putrid stench he cannot stand. The beautiful harmony of their singing and the trumpet blasts of their music are turned into obnoxious noises. Their sin separates them from God (Isa. 59:1–2).

Justice among individuals should have been a hallmark distinguishing Israel from her neighbors, but God does not see this moral value in the lives of many Israelites. Amos exhorts the people to let righteousness and justice characterize all their activities. Justice should flow continually like a year-round river, not like an undependable wadi that has water in it only when it rains. Justice is not an optional trait that one can choose to practice; it is a key value that must characterize the behavior patterns of those who claim to love and follow God. If these people would let justice govern their action, God would look at their worship in a different way. They are not deceiving him with their meaningless worship; rather, they are only fooling themselves.

Alec Motyer: Broadly, therefore, justice is correct moral practice in daily personal and social life, and righteousness is the cultivation of correct moral principle (both for self and for society); justice is mainly outward, righteousness inward. Of course, for the Bible righteousness always has the connotation ‘right with God’, ‘what God thinks right’, and therefore when the Lord desires that the outflow of religion should be justice and righteousness, He is calling for the establishment of principles and practices of daily living which conform to His word and law.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: This verse explains the reasons for the Lord’s disgust. The explanation is indirect, implying that justice and righteousness are not present in Israel’s midst and it is precisely their absence that makes the cult odious to God. The comparison to an ever-flowing stream – that is, a river that does not dry up during the hot summer months – emphasizes the purifying and life-giving quality of social justice. Conversely, the absence of justice is like a deadly drought (see further, Introduction).

III. (:25-27) HISTORICAL TRANSGRESSIONS PAVE THE WAY FOR JUDGMENT VIA EXILE

A (:25-26) Indictment of Past History of Unacceptable Worship

1. (:25) Failure to Present Adequate Sacrifices and Grain Offerings
“Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel?”

Gary Cohen: “In the wilderness for forty years . . . Sikkuth . . . Kiyyun, your images, the star” (vv. 25-26). Here the argument is that the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were repeating the same sins that had been characteristic of that rebellious generation in the wilderness. While those people had worshiped God at the Tabernacle, they had also secretly worshiped the pagan images they had brought along from Egypt. That

comparison aptly fits the Northern Kingdom's confusion of worshiping the true God and the calf images at Bethel and Dan (**1 Kings 12: 28-29**). . .

The message is clear. Israel was mixing oppression and the breaking of God's law with a worship that blended a large cup of paganism with the true worship of the Lord. God would not accept this kind of religion. He did not accept it in the forty years of wilderness wanderings, and He would not accept it from Samaria in Amos's day.

Alternative View:

Gary Smith: Amos is probably asking whether the central aspect of Israel's relationship to God is based only on their sacrificing. The assumed response to this questions is negative. In other words, Amos is hinting that the people's relationship with God is **not primarily based on sacrifices**, but on their covenant love with God. This is supposed to be the central feature of their relationship (**Deut. 6:5**), and it is missing.

Billy Smith: There is reason to believe, however, that sacrifices and offerings were severely limited during the wilderness years. Following Israel's rebellion and God's judgment at Kadesh in **Numbers 13-14**, certain regulations for worship are given but are introduced by "*after you enter the land I am giving you as a home*" (**Num 15:2**). **D. Stuart** explains that neither "*slaughtered sacrifices*" nor "*grain offerings*" were "usually" given while Israel was in the wilderness. "The sacrificial system was essentially predesigned for a coming era of normal food production...in a landed, settled situation." Though inaugurated at Sinai, "sacrificing and its association with the three yearly festivals became regular only after the conquest." Amos's point in this case would be that in the absence of a regular sacrificial system, God still maintained a relationship with his people and blessed and cared for them. Therefore **the sacrificial system alone is clearly not sufficient to gain God's favor.**

Allen Guenther: The rhetorical question of **Amos 5:25** invites Israel to recognize the **secondary role of worship rituals**. The question implies that during the years of wilderness wandering, the laws requiring sacrifice by individuals and the general population were not yet in force or were temporarily suspended (**Num. 15:1-3, 17-19**). Even the Passover was celebrated only twice before entering Canaan (**Exod. 12:21-28; 13:5; Num. 9:1-5; Josh. 5:10**). The festivals marking the harvest year would not have had meaning for Israel in the desert because they would not have harvested grains or vegetables. Amos utilizes the Northern Israelite tradition to argue against Israel's **overemphasis on the place of sacrifice and cultic ritual** (cf. **2:10**) [*Israelite Religion*, p. 385]. His argument: At the time of Israel's greatest intimacy with God, during the wilderness years, the people were not sacrificing. Yet God accepted them. Therefore, **ritual sacrifice is not essential to maintaining a dependent and faithful relationship with God.**

2. (:26) Failure to Abandon Idolatry

"You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves."

Billy Smith: Most scholars consider **Amos 5:26** as referring to **Mesopotamian astral deities**. The phrase translated here “*the shrine of your king*” is more commonly, and probably more correctly, “*Sikkut, your king*.” The Assyrian war god Adar also was called Sakkut. Likewise, the following phrase translated “*the pedestal of your idols*” is better (and more literally) rendered “*and Kiyyun, your idols*.” The Assyrians worshiped an astral deity they called Kaiwan, otherwise known as Saturn. “*The star of your god [or gods]*” apparently refers to the latter. The spelling of these names as Sikkut and Kiyyun probably is the result of substituting the vowels of the Hebrew word, “abomination,” in the names of the two astral deities. This was the prophet's way of ridiculing these pagan gods. The folly of carrying about such images is that Israel “made” them. **Homemade gods regularly disappoint the ones who fashion them** (cf. **Isa 40:18-20; 41:21-24; 44:12-20; Jer 10:1-16; Hos 8:6**). “*Therefore*” in v. 27 indicates that v. 26 speaks of **idolatry during Amos's time**. But v. 25 would suggest that idolatry also was a problem in the wilderness. This seems to be a point of comparison, then, between the wilderness generation and Amos's Israel.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Trying to buy time in her uneasy relationships with Assyria, Israel had placed at Bethel an image of Sikkuth, from the Assyrian tabernacle of Molach. Chiun, the star god of the Assyrians, was placed in Israel's constellation of gods along with Yahweh. And added to all that petulant polytheism was the ever present syncretism with Baal worship.

Allen Guenther: Translations vary on **Amos 5:26**. The NIV takes the text as describing the royal chaise and the home-crafted deities, resulting in the picture of king and gods going into exile. It is doubtful, however, that a captive king was ever carried into exile in royal style. The text may be referring to Assyrian astral deities worshiped in Israel: **Sakkuth** = Moloch/Molech, the Canaanite god, and **Kaiwan** = the planet Saturn (cf. **2 Kings 17:16; Acts 7:42-43**). Sakkuth and Kaiwan may be a name and an epithet of the planet Saturn, taken as a star-god (**ABD**, 5:904). On this interpretation, Israel is still probably on favorable terms with Assyria, and the text is heavy with irony: Israel will carry into exile the very gods of those people (the Assyrians) who are ravaging and deporting them.

Another possibility commends itself to this interpreter. Some 170 years earlier, Jeroboam I had led the ten Northern tribes in secession from Judah and the leadership of the Davidic monarchical family line. He astutely identified with the wilderness tradition and with the symbols of the kingship of El Shaddai and Yahwe, the two manifestations of Israel's God, by the images of the bull calf. The text would translate as: *And you will take along Sikkuth (Heb.) your king, and Kiyyun, the star (heavenly representation) of your gods, which you have crafted for yourselves.* That is, when the time of judgment overtakes the nation, they will carry with them these symbols of their god. How useless, since he was unable to rescue the nation from the invading Assyrians! [*Bull Calves*, P. 375]

B (:27) Promise of Judgment Via Exile

“*Therefore, I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus,*”

says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.”

James Mays: ‘*Exile*’ is a word with implications of horror which outrun the ruin and pain of defeat and capture by an enemy. For Israel it meant being removed from the land promised to the fathers, displacement from the geographical locus of the unfolding history of election, and so was in effect a kind of excommunication.

J. Vernon McGee: Israel is to be punished in the future. They will go into captivity “*beyond Damascus*” (that is, beyond Syria), and beyond Damascus was **Nineveh**. God is telling Israel that the **Assyrian would take them into captivity**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some false expectations that people have about the end times?
- 2) How would you define the type of justice that God requires?
- 3) How can we expose the false security that surrounds the performance of religious rites?
- 4) What should have been Israel’s response to this prophetic threat of exile?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Robert Martin-Achard: As Yahweh’s spokesman, Amos’ thought is clear, even though some verses (vv. 25 f) pose real difficulties. Yahweh rejects the worship which his people offer him (vv. 21 ff); what he looks for is justice and righteousness. The theme is not new (**Amos 4:4 ff; 5:4 ff, 14 f**), but the prophet’s tone here is particularly **severe**. Amos calls the whole of Israel’s worship life to account. Nothing escapes him—their pilgrimages and solemn assemblies (v. 21), their burnt offerings and cereal offerings (v. 22), even their songs and their prayers (v. 23). The prophet does not denounce the ritual of worship itself, nor does he reproach Israel with the paucity of her offerings; but he expresses Yahweh’s disgust at the ceremonies that the people organize in his honour. He requires that in Israel’s midst justice should roll down like an inexhaustible river and righteousness should assert its presence like life-giving waters (v. 24).

Like other prophets (**Isa. 1:10 ff; Micah 6:6 ff; Jer. 7:1 ff**) Amos is not dreaming here of a worship that is purely inward and moral, as has been supposed at times. What he condemns is a piety which is not confirmed by a reverential attitude towards the rights of others. Yahweh rejects an ‘alibi-religion’. It is not possible to offer him worship

while trampling justice under foot. The Gospel does not contradict this teaching (**Matt. 5:21 ff; Mark 11:25**; etc.).

Trent Butler: When God's woe falls on his people, they should heed his word and turn back to righteous living in which all classes and groups of people receive fairness and justice. . .

5:24 -- God has one requirement for those who worship him: *let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!* True worship on the Lord's day depends on true righteousness lived out during the other days of the week. Only a people who obey God can truly worship him. They cannot take advantage of their neighbor on Monday, cheat on a business deal on Tuesday, tell a bunch of lies on Wednesday, cheat on their spouse on Thursday, get in a fight with their friend on Friday, take off on a drunken tangent on Saturday, and then worship on Sunday. A person's worship comes directly from his life. Only a life of obedience can bring acceptable worship to God. **He demands righteousness before ritual.**

John Schultz: It should be noted that Amos speaks of the day of the Lord in connection with the siege and fall of Samaria. The shadow of Christ's coming at the end of times falls over every century of world history. Every event of conquest, revolution, and defeat is thus placed in an apocalyptic light. This emphasizes the link between all political events and man's relationship with God.

Anthony Petterson: Amos warns of coming judgment, while the popular view of the day of the Lord was that it would bring vindication for Israel and judgment for their enemies. Amos refutes this. The day when God comes to establish his rule on earth and judge his enemies will be darkness (judgment) for Israel, not light (salvation). People may try to run from it, but there will be no escape (v. 19). The Israelites may think they are immune to God's judgment because of their elaborate worship, including religious festivals (e.g., the Festivals of Unleavened Bread, weeks, and Tabernacles/Booths), multiple types of offerings, and music. But God hates and despises their worship – not because it is second rate or insincere but because the Israelites reject the Lord and his ways by failing to exhibit justice and righteousness in their relationships with one another (v. 24; cf. vv. 7, 10-13). Amos's argument in **verses 25-26** is difficult to unravel, but he seems to charge Israel with committing idolatry, just as their ancestors had done in the wilderness when they made for themselves a golden calf (Ex 32). This is how Stephen understood these verses in **Acts 7:42-43**. Because of Israel's hypocritical worship, injustice, and idolatry. God pronounces the judgment of exile (**Am 5:27**; cf. **6:7, 14**). Damascus is the capital of Aram (Syria), to the north of Israel (cf. **1:3**). This prophecy is fulfilled in the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC (cf. **2Ki 17:6, 23**). The one who decreed this invasion is God Almighty, the God of hosts, the God of earthly and heavenly armies. He acts with power and dominion.

TEXT: Amos 6:1-14

TITLE: *THIRD MESSAGE OF CONDEMNATION AGAINST ISRAEL – PART 3 –
REBUKING THE FALSE SECURITY OF THE LEADERS*

BIG IDEA:

PROSPERITY MUST NOT PROVIDE A PLATFORM FOR PRIDEFUL FALSE SECURITY ON THE PART OF LEADERS WHO FAIL TO PURSUE JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION:

Thomas Constable: [6:1-2] 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 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.

Warren Wiersbe:

1. "WOE TO THE IGNORANT!" (5:18-27)
2. "WOE TO THE INDIFFERENT!" (6:1-2)
3. "WOE TO THE INDULGENT!" (6:3-7)
4. "WOE TO THE IMPUDENT!" (6:8-14)

These impudent people, who rejected God's warning, would one day face three terrible judgments.

Death (Amos 6:9-10)

Amos describes a hypothetical situation to emphasize the terrors that will come when the Assyrians invade Samaria. Ten men, perhaps the remnants of a hundred soldiers (5:3), would be hiding in a house, but pestilence would catch up with them, and they would die. If a relative came to burn the bodies (the safest thing to do in war when disease is rampant), anyone in the house guarding the bodies would deny there were others there who also might die in the plague.

But the disposal of the dead bodies wouldn't be a "religious" occasion, for the people would be afraid to even mention the name of the Lord lest He become angry and send more judgment.

Destruction (Amos 6:11-13)

Pride always goes before destruction (Prov. 16:18). The summer houses and winter houses that the wealthy enjoyed and boasted about would one day be nothing but ashes

and fragments. The Babylonians would even burn Judah's beautiful temple. This would occur because the Lord commanded it, and His commands are always obeyed.

Disgrace and defeat (Amos 6:14)

Assyria's invasion of Israel wouldn't take place because of the accidents or incidents of international politics. God would bring the army into the land and give Assyria the responsibility of chastening His people. “*Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel, ' says the Lord*” (**Jer. 5:15**, NKJV).

Gary Cohen: Chapter 6 is replete with lessons concerning the futility of misplaced confidence.

Allen Guenther: In the time of Amos, the court personnel in both Zion and Samaria are smugly self-confident and secure. They are notables, living in defensible cities, there by special appointment or because of their outstanding qualities. They speak proudly of their nation as a superior people, a foremost nation (cf. **Num. 24:20**). These elite relish the attention and pride of place that come with their leadership roles. It is gratifying to be wanted and needed by the common people.

Robert Martin-Achard: We find here Amos' familiar themes:

- (a) condemnation of an 'aristocracy' preoccupied above all else with enjoying life (**vv. 1 ff**);
- (b) announcement of the destruction of Samaria (**vv. 8 ff**);
- (c) denunciation of the wickedness inherent in the land (**v. 12**); and
- (d) a polemic against the illusions in which the Israelites persist in living (**vv. 13–14**).

What strikes us here is the peculiar tone adopted by the prophet, his sarcastic irony and his slashing criticism of a populace that refuses to recognize the reality of the situation.

Chapter 6 commences with the funereal cry '*Woe ...*' (*hoy*). Following it is the picture of a city in ruins, piled high with corpses (**vv. 8 ff**); and it concludes with the threat of an invasion that will dumbfound the efforts at reconquering east Jordan, of which the government of Samaria is so proud (**vv. 13 f**). Once again Amos lets his hearers glimpse how **the catastrophe is near** and how death is prowling around the capital and its inhabitants. There is **no escape** from the living God and his wrath, when, in search for pleasure, security and comfort, one ignores the needs of others and makes a mock of justice. Such then is the warning with which Amos and the other prophets who follow him address us.

Jorg Jeremias: A precise exegesis of this lamentation must determine whether the revelry described in **vv. 4–6** is of a private or institutional nature. Only when one understands that the latter is the case, does the text acquire its sharp profile. In particular, only then do the striking parallels to the characterization of worship activities in **5:21–23** (the eating of meat, the musical instruments, singing) come into focus in their intended sense, as does also the analogous association of feelings of security,

repression of all notions of misfortune, and worship celebrations in **5:18–20** and **5:21**, as well as in **6:1, 3** and **6:4ff**.

This question depends on the understanding of the next-to-last word (*marzēah*), occurring otherwise in the Old Testament only in **Jer. 16:5**, where the funeral repast takes place in the “*marzēah-house*,” a repast attested quite frequently outside Israel. . .

The connection between **Amos 6** and this institution presumably comes to expression most clearly in the fact that the wine is served in vessels otherwise attested exclusively in cultic contexts as containers for the blood of sacrificial animals, for oil as part of the cereal or grain offerings, and possibly also for libations (*mizraq*, **v. 6**; HAL translates—appropriately for the other occurrences—“*sprinkling basin*”). The verb “*anoint*” (*mšḥ*) in **v. 6** also occurs almost exclusively in cultic contexts.

I. (:1-7) WOE TO THE SMUG WHO FEEL SECURE

A. (:1-3) Smugness Based on Denying Reality

1. (:1) Warning of Coming Disaster – (Expressed as a Woe Oracle)

a. False Security of the Nations: Both Judah and Israel

*“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion,
And to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria,”*

Gary Cohen: *Hoi* is the Hebrew word of admonition and lamentation, much like our English *woe*. Amos directs that word at those who were “*at ease*” (*shaanan*, “resting quietly”), and those who were “*secure*” (*batach*, “trusting in”).

Trent Butler: **Wealth** cannot bring security to a people who will not worship and obey God. Again the prophet picks up funeral oratory to condemn Israel's affluent class. Israel's elite are complacent or at ease in Zion. They are self-confident, carefree, undisturbed by the nation's situation or the prophet's predictions. They feel secure; they place their trust in Mount Samaria. As Amos had done in the opening oracles against the nations (**Amos 1–2**), so here he introduces the Southern Kingdom first. Mount Zion refers to Jerusalem with its religious and political traditions. It was Amos's capital city. By announcing disaster for the south, Amos gained credence and a hearing in the north. His audience in Samaria began to anticipate the day they could move south and expand their territory and power at Jerusalem's expense.

But Amos quickly shifted to Mount Samaria, the capital city of the Northern Kingdom. In his day Samaria was flying high as one of the most powerful and influential cities in the world. God's prophetic word pointed to the end of such power and prosperity. It was time to preach Samaria's funeral, but no one wanted to listen. The people of Samaria were notable men, dignitaries. They exercised influence in the foremost nation, or Israel. The people of Israel came to them for advice and direction. These men were too busy being important and too enthralled with power. They had no time for a southern prophet's funeral orations.

John Goldingay: Amos's critique begins in a startling way with its reference to Zion. When the scroll was being read in Judah, the effect would be again to warn Judahites against feeling superior to Ephraim. Half of the First Testament references to being "relaxed" (*šā'ānān*) refer to wise or unwise calm in Judah; references to reliance or trust occur in parallel with references to being relaxed (**Isa. 32:9, 11**), often denoting trust that has no basis. If Amos began a message in this way in Beth-el, then his words would have a similar effect to that of **2:4–5**. The first colon would make people smirk; the second colon would then hit them with its parallel description of them as people with the same mistaken reliance on Samaria as the Judahites' trust in Zion. Both Zion and Samaria were walled towns on defensible hills, **whose people thought they were fairly safe**.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The passage is addressed simultaneously to the elites of Samaria and of Jerusalem. Originally Amos spoke primarily to the leaders of the Northern Kingdom, but his denunciations were just as applicable to the leaders of the South. When the Babylonians burned the houses of Jerusalem and led its citizens into exile, the people of Judah could see that their own oppression, affluence and injustice were just as odious to the Lord as those of their Northern neighbours from a century and a half before.

b. False Security of their Distinguished Leaders

*"The distinguished men of the foremost of nations,
To whom the house of Israel comes."*

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The feeling of security is coupled with the conviction that they are *the first of the nations*, either a ridiculously exaggerated view of the importance and power of Israel or a sense of spiritual superiority derived from their special relationship to the Lord.

Billy Smith: The first focus of the woe oracle is upon the **proud leaders** of Judah and Israel. They considered themselves the top men of the top nation. The entire house of Israel came to them in all matters of importance "for advice or in order to petition them against injustice."

2. (:2) Lessons from Recent History

*"Go over to Calneh and look,
And go from there to Hamath the great,
Then go down to Gath of the Philistines.
Are they better than these kingdoms,
Or is their territory greater than yours?"*

Gary Cohen: Calneh was a Babylonian and Assyrian capital city, filled with temples, on the east bank of the Tigris River. Hamath was the capital of a Syrian state of the same name, and it was on the banks of the Orontes River. Gath was one of the five capitals of the Philistines, which by this time had lost its former grandeur. All three cities had at one time been great, and all had now fallen into decay. Thus, Amos tells those who rest

in Samaria's strength that they should look at the record of history, at similar cities and nations of the past who neglected or rejected God.

Alternate View:

James Mays: Verse 2 is best understood as a quotation which Amos puts in the mouth of the leading class. This command to see how well Israel comes off in comparison with other nations is simply a case of **unmitigated bragging**. The technique of using a quotation to typify the attitude of his audience is employed by Amos in **8.5; 9.10; 5.14; 6.13**. 'Let our countrymen travel to Calneh, Hamath and Gath, and observe that none of these countries is so large as Israel and Judah!' Hamath (cf. **6.14**) and Calneh (= Calno in **Isa. 10.9**) were city-states to the north of Israel, the former in upper Syria on the Orontes River and the latter still farther north in the vicinity of Carchemish. Gath was a city in the Philistine Pentapolis to the west of Jerusalem. In **Isa. 10.9** Hamath and Calno are ranged together with Samaria. The allusion to Gath is puzzling since it appears that in the time of Amos' ministry the city was held by Judah. Another interpretation takes v. 2 as the warning of Amos to Israel to go see nations which were greater than they and yet had met their doom. This interpretation requires the emendation of the text ('*your borders than their borders*'; cf. BH), and is embarrassed by the uncertainty whether Hamath and Calneh had been captured by the Assyrians in the mid-eighth century; we cannot be sure that Hamath was put under Assyrian tribute before 738. The MT conveys a vivid sense as a quotation. The boast articulates a **pride** that is nurtured by the success of Jeroboam's reign (**6.13**) and a belief in their manifest destiny as the people of Yahweh (**5.14**).

Living in such complacent confidence, the leaders are in no mood to hear dire predictions of a '*day of disaster*', no patience with a country Cassandra. '*Day of disaster*' is an alternative term for the day of Yahweh (cf. **5.18, 20; 8.10**). They take their own accomplishments as the sign of God's favour and presence with them and boast that misfortune will never be their lot (**9.10**). They reject the judgment day warning of Amos, and busy themselves with plundering the poor. '*Seat*' is used in its technical sense of throne or judicial seat (**Pss. 122.5; 74.20**). Violence (**3.10**) reigns where they sit to govern; these men are doing too well at creating misfortune for others even to consider the possibility that they may be digging their own graves.

3. (:3) Irony of Contrasting Actions – Impossible to Avert Calamity

*"Do you put off the day of calamity,
And would you bring near the seat of violence?"*

Trent Butler: Israel's carefree leaders "postponed" the evil day but "invited" or "celebrated ahead of schedule" a reign of terror or perhaps more likely "*a cessation of violence*" (author's translation). Israel ignored the prophetic warning and lived as if judgment day would never come. They escaped from reality, thinking they had established a kingdom without threat so they could celebrate the absence of violence in their day. Amos apparently used a play on words here. The people expected no violence, but the same phrase in Hebrew could be understood as a "reign of violence." Amos said Israel had established just such a reign of violence. Those at ease in Zion

and trusting the mountains of Samaria—the political and economic elite—carved out their lifestyles with acts of oppression on the lower economic classes.

Gary Cohen: Here the prophet points with irony at the people’s **contrasting actions**. They “*push away*” (*nadah*) their day of reckoning with the Lord, while still “*pulling close*” (*nagash*) their sinful, violent lives. On the one hand he asks them sarcastically if they think they really can “*put off the day of calamity (yom ra, “day of evil”)*.” The verbal form *put off* is *nadah*, and it means “to remove or cast out someone or something.” In the Talmud, the writings that record the words of the ancient rabbis, this word is used to designate the excommunication of someone from the synagogue congregation. So Amos seems to be saying, “Do you think you can eliminate God’s coming day of judgment by excommunicating it from your lives and thoughts?”

Next, in a purposeful contrast to *nadah*, the prophet asks, “*And would you bring near the seat of violence?*” Here, in the second half of the verse, “*bring near*” (*nagash*) is in direct contrast to “*put away*” in the first half. Simply put, he is asking, “How can you push away God’s judgment when you pull close to yourselves sinful violence?” *Chamas*, “*violence*,” refers to **sinful oppression**, Amos tells them that such thinking is a contradiction—you cannot live in sinful violence and at the same time expect God to be at peace with you. Therefore, God’s message to those at ease in Zion is, “*Your calamity is coming!*”

B. (:4-6) Self-made Reality Focuses on Self Indulgence

1. (:4-6a) Exposure of Self-Indulgent Opulence

a. Expensive Furniture

*“Those who recline on beds of ivory
And sprawl on their couches,”*

Billy Smith: “*Lounge*” may be rendered “sprawling,” or “hanging over” with a distinctly negative connotation. Implied in the word is either laziness or drunkenness or both.

J. Vernon McGee: Illicit sex and gluttony are the two sins that are mentioned here, and they are sins of the flesh. . .

“*And stretch themselves upon their couches*” suggests their preoccupation with sex. That was the thing that they were engaged in, and it is that which characterizes our own day. . .

The sins of the flesh (illicit sex and gluttony), heathen music, and drunkenness are the three great sins which have brought great nations down. I simply cannot believe that our nation will be the exception to the rule.

b. Elegant Dining

*“And eat lambs from the flock
And calves from the midst of the stall,”*

- c. Elaborate Entertainment
*“Who improvise to the sound of the harp,
 And like David have composed songs for themselves,”*
- d. Excessive Drinking
“Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls”
- e. Exotic Perfumes
“While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils,”

John Goldingay: Through ruling oppressively, they can ensure that they live comfortably (6:4–5). They recline on their ivory-decorated seating in order to eat well. Generally people would eat lamb and beef only at great festivals of the kind that 5:21–22 critiqued; evidently these are not the only occasions when the well-to-do eat this way. And they eat the (best) lambs from the flock and calves that have been fattened in their stalls for the purpose. Meanwhile the diners hum along with their minstrels and make up songs. The talk of mandolin and song recurs from 5:23 and further draws attention to the comparison between their enjoyment of a festival at the sanctuary and their celebration of the good life in other contexts.

Allen Guenther: Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous

Amos hits hard at extravagant furniture, elegant dining, elaborate entertainment, excessive drinking, and exotic perfumes. The nations’ leaders live in idle opulence. They have the latest in design and the most expensive modern furniture (6:4a). **Ivory** is ‘in’ in Samaria. One envisions ivory-inlaid furniture. Furthermore, in a society where the average person rarely eats meat (except for festive occasions), Israel’s elite dine on *lambs and fattened veal* (6:4b; Beach, 1992:130-139). They twitter away their time composing songs extemporaneously, in what they regard as the great lyrical tradition of their foremost ruler, David (6:5). Wine is served them in widemouthed bowls, probably to permit the wine to be mixed with spices (6:6a). The aroma of the best anointing oils wafts through their spacious houses (6:6b).

2. (:6b) Exposure of Spiritual Indifference to the Nation’s Ruin

“Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.”

Gary Cohen: This luxurious living amid basins and oils was not complemented with spiritual beauty. There was no grieving for sin here, no personal repentance, no asking God for forgiveness and strength to live for Him, and no weeping or prayer for the nation, which was daily sinking deeper into sin.

Allen Guenther: Most serious, is the sin of omission: *They are not sickened* (6:6, lit.) by the shattering of their people. They cannot see the destruction of society around them. They seem incapable of feeling the pain of others. Their thoughts are for themselves alone. Here is the crux of Amos’s critique. The wealthy are called to account for

servng self alone. Gone is compassion for broken people. Absent is any concern for the well-being of God's people (*Joseph* = Israel).

C. (:7) Shock Based on Facing Reality

1. Humiliation of the Leaders Condemned to Exile

"Therefore, they will now go into exile at the head of the exiles,"

John Goldingay: The subsection ends with another "*therefore.*" The leadership to whom ordinary Ephraimites have to look will maintain their position in the preeminent nation when they lead it into exile, as the banquet of the loungers (see v. 4) ceases. "The first shall be first."

2. Halting of the Self-Indulgent Partying

"And the sprawlers' banqueting will pass away."

Billy Smith: God does not tolerate a **self-indulgent lifestyle**. The history of Israel and Judah brought to literal fulfillment the judgment sentence Amos delivered against them (2 Kgs 24:11-16; 25:11-12, 18-21). When the worship of God's people fails to produce justice and righteousness in society, God's judgment cannot be far behind.

II. (:8-14) WARNING THAT DESTRUCTION FROM THE LORD IS COMING SOON

Trent Butler: God swears to bring total destruction to a people whose lifestyle has become the exact opposite of God's expectations.

Allen Guenther: This oracle consists of five literary snippets. The end has come for Israel. What true prophet could announce the death of his people in clear, calm speech? The thought leaps from image to image, like the semi-coherent account of an accident victim or the reminiscences of the recently bereaved. A common thread unites these short outbursts: Yahweh has turned against his people.

A. (:8) Confirmed by the Divine Oath

*"The Lord God has sworn by Himself, the LORD God of hosts has declared:
'I loathe the arrogance of Jacob, And I detest his citadels;
Therefore, I will deliver up the city and all it contains.'"*

Billy Smith: The Lord's character, integrity, and power stood behind the oath.

James Mays: The economic base of such luxury is violence (*hāmās*; cf. 3.10) against the poor. In all their luxury they have not the slightest concern for the breakdown of Joseph (= Israel). The sufferings of the oppressed and wronged in the nation do not touch them. They neither see nor hear their covenant brother. Surely the God who made himself known to Israel in Egypt as one who heard their cry and knew their sufferings there (Ex. 3.7) cannot bear this revelry. Just as he rejects the sound of their worship

(5.21–24), he is nauseated by the noise of their amusement.

Alec Motyer: When this God swears by himself He commits the totality of His nature (the holy One, the Redeemer and Judge), the totality of His status as the world’s Sovereign Lord, and the totality of His effective power as the Omnipotent. Again, what is it that so rouses and antagonizes the Lord? **Human pride.** And when pride is assaulted the strongholds and the capital city (cf. **verse 1**) which are its embodiment fall as well.

B. (:9-10) Chronicled by the Scope of Death and Destruction

“And it will be, if ten men are left in one house, they will die.

¹⁰ Then one's uncle, or his undertaker, will lift him up to carry out his bones from the house, and he will say to the one who is in the innermost part of the house, ‘Is anyone else with you?’ And that one will say, ‘No one.’

Then he will answer, ‘Keep quiet. For the name of the LORD is not to be mentioned.’”

Gary Cohen: It should be noted that the word *undertaker* in **v. 10** is *miseraph*, literally “a burner,” hence the diseases, and perhaps the large number of dead, required **cremation** rather than the usual Hebrew custom of burial—except in the case of the badly mutilated or criminals (**Josh. 7:25; 1 Sam. 31:12**).

Tchavdar Hadjiev: Those who are left behind after the catastrophe do not dare to speak, for fear of inadvertently pronouncing the name of the Lord. They are scared of drawing divine attention to themselves and dying as a result.

Thomas McComiskey: **Verses 9–10** reflect the responsibility of an individual for the burial of members of his family. Since cremation was not acceptable in ancient Israel, the reference is probably to the burning of corpses during a plague. **Verse 11** is a powerful picture of the destruction that will surely fall on oppressing Israel.

Charles Feinberg: How widespread the plague will be is noted for us in **verse 10**. When one’s next of kin, to whom the duty of burial belonged, would come to carry the corpse out of the house to burn it, he would find but one remaining out of the ten who lived there formerly. And that last surviving one hidden away in the innermost recesses of the houses fearfully awaiting the hour when the plague would carry him away also. In ancient Israel in accordance with the words of **Genesis 3:19** burial was the accepted method of disposal of the dead. In this the New Testament doctrine of the body concurs. Hence cremation was considered wrong and not countenanced (see **Amos 2:1**). But when God’s judgment falls upon His people, there will be so many dead that they will not bury but burn them. The cases here and **1 Samuel 31:12** are exceptional cases. Here cremation is resorted to in order to prevent contagion; in 1 Samuel it was done to obviate further dishonor of the bodies of Saul and his sons by the Philistines. When asked if there are others alive, the remaining occupant of the house will say there is none. Immediately he will be told to hold his peace for fear he would mention the name of the Lord in announcing the death of the others in the household, or in praising God

for his own deliverance. Punishment will so work fear and despair in them all that they will refrain from even the mention of the name of the Lord (which should be their sole refuge in such an hour) lest further wrath come upon them.

C. (:11-13) Caused by Divine Opposition to Prideful Rebellion and Self-Reliance

1. (:11) Smashed to Bits

“For behold, the LORD is going to command that the great house be smashed to pieces and the small house to fragments.”

John Goldingay: Amos returns to poetry (v. 11) for a more literal description of the **total devastation** that faces Samaria. Big and small houses implies all of them. Perhaps Yahweh is commanding his supernatural executioners (cf. 3:9 and the comments), or perhaps it is a kind of self-command. Amos’s point is that **the destruction is going to happen.**

2. (:12) Senseless Unrighteous Lifestyle

*“Do horses run on rocks? Or does one plow them with oxen?
Yet you have turned justice into poison,
And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood,”*

Trent Butler: To get his point across, the prophet turned to rhetorical questions that expect negative answers. Do horses run on the rocky crags? Does one plow there with oxen? Obviously not. But Israel's actions are as logical as a farmer trying to plow through the huge stone cliffs overlooking the sea. God has consistently demanded justice. Israel has transformed the justice that should preserve equality and fairness in the community into a poisonous plant that brings death to the community. God expects righteousness to characterize the people so that the stable order of the community can continue. Those who live by righteousness will produce fruit—justice. Instead, Israel's elite have produced bitter wormwood (**Amos 5:7**).

Allen Guenther: Amos assigns the cause of the divine judgment to two sins; injustice (**6:12**) and pride (**6:13**). The fundamental character of the people of God has been violated by the nation’s leaders. The judicial system, which should empower the poor and create equity between covenant members, has been poisoned. It has become the tool of the powerful in suppressing the helpless and in promoting their own welfare. What should show itself as the results of righteousness – wholesome, creative relationships – has been transformed into bitterness and enmity. Such perversions on Israel’s part should be as improbably and contrary to nature as having horses gallop on rocks or oxen plow the sea.

James Mays: When the poor and afflicted come to the courts of Israel expecting their rights to be protected and vindicated, instead of justice they are dealt out the very same injustice from which they sought relief. To Amos, who will allow Israel no other identity and way of life than that given her in the election of Yahweh, such a reversal of things staggers the mind, and he can only compare it to some incredible perversion of the normal order of things. And with this argumentative saying he seeks to make the

leaders of the nation see their deeds as Yahweh sees them.

Gary Smith: By using these ridiculous rhetorical questions, Amos gets his listeners to agree with him. This makes it easier for them to see the absurdity of their own action of turning righteousness into something vile, bitter, or poisonous. This type of injustice is as absurd as riding a horse over a rocky field; it makes no sense. In this verse “*righteousness*” is not defined by a specific context (social relationships, religious, or a worship context), but it is frequently used in relationship to social justice in other contexts in Amos (**5:10–15, 21–24**). At the least, it indicates that people are not living according to the standards of God’s law or demonstrating just behavior or pure heart attitudes in their relationships with God and other people.

3. (:13) Self Reliant Pride in Military Exploits

“You who rejoice in Lodebar,

And say, ‘Have we not by our own strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?’”

Trent Butler: These people face the threat from the general who controls the heavenly hosts, and they take time to celebrate a victory over Lo Debar, translated literally as “*No Thing*.” They claim, “*Did we not capture for ourselves Karnaim* (that is, “the horns of power”) *in our own strength?*” (author’s translation). Lo Debar was a city-state east of the Jordan River (**2 Sam. 9:4–5**). Karnaim, just north of the Yarmuk River, was the most important city in the northern part of Transjordan called Bashan. Apparently, Jeroboam II had recently captured these cities as he expanded his territory eastward and northward. This gave Israel a strong sense of power. Amos declared it was “nothing.” **God is the only one with power and might.**

James Mays: An Israel which saw its own strength as the foundation of military victory was flying in the face of the old theology of Holy War. Yahweh was a God of war (**Ex. 15.3**) and had revealed himself in Israel’s battles; when she won it was because Yahweh himself had given the enemy into her hand. For Israel to think that she had prevailed on the field of battle was a perversion of the ancient faith and a usurpation of Yahweh’s role in the nation’s existence.

Billy Smith: The horns of an animal were symbols of power or authority in Old Testament times. Perhaps Israel thought that by taking Karnaim they had doubled their strength. Actually Karnaim was a relatively insignificant city.

D. (:14) Carried Out by the Lord God of Hosts Via an Oppressing Enemy Nation

“For behold, I am going to raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel,’ declares the LORD God of hosts, ‘And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath To the brook of the Arabah.’”

Trent Butler: God would soon display his power and strength. He would raise up an enemy nation to oppress Israel. All the territory Jeroboam II had conquered anew for Israel (**2 Kgs. 14:25**), God’s enemy nation would take back. Lebo Hamath or the Entrance to Hamath represents the southern border of the Syrian city-state mentioned in

Amos 6:2 (Ezek. 48:1). The valley of the Arabah or the wadi of the Arabah represents a stream bed running off the Dead Sea that carried water only in the rainy season. It represented the southern extension of the conquests of King Jeroboam II.

All Israel's winnings would be lost. Israel had partied long enough. They had not taken care of God's business or heeded God's warnings. The end was in sight. When God had no impact on daily life, those living without God would soon not be living at all.

Robert Martin-Achard: Chapter 6 ends then on the perspective of a political disaster rendering the 'couldn't care less' attitude of Samaria's leaders, indicated in his first couplets, all the more ridiculous and culpable. Woe awaits a nation whose authorities make proof of frivolity and blindness. They are dragging down the whole of Israel to its doom.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does the prosperity and comfort of our times impact your sense of dependence upon the power and goodness of the Lord?
- 2) Do you ever embrace the lie that riches guarantee or indicate God's pleasure?
- 3) In what ways has the Lord acted to humble your pride?
- 4) Where are you tempted to take credit for accomplishments that should be attributed to God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jorg Jeremias: Whatever may indeed be presupposed for Amos in the way of extrabiblically attested organizational forms of the *marzēah*, Amos himself is obviously referring to more than merely spontaneous private celebrations. On the other hand, however, no great emphasis is placed on the **cultic character** of these gatherings in **Amos 6**; such comes to expression (besides in **v. 6** as just mentioned) only indirectly in these celebrations' (**vv. 4–6**) striking similarity to the worship activities characterized in **5:21–23**. What is decisive for Amos' criticism is that these celebratory meals foster that particular **self-confidence** about which **v. 1** and **v. 3** speak. Such self-confidence is based first on the site of this revelry. When the inhabitants of Jerusalem are later warned, on the basis of Amos' oracle, against "*being at ease in Zion*," the juxtaposition of Zion and "*Mount Samaria*" shows that the royal citadel in Samaria was granted a status comparable to that of Zion (the second line might even be translated "*who trust in Mount Samaria*"), even though it was not associated with any Yahweh temple (nor, since the revolution of Jehu, with any Baal temple). The celebratory meals possibly

occupied this gap. Second, the aforementioned self-confidence is also based on the popular faith in election according to which Israel is the “*first*” among the nations, since the conviction “*Yahweh is with us*” (5:14) banishes any thought of defeat or misfortune (v. 3; cf. v. 13). Within such a conceptual horizon, the prophetic announcement of a “*day of Yahweh*” that is “*dark*,” and that accordingly brings God’s judgment rather than his salvation (5:18–20), can only sound absurd (cf. Isaiah’s similar oracle of woe against the reveling Jerusalemites, who “*do not regard the deeds of Yahweh*,” Isa. 5:11f.). This carefree attitude is based, third, on social status. Only the upper class (literally: those who are “*notable*,” i.e., “*distinguished*”) partake in these celebratory meals; at the same time, however, they are thus the point of orientation for the directionless crowd. Finally, this sense of security is based on the undiscussed dominion over those who are dependent, dominion based on destructive “*violence*” (concerning this term, cf. the discussion of 3:10 and 4:1 above), about which v. 3b speaks parenthetically with an emotionally laden address (cf. the analogous transition to direct address in the oracle of woe in 5:18); that is, it is based on securing power and wealth by restricting the life sphere of the poor.

Alec Motyer: Their particular error was to isolate two components within the true religion which had been revealed to them and to act as if there was nothing else to the question of being religious: sincerity and ceremony. Why should we suppose that these people were less than sincere in their seeking of God at the shrines? But it was a sincerity out of step with the truth about God; it was sincere belief in a God of their own devising. Furthermore, their ceremonies were ninety-nine per cent that which God had commanded as far as their performance was concerned: Amos can fault them only on the matter of leaven (4:5), and they covered two-thirds of the decreed material of sacrifice, omitting only the **sin offering**. But they treated the ceremonies as an **end in themselves**, done in and for the inherent, automatic benefits achieved by the ceremonial act, and they divorced them from their God-intended context in a life of moral obedience, righteous principle and just conduct. Thus **sincerity over-rode theology** (i.e. in the interests of what they would like God to be, they modified the revealed teaching of what He in fact is) and **ceremony obscured ethics**. Their religion was **devoid of creed and conduct**. It did not arise from what God is, nor did it take account of what man is. It lived alone by the principle of **individual self-pleasing**. Upon this religion and these people the Lord will bring a condign judgment of exact retribution.

Anthony Petterson: Amos singles out the privileged leadership for condemnation. Zion (Jerusalem) and Samaria are the capitals of the southern and northern kingdoms of Israel, respectively. The leaders are complacent and feel secure despite Amos’s warning of coming judgment. The cities of Kaineh and Hamath are in Aram (Syria), to the north of Israel. It seems they have been recently conquered, probably by King Jeroboam II (2Ki 14:28). Gath is a Philistine city that has been recently conquered by King Uzziah of Judah (2Ch 26:6). Amos’s argument seems to be that if these kingdoms were able to be conquered, then Zion and Samaria are wrong to feel invincible and so dismiss the idea of a judgment day (cf. Am 5:18-20). The opulent lifestyle of the leaders is disclosed in Amos 6:4-6. They party while they should be grieving over the ruin of Joseph (the northern kingdom; v. 6). This ruin probably refers

to the way they have acquired their wealth at the expense of the poor and vulnerable and refused to heed the call of the prophets to repent (2:6-12; 5:10-13). With cutting irony, the foremost of the nation will be the first to go into exile (6:7). The party's over.

The Lord decrees punishment on his proud people. In swearing by himself, he underscores its certainty. His name, God Almighty or God of hosts, also asserts his power and dominion (5:27). The "*pride of Jacob*" (6:8) is probably a reference to the city of Samaria since "*fortresses*" are elsewhere associated with cities (1:4, 7, 10). A number of the details in Amos 6:9-10 are difficult to interpret. It seems that in the aftermath of the devastating judgment on Samaria, any survivors will be told not to mention the name of the Lord (v. 10), possibly to honor the sanctity of the Lord's name in such a place of death, since contact with death defiles (Lev 21:1-6; Nu 19:11-22). The destruction will come at the Lord's command and bring comprehensive destruction of houses great and small (Am 6:11). Two absurd scenarios in verse 12 highlight the absurd behavior of the Israelites who have turned justice into poison and fruit of righteousness into bitterness (cf. 5:7). They rejoice and boast in their conquest of two cities: Lo Debar, which means "nothing," and Karnaim, which means "two horns" (6:13). Amos is being sarcastic: they boast of conquering "nothing" and "two horns" in their own strength. In response, God will raise up a nation to drive them from their inheritance. Lebo Hamath and the Valley of the Arabah represent the northern and southern boundaries of the promised land. In the first instance, God raised up the Assyrians, who conquered Samaria in 722 BC and exiled the northern kingdom. In 586 BC, God raised up the Babylonians, who destroyed Jerusalem and exiled its inhabitants.

Gary Smith: This lament deals with the **problem of false security (6:1)**. Everyone naturally wants security from robbers, hunger, financial ruin, medical malpractice, and misrepresentation of products. Security results in the removal of feelings of anxiety, doubt, and fear. When one is secure, there is no danger, apprehensive feelings, or threat that will ruin the pleasant life one now enjoys. Security relates to being sure of your situation and certain about the future.

But security can lead to feelings of overconfidence and carelessness. When situations change, people can sometimes maintain their old attitudes of security and have a false perception of reality. The broad question Amos asks the Israelites is: Why do you feel so secure? This is a question that individuals in the church need to address because it is easy to rest blindly in inappropriate sources of security. A person can easily take on the modern cultural definitions of security and ignore God's role in providing freedom from anxiety and fear.

Amos addresses the issue of security by analyzing the basis of Israel's security. After a person can verbalize the reasons why he or she feels secure, then it is possible to ask if it is wise to trust in these factors. Have situations changed that require a new appraisal of one's confidence, or was a certain factor never a secure basis for hope? People can also compare their own confidence with that of others to see if there is some inconsistency between their attitudes and behaviors. Another avenue one can pursue is

to discover what sacred traditions have to say about placing security in various objects or people. Should people, armies, and finances be the basis of a believer's confidence and security? Although no one can totally ignore these human factors of security, people need to think about the role God plays in providing security. . .

Amos connects a false sense of security to riches, pride, and military achievements. These dangers were included in the warning to kings in **Deuteronomy 17:14–17**. The king must not be a foreigner, must not acquire great numbers of horses that he might trust in, must not take many wives by making astute political alliances, and must not accumulate large quantities of silver and gold. Instead, he is to make his own personal copy of God's revelation in the Torah and read it daily so that he will revere God and follow his instructions. The king is to avoid pride and not think of himself as better than his brothers (**17:18–20**).

TEXT: Amos 7:1-6

TITLE: 2 PARALLEL VISIONS OF DESOLATION AND DESTRUCTION –
SWARMING LOCUSTS AND CONSUMING FIRE

BIG IDEA:
INTERCESSORY PRAYER CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

INTRODUCTION:

Gary Smith: These vision reports in **Amos 7** begin the third major section of the book. Five visions are described (**7:1–3, 4–6, 7–9; 8:1–3; 9:1–4**), with the first two having a common structure: an introductory formula, a description of the vision (introduced with the particle *hinneh*, “*behold*,” not trans. in NIV), the intercession of the prophet, and God’s decision. The almost identical wording of the prophet’s prayer and God’s response draws the two visions together as a pair. The autobiographical nature of the language of the dialogue testifies to the personal nature of the prophet’s involvement in the process and his deep concern for his audience. . .

The graphic nature of visions allowed the prophet to see God’s intentions, thus bringing out a more powerful understanding and feeling about what he said he would do. Amos’s visions move him to cry out for mercy and to intercede for those who will suffer, a reaction that is not aroused by the earlier spoken words by God in **Amos 1–6**.

Billy Smith: All the vision accounts follow the **first-person style of reporting**. Advantages of the style include (1) enhancement of the claim to authority, (2) establishment of rapport between the prophet and his audience, and (3) a more powerful emotional appeal. The report form enabled the audience to identify with what Amos reported, and it enabled Amos to identify with the audience as an intercessor.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The visions can provide the basis of one message or class session or can be presented as a series. I have done it both ways. When using the series approach, I have found it effective to do the first two visions as a unit, and each of the last three as separate units. Whatever the method, it is important to stress the flow of Amos’s dynamic interaction with the Lord about Israel and the consequences of her refusal to repent and to accept His forgiveness. . .

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Alec Motyer: The Third Part of Amos opens with two visions of total destruction (**7:1–6**). In each case it is of such proportions and such timing that national survival is

counted impossible: ‘*How can Jacob survive, being so small?*’ (verses 2, 5, JB). In each case also the Lord repents and promises that such a thing will not happen. The doubling makes the message emphatic. Twice over the Lord rejects the thought of a judgment of total destruction coming on His people. But the doubling also is cumulative. In **verse 3** it is simply It shall not be, but in **verse 6** there is almost a degree of warm rejoinder in This also shall not be. It is as if the Lord rather rounded on the praying prophet: And neither shall this be! Furthermore, in **verse 3** the speaker is Yahweh, but in **verse 6** ‘the sovereign Yahweh’; this is to say, since in Amos’ theology Yahweh is in any case the sovereign God, the adjective ‘sovereign’ adds nothing to Him but adds the element of absolute guarantee to what He pledges to do. In this sense, then, of emphatic repetition, cumulative force and solemn divine affirmation, the idea of the total destruction of God’s people is ruled out of court. It will not happen, and since it is the Lord Himself who says so, it cannot happen.

Robert Martin-Achard: In both instances Amos intervenes on Israel’s behalf. He pleads the cause of the guilty party and succeeds in imploring God’s pardon. Three matters deserve to be noted

a) Amos makes himself an **intercessor**, since his prophetic activity seems to demand it (**Gen. 20:7; Jer. 15:1 ff;** etc.). A revealing factor is that in spite of the harshness of his pronouncements with regard to the Israelites, Amos does not hesitate to appeal to the divine mercy.

(b) He makes a case of the **smallness of Jacob**, that is to say, of his frailty and vulnerability, and this at the precise moment when Israel thought herself to be great and strong. The arrogance of the ruling classes contrasts here with this humble, resolute and lucid prayer.

(c) Yahweh allows himself to be convinced by the pleading of his witness and ‘repents’ for striking the guilty party: the plague that has been announced will not come to pass. The issue of ‘anthropopathism’ in the Bible (the ‘**repentance**’ of Yahweh is the issue here) worries only those who conceive of God as an abstract, cold and distant idea. They have not understood how near the living God is to men and how he is able to share in their feelings.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: Taken in isolation the first two visions extol the **power of prayer** and the **merciful nature of God** who is willing to forgive. The Lord plans to punish Israel, but Amos dissuades him from doing so, not because the people do not deserve it but because they are small and weak. Some interpreters have postulated that this passage reflects the earliest period of Amos’s ministry (cf. **5:4–6**), when he was still hoping for a positive response to his message. Whether this is true is impossible to say. In the present shape of the text the passage serves as an introduction to the rest of the visions with their message of irrevocable punishment. Its primary function within the book is to stress the **tragic nature of the missed opportunities of the past**.

I. (:1-3) DESOLATION – VISION OF SWARMING LOCUSTS

A. (:1) The Vision Revealed

*“Thus the Lord God showed me,
and behold, He was forming a locust-swarm when the spring crop began to sprout.
And behold, the spring crop was after the king's mowing.”*

Gary Smith: The **timing** of this plague is critical, for two chronological indicators appear in this vision. The locusts are being formed after the king's share of the crop has been harvested (probably grass for his horses; see **1 Kings 4:26–28; 18:5**) and just as the young tender spring crops are sprouting (probably in April). This suggests that the royal needs have been met but that the average peasant farmer will be in serious trouble. If the locusts had come a few weeks earlier, there would not yet be any sprouting grain and thus no harm to Israel's farmers. If it had come later, the crops would be set back by the locusts but not totally destroyed. This heightens Amos's compassion for the poor farmers, who will be left in a hopeless situation.

Allen Guenther: **Locusts** were commonly understood to convey the divine judgment. They represent one of the futility curses threatened against a covenant-breaking Israel (**Deut. 28:38, 42**) [Covenant, p. 379]. Joel depicts them as a marauding army, leaving death and destruction in their wake (**Joel 1-2**). Here they are expressly said to be prepared or shaped (cf. **Gen. 2:19**) for the divine purpose.

James Mays: In the first vision Amos is shown a locust swarm being created and made ready just when the 'late planting' (*leqeš*) had begun to spring up. The threat looms when the last growth of pasture and field before the summer's dry season is beginning; if it were lost the people would have nothing to carry them over until the next harvest. The reference to the royal mowing (**2b**) suggests that the king had the prerogative to claim the first cutting of hay for the use of his military establishment (**I Kings 18.5**). . .

When Amos was made to see the locust swarm being made ready by Yahweh, the event carried its own portentous message; Yahweh's wrath had broken out against his people; punishment had been decreed for Israel. In the elevated consciousness of the vision, time is telescoped and Amos watches the progress of the plague until the crops and pasture of the land are almost gone. The event belongs completely to the realm of vision, is not yet actual event. It is the dramatic portrayal of the divine purpose shaped into revealing experience for the sake of the prophet that he may know the decision of Yahweh before it is executed (cf. the vision of Micaiah ben Imlah, **I Kings 22.17**). It is none the less real because it is a preview; what Yahweh prepares in heaven will inexorably unfold on earth. The timing of his appeal indicates that, were the event to be completed in the vision, its re-enactment on earth would be an accomplished fact, a decree that could not be turned back. At this crucial juncture Amos addresses Yahweh.

B. (:2) The Prophet's Intercession

*“And it came about, when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land,
that I said, ‘Lord God, please pardon! How can Jacob stand, For he is small?’”*

Gary Smith: The action in 7:1 sets the plot, but nothing has actually happened yet. Some translations of **Amos 7:2** picture the crops already eaten by the locusts (RSV, NASB, NIV). This raises the difficult situation of having the prophet intercede after the danger is past and of God's stopping the punishment after it has already happened. This makes no sense and is not required by the Hebrew text. Since the word used here (*klh*) can mean to determine, decide, complete a plan (**1 Sam. 20:7, 9, 33; Est. 7:7; Prov. 16:30**), the text can read, "when he determined to destroy the vegetation." With this translation, Amos's intercession comes when he realizes God has finally determined to release the locusts on the land.

At that point the prophet prays for **compassion**. Much like Moses at the golden calf, Amos relies on the long-suffering, patient, and forgiving nature of God (**Ex. 34:6**). But unlike Moses, there is no reasoning with God about the impression this will have on Israel's neighbors or any appeal to some promise to the forefathers (**32:11–14**). The prophet's prayer seems more like a lament (a lament often asks how long or why; see **Ps. 13:1–2; 42:5, 11; 79:5**), which is full of deep sympathy for the poor farmers who will suffer the most misery. They have already suffered under the oppression of the wealthy landowners. Why will God make them the object of his anger?

Billy Smith: The basis for the prophet's plea was that "Jacob" (Israel) was small. The word "small" may refer to **helplessness** rather than to size. During the time of Jeroboam II the nation and its army was not especially small or weak, except before God. "How can Jacob survive?" reveals the prophet's assessment that the nation could not survive the potential plague. **The nation's survival hinged on the prophet's intercession and God's response to it.**

Tchavdar Hadjiev: He accepts that the punishment is deserved but **appeals to the Lord's pity** by pointing out the vulnerability of the people. His strategy proves successful. God's declaration *It shall not be* announces a change in the divine plan, made in response to the prophetic request. Such an alteration in God's intentions is not unique to this passage (**Andersen and Freedman** 1989: 638–679). The Old Testament portrays the Lord on numerous occasions changing his prior resolve to punish or bless someone in response to intercession (**Exod. 32:12–14**), repentance (**Jer. 18:8**) or sin (**1 Sam. 15:35; Jer. 18:10**). The statements to the contrary (**Num. 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29**) must mean that he does not change his mind in an arbitrary and capricious manner. The verb *relented* (*niḥam*), describing the divine reaction, carries strong emotional overtones. It can describe feelings of compassion and pity (**Judg. 2:18; 21:15**) as well as regret (**Gen. 6:6–7; 1 Sam 15:11**).

Allen Guenther: The description *small* is more frequently a reference to significance than to size. It appears as a deliberate literary linkage of this final part of the book with what preceded. As such, it represents Amos's confession of the sin previously mentioned: Israel is a proud people, claiming God's victories as their own doing (**6:13**).

M. Daniel Carroll R.: He does not ask on the basis of the people's positive response to his message, and there is no mention of the nation's historical relationship with God

(2:9–10; 3:2). Some see this cry as a challenge to God on the basis of covenant, but in context it is simply **an appeal to divine mercy on behalf of a shattered people**.

C. (:3) The Lord's Response

"The LORD changed His mind about this. 'It shall not be,' said the LORD."

Gary Smith: God's response is **immediate** and **somewhat surprising**. The plague is stopped before it begins, and without any prerequisites. God does not make his decision to stop the locusts if the people first do this or that—a condition that would make his decision understandable (see **Jer. 18:1–12**). It is an **act of pure grace** on a people who have been rebelling against him for centuries. God's relenting (*niham*) on his plans is an anthropomorphic way of explaining his personal interaction with the prophet and his people. Compassion for the people is not inconsistent with God's character; rather, it reveals the depth of his patience and his openness to hearing the prayers of righteous intercessors (**James 5:13–18**).

God is not a mindless abstract principle of philosophy who rules by some set of mechanical computer formulas. He is a personal caring ruler who does not enjoy the punishment of the wicked (**Ezek. 18:23**). He richly pours out his love to those who do not deserve it. The removal of the locust plague postpones God's wrath for another day.

James Mays: The outcome of the first vision leaves a sense of unbearable tension. Israel has been spared the cataclysmic outbreak of the divine wrath only because of Yahweh's willingness to hear the intercession of one man. But the circumstances which provoked the decree of punishment continue unchanged.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Yahweh is presented as supremely sovereign, all-knowing, and omnipotent. What is clear is that redirection of potential outcomes is consistent with God's mercy. His person is unchanging, even as he is willing to alter a course of action in ways congruent with his character.

Trent Butler: Here we see the prophetic office at its best. A prophet called to pronounce judgment identifies with his people and stands between the judging God and the sinful people. Through his prayers he brings God to forgive and to stop his judgment.

II. (:4-6) **DESTRUCTION – VISION OF CONSUMING FIRE**

A (:4) The Vision Revealed

*"The Lord God showed me,
and behold, the Lord God was calling to contend with them by fire,
and it consumed the great deep and began to consume the farm land."*

Lloyd Ogilvie: It is a sweeping conflagration of the land, a fire that would be so devouring that it "*consumed the great deep*" (v. 4). It would be inextinguishable. That means a fire that even water cannot put out. It would happen in midsummer when the fields were dry and would burn like a wildfire across all of Israel.

John Goldingay: We already know that **fire** is key to Yahweh's self-assertion in relation to wrongdoing (**1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5; 5:6**); the sequence of locust and fire also compares with **Joel 1:2–20**. The **Great Deep** is the vast sea underneath the world's land mass, from which springs and rivers bubble up; the fire that can burn up such a sea is obviously quite a fire. This calamitous confrontation is thus more drastic than the epidemic in the first revelation; if Yahweh's fire burns up the Great Deep, a total drought results, another disaster like one described in **4:6–11** but much worse.

B (:5) The Prophet's Intercession

"Then I said, 'Lord God, please stop! How can Jacob stand, for he is small?'"

Billy Smith: The basis for his request was Israel's need: *"How can Jacob survive? He is so small."* Israel's leaders thought of themselves as the top leaders of the top nation. Amos saw the nation in its weakness and vulnerability, not *"the foremost nation"* (**6:1**) but *"small"* (**7:5**). No one should overlook the prophet's solidarity with the people of Israel when he interceded in their behalf.

Allen Guenther: There are, however, **limits to the divine forbearance**, as shown in **Amos 7:8; 8:2**. Indeed, three times Jeremiah is told to stop praying for the people (**7:16; cf. 11:14; 14:11**). The repetition of this instruction implies that Jeremiah persisted in intercession and that God's hand was stayed by the prophet's appeal. This illustrates both the limits of the divine forbearance and the power of intercession. Elsewhere those limits are stated yet more dramatically: God announced that even the prayers of intercessors such as Noah, Daniel, and Job will be impotent (**Ezek. 14:20**).

C. (:6) The Lord's Response

*"The LORD changed His mind about this.
'This too shall not be,' said the Lord God."*

Gary Smith: The basis for this request is the same as his earlier rationale: Israel is so small, and it cannot last under this great judgment. God's response is the same as his earlier decision. He stops the fire, for no one can survive the onslaught of his wrath. More time is provided for the Israelites to respond before his judgment. Indeed, God is long-suffering and surprisingly patient; his grace extends to undeserving people again and again.

Allen Guenther: Indeed, the multiplied warnings and threats of this book are a reminder of the reluctance with which God acts against his chosen people, Israel. The sentence is executed only when all means to create repentance as well as all other avenues of appeal have been exhausted. Twice God responds to the intercession of his prophet.

Gary Cohen: Such a thorough judgment is represented that it is as if both the unseen roots and the visible surface area are destroyed without a trace. Amos could not bear this, and again he prayed to God for mercy, and the vision of fire was halted. God granted Amos's plea for mercy because when the Assyrians finally took Samaria and

the Northern Kingdom, they did not destroy Israel, but rather were content to scatter the Israelites and mix them into the nations.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you believe in the efficacy of intercessory prayers?
- 2) How can God repent or change his mind regarding an action or its timing?
- 3) Do you have an appreciation for the patience and forbearance of God?
- 4) Why is it so dangerous for people to presume on the patience and forbearance of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Lloyd Ogilvie: We pause to reflect about both the power of intercessory prayer and the forgiveness of God. In his fellowship with God, Amos became an agent of asking for what God wanted to give. God did not desire the destruction of His people. He consistently sought another way. God's change of mind does not indicate that He vacillates. He would not have put it into Amos's heart to ask for forgiveness for Israel if that had not been His greater desire all along.

Intercession for others is an expression of profound trust in God and love for them. We long to bring them and God together again. But effective intercessory prayer requires listening to God to know how to pray. After adoration, confession, and thanksgiving in our prayers, the next step is to spread out before the Lord the need of others. Then it is time to be quiet so He can clarify what He wants to give or do. After that, we can intercede boldly.

Alec Motyer: [Amos] repeatedly uses the title '*the Lord GOD*', the Sovereign Yahweh. In the whole book of Amos this is used twenty times, of which eleven occurrences come in the last three chapters. While counting verses is a somewhat arbitrary statistic, nevertheless there are one hundred verses in the first six chapters and the title occurs nine times; there are forty-six verses in the last three chapters and the title occurs eleven times—once in every four or five verses as compared with once in every eleven or twelve verses. There is that in his message which requires him to underscore the **absolute liberty of Yahweh to implement His own will**, to do that which accords with His divine name. What can this be except that judgment and salvation will somehow both be secured, the overthrow of His enemies and the safety of His people? For this is what the name Yahweh means.

Jorg Jeremias: This structuring in pairs of the first four visions draws attention within the text to the **decisive turning point** at which Amos' prophetic intervention fundamentally changed. What was initially possible for him in the first two visions, namely, through intercession to have Israel's punishment withdrawn or at least delayed, is denied him beginning with the third vision. Amos had to learn that there are **limits to divine patience**, that is, that Israel's sin can reach proportions allowing no more room for this patience. This changes the prophet's function in a fundamental way. Whereas at the beginning he was a mediator between Yahweh and Israel insofar as he possessed knowledge of God's plans for Israel, and yet at the same time could influence these plans to Israel's advantage, his own capacity is radically altered beginning with the third vision. It is curtailed insofar as Amos no longer has the opportunity for further intercession. It is enhanced insofar as Amos now moves completely to the side of Yahweh; Yahweh now speaks through him (and no longer through numerous other representatives of religious institutions; cf. **7:10–17**), and Amos' words will from now on be the direct words of God (cf. **Amos 3:8**). The first understanding of prophecy was the one familiar to Amos' contemporaries; the second, associated with the harsh prediction of "Israel's end," was completely new. Hence it is by no means accidental that all the visions beginning with the third have received long commentaries (**7:9ff.**; **8:3ff.**; **9:5ff.**), while the first two visions did not need such an interpretation.

This simultaneously discloses the meaning behind making the visions public. Their intention is to show Amos' readers how he changed from the messenger of divine patience to the messenger of relentless divine judgment; put differently, they serve to legitimize the prophetic message of judgment against Israel. They attest how little Amos actually wanted to be the kind of messenger of disaster these visions forced him to become, and how he struggled to the maximum against this new determination of his function. On the other hand, they attest that Israel is not yet lost simply by incurring guilt, but rather only when God himself prevents its prophet from fighting against God's plan of annihilation through the power of intercession.

Allen Guenther: What does it mean that God *repents* (*noham*)? The phrase appears frequently in the OT (cf. **Gen. 6:6-7**; **Exod. 32:14**; **2 Sam. 24:16**; **Jon. 3:10**; **4:2**). On the other hand, Balaam's God-given oracle for Balak seems to contradict this statement: "God is not a human being, that he should lie, nor a mortal, that he should change his mind (*naham*)" (**Num. 23:19**). The parallel between "does not lie" and "does not repent" reinforces the fact that a fundamental aspect of the person of God is at stake. God will not and cannot act contrary to his nature.

An even more puzzling text is **1 Samuel 15**. Twice it is said that God repented (*naham*) that he had made Saul king (**15:11, 35**). And twice the word *naham* is used to describe the impossibility that God might reverse his decision to replace Saul on the throne (**15:29**).

Perhaps the clue is to be found in Jeremiah's experience at the potter's house (**Jer. 18**). There God enunciates a fundamental principle governing the relationship between

human repentance and the sovereign acts of God: God's promises of wealth or threats of woe to the nation are **conditional**. Repentance from sin or defection from the covenant Lord may cancel an earlier threat or promise (**18:6-10**; cf. **Ezek. 18**).

The principle suggests that God has included human choice and responsibility as a factor in ordering the affairs of individuals and nations, in shaping our destinies. Good and evil will always bear their fruit in the form of curses or blessings. If, however, defection or repentance (or intercession) occur, the conditions have changed so that other consequences take effect. God's **purposes** are never altered by human choices. He is not a human that he would change his objectives or act contrary to his nature. Saul's rejection of God resulted in God removing him from the throne. This eliminated the possibility of his family creating a ruling dynasty. The timing of the consequences, while incorporating human participation or lack thereof, rests in God's hands. With Israel as with Saul, the verdict *I will spare them no longer* (**Amos 7:8; 8:2**) is divinely ordered. The end has come. Even intercession will no longer delay the judgment.

The biblical report that God *repented of the evil he had intended* is in anthropopathic terms, the language of human emotions. It is an accommodation to our finitude. That is, if we were to act toward others as God dealt with Israel (or Saul), we would speak of that as changing our behavior because of the intense compassion (or disappointment) we felt. That is what it means that God repented (*naham*). When God's repentance is directed toward those who harden and assert themselves against God, it leads to judgment. His repentance toward those who humble themselves, personally or representatively, roots in his deep compassion (**Ps. 106:45**).

TEXT: Amos 7:7-9

TITLE: VISION OF THE PLUMB LINE – ISRAEL MEASURED AND FOUND CROOKED

BIG IDEA:

**FAILURE TO CONFORM TO GOD’S STANDARD (RIGHTEOUSNESS)
CONDEMNIS ISRAEL TO CERTAIN JUDGMENT WITH NO MORE DELAY**

INTRODUCTION:

Warren Wiersbe: God’s law is His plumb line, and He measures His people to see how true they are to the pattern in His Word, and if they are upright in character and conduct “*Also I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plummet*” (Isa. 28:17, NKJV). Alas, in Amos’ time, He found that Israel was “out of plumb” and therefore had to be destroyed. This would include Israel’s high places and sanctuaries, where they worshiped contrary to God’s law, for the only place the Jews were to bring their sacrifices was to the temple in Jerusalem (**Lev. 17:1-7**).

Gary Smith: Just as a builder tests the straightness of a wall with a plumb line, God exposes the true state of his people’s moral character and covenant faithfulness with his plumb line. In the earlier visions guilt is implied, but this testing procedure legitimates the conclusion that it is no longer possible to delay the judgment of Israel.

Trent Butler: God had created everything perfectly. But he gave his people the gift of freedom. They can choose to live in faithful obedience to him, or they can choose to go the way of the world and ignore God. When we choose the world's way, our lives become **warped** and out of plumb. We no longer mirror God's perfect image. We no longer serve his purposes. We become useless just like an out-of-plumb wall that is about to fall. Eventually, we must be reshaped and remolded by the Master's hand. So Amos learned in his vision that Israel had reached the point of no return. Major disciplinary action was in order: *I will spare them no longer*.

Gary Cohen: A plumb line is a weight hung from a string in order to measure a perfectly straight vertical line in engineering and construction work. Such a device was known in antiquity. The modern English word is derived from the Latin *plumbum*, “*lead*,” for the heavy lead weight hung at the bottom of the string. Here the words, “*Behold I am about to put a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel. I will spare them no longer*” (v. 8), reveal the meaning of the vision. God is seen making careful and precise preparations for the coming punishment of the Northern Kingdom. As a surveyor He is measuring exactly where the punishment will come, how far it will extend, and the precise level of damage that it will do.

Allen Guenther: Modern interpreters disagree on the meaning of the word translated *plumb line*. The corresponding Akkadian (and Assyrian) word means “*tin*.” On the assumption that plumb bobs were made of lead, some interpreters have ruled out the

idea of the plumb line (Holladay: 492-494; Stuart: 372-374). The Hebrew phrase “stone of tin,” appears in **Zechariah 4:10** as a plum bob or plummet. The tin, then, stands for the plumb bob. The phrase *wall of tin* (**Amos 7:7**, Heb.) means a wall built by use of the plumb line to make it truly vertical.

Alternate View:

M. Daniel Carroll R.: All the English versions render *’ānāk* as “plumb line,” a translation that apparently appeared during the medieval period. The idea is that God has evaluated the nation in terms of its obedience to the norms of the Law or its response to the prophet’s message and found Israel lacking (cf. **2 Kgs 17:13, 23; 21:10–15; 24:2**); it is “out of plumb,” as it were. Their transgressions now bring judgment. This is the explanation found in many commentaries and other recent publications. It is difficult to suggest an alternative because “the traditional picture of Yahweh standing with a plumb bob in his hand, apparently testing the trueness of a wall (the wall being Israel) is one of the most familiar and best loved of all of the depictions in the book of Amos.”

Nevertheless, there are problems with this construal.

1. First, it is odd that, if a plumb line is meant, other terms in the Old Testament referring to a plumb line or something akin to it were not used: *qav* (**2 Kgs 21:13; Isa 28:17; 34:11**) and *mišqelet* (**2 Kgs 21:13; Isa 28:17**).
2. Second, it does not make sense for the plumb line to be placed in the midst of the people. Plumb lines are set against a wall to check if it is properly perpendicular.
3. Third, setting a plumb line to test the wall does not fit in a context where the guilt of Israel is beyond doubt and judgment has already been decreed.
4. Fourth, and most important, research demonstrates that *’ānāk* is an Akkadian loanword for **tin** (the Hebrew term is *bādîl*; e.g., *Ezek 27:12*). Plumb lines would have been made of lead, a metal much heavier than tin.

The best option in this context of imminent judgment in the form of an invasion is to concentrate on the **weakness of tin**. In the ancient world, walls were designed to protect cities—especially the more prominent ones—where the palace, key administration buildings, and principal temples were located, and where important commercial activity was concentrated. In several passages, other metals (iron and bronze) are used metaphorically with pillars and walls (perhaps covering them) to communicate **strength** and **impenetrability** grounded in divine support (**Jer 1:18–19; 15:20**). In this verse, however, the wall is of tin, a **soft metal!**

Tchavdar Hadjiev: In 1965 the eminent Assyriologist **Benno Landsberger** argued that the Akkadian term meant ‘tin’ not ‘lead’. Since tin is too light to be used as a weight, *’ānāk* in Hebrew could not mean plumb line. Amos, therefore, saw the Lord standing on a wall of tin, holding a lump of tin in his hand and threatening to put tin in the midst of his people Israel. The problem with this picture is that it is largely **meaningless**. None of the attempts to explain the symbolism of tin in the vision have been convincing

enough. Moreover, subsequent studies have disproven the assertion that *'ānāk* here cannot mean plumb line (Williamson 1990; Noonan 2013).

Therefore, it is best to go with the traditional translation '*plumb line*' (cf. DCH 1.342; HALOT 1.71–72) and see the vision as announcing the **transition from forgiveness to punishment**. The Lord stands beside a wall that was originally straight because it was built with a plumb-line. The plumb-line he now holds in his hand signals his intention to inspect the wall and see if it has not begun to bend. If that is the case, the wall will have become dangerous and will need to be pulled down. It is not clear at this stage who or what the plumb line actually represents. The following narrative will make clear that it is the preaching of Amos himself. The statement *I will never again pass them by*, which means '*I will never again overlook their offences*' (njb), signals a change in disposition from the preceding two visions. The Lord is not inclined to turn a blind eye any more. Jacob's only chance to remain standing now is in being found to be straight and in good condition. The time of prophetic intercession has passed.

Brad Mills: The Plumb Line

1. The Standard of Inspection (7)
2. The Failure of Inspection (8)
3. The Outcome of Inspection (9)

<https://gracefresno.com/sermons/plumb-line-amos-77-9/>

I. (:7-8A) VISION OF A PLUMB LINE – INSPECTION MEASURES CONFORMITY TO GOD'S STANDARD

A. (:7) Vision Revealed – God Determines the Standard for Righteousness

“Thus He showed me, and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall, with a plumb line in His hand.”

Trent Butler: The prophet received a third vision. God himself stood beside a wall with a plumb line in his hand. He was determining whether the wall was straight or not. If not, he would have to knock it down and build it again.

Explanation of a plumb line:

The plumb-line is a weight, usually with a pointed tip on the bottom, suspended from a string. Plumb lines (aka plumb bobs), are used as a vertical reference line, or datum. Their accuracy is absolute.

Plumb-lines always find the vertical axis pointing to the center of gravity. The plumb-line ensures a structure is centered and aligned. The Latin word “plumbum” is the root of the English word “plumb line.” It is translated to liquid silver.

By aligning their measurement to the immutable force of gravity, Plumb lines are never inaccurate.

<https://becauseofgrace.wordpress.com/2021/08/07/leadership-plumb-lines/>

B. (:8a) Vision Received – God’s People Must Acknowledge God’s Standard

*“And the LORD said to me, ‘What do you see, Amos?’
And I said, ‘A plumb line.’”*

Billy Smith: The Lord's question required Amos to concentrate on the vision in order to identify its contents. “*What do you see*” is more accurately “*what are you seeing*,” since the verb is a **participle**. The prophet was in the process of observing what God was showing him. How Amos understood what he was seeing seems to be the intent of the Lord's question.

II. (:8b-9) CROOKEDNESS DEMANDS JUDGMENT ONCE GOD’S PATIENCE HAS BEEN EXHAUSTED

“Then the Lord said,”

A. (:8b) Day of Accountability Approaching

“Behold I am about to put a plumb line In the midst of My people Israel.”

Billy Smith: God was checking his own people, who had been built true to plumb, to see if they would stand the test or have to come down. On the basis of that test the Lord announced a new policy of the end of grace: “*I will spare them no longer.*” Israel could not stand the test. The Lord's threatened intervention would not be directed by arbitrary motives but by an incorruptible test, the plumb line.

B. (:8c) Delays in Judgment Have Ended

“I will spare them no longer.”

Trent Butler: No longer could the prophet pray and expect God to “*relent.*” The day of compassion was past. Israel was untrue and faithless before God. The day of judgment had been announced. Israel's days were numbered. God is in the business of hearing prayers and showing compassion, but he is also in the business of measuring his people and bringing judgment on those who do not stay true to him.

Now the prophet's role changed. Intercession and mediation became useless and impossible. The prophet had to switch from representing the people before God to representing the God of judgment before the people.

C. (:9a) Designated Focal Points of Idolatry Targeted for Judgment

*“The high places of Isaac will be desolated
And the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste.”*

Allen Guenther: The king’s palace and the temple frequently adjoined the city wall and were located at the most defensible part of the city. The construction engineer in the vision is *standing on* (7:7, Heb.; not by or *beside*, as in NIV/NRSV) *the wall*, holding the plumb line that all may see how seriously the wall is out of plumb. The danger is evident; their most formidable point of defense is tottering. Enemy sappers might

easily undermine the wall at its weakened point and permit their assault troops access to the city through the beach. Or an earthquake could bring the wall crashing down.

Israel is that leaning wall. The religious centers, whether local cult *high places* or sanctuaries in major fortified cities – all will fall to the enemy. The royal family will go down in defeat. The prophecy does not spell out the reasons nor the time; the fact is sufficient. In preventing intercession (7:8b), the Lord ensures the fulfillment of this prediction.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: the religious and political hierarchy of the nation. All these will be dismantled by the direct military action of the Lord.

Billy Smith: Nowhere could religious purity be found, neither in established sanctuaries nor in the high places where the people resorted to worshipping pagan deities.

D. (:9b) Devastating Judgment Carried Out

“Then shall I rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

James Mays: The announcement contains an eloquent correspondence to the symbol of the plumb line; devastation will fall upon the principal structures of the Israelite state, its **religion** and its **dynasty**. Yahweh has measured the shrines and the ‘house’ of Jeroboam and found them of no use. ‘Your highest and holiest shall perish’ (**Well-hausen**). Isaac is used as a name for the northern kingdom (cf. **7.16**) *High places* and *sanctuaries* are inclusive of all the religious sites in the nation. The high place (*bāmā*) was a shrine on a hill in open country; usually they were equipped with altar, sacred grove and trees, pillars, etc. Many had been in continuous use by the residents in local areas since Canaanite times. The sanctuary (*miqdāš*) was a holy place, usually a temple. The sanctuaries are the official religious centres of the northern kingdom, Bethel (**7.13**) and Dan, established by Jeroboam I. The instrument of devastation and death will be ‘*the sword*’ (cf. **9.1, 4**). Amos names no historical protagonist, only the divine one. The fall of Israel’s national existence will be Yahweh’s act; Israel’s God has become his executioner.

Billy Smith: At any rate, “judgment, terrible and drastic” was on its way, “certainly not because God wills it, though he does, but because the people deserve it and their persistently wicked behavior demands it.”

Gary Smith: The vision abruptly ends without any prayer of intercession or any message of hope for Amos’s audience.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why does God transition from delaying judgment to implementing judgment?

2) In what ways do we try to substitute our own standard of measurement instead of submitting to God's plumb line?

3) Why did God target these specific centers of idolatry and dynasty failure?

4) Does this passage have an eschatological application as well as the historical fulfillment?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Anthony Petterson: The third vision is of a plumb line, but Amos is not given any opportunity to intercede. Instead, God asks him what he sees and then explains the vision in a way that indicates the certainty of judgment. The plumb line suggests God is measuring up his people against the requirements of the covenant, and they are found wanting (v. 8). God will destroy Isaac's high places and sanctuaries used for idolatrous worship. Isaac was Jacob's father and is another way of speaking of Israel (v. 9). God will also rise against Jeroboam II, the king of the northern kingdom of Israel (cf. 1:1). God pronounces the end of his dynasty, as judgment fulfilled with the death of his son Zechariah in 752 BC (2Ki 15:8-12).

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The third vision (7:7-9) is at the heart of the visions report both in terms of place (positioned at the very centre) and in terms of literary form and function. On the one hand, it is clearly meant to be read together with the fourth vision (8:1-3). In contrast to the first pair of event-visions (forming of locusts/raining down of fire), the third and the fourth are symbolic visions centred around a particular object whose meaning is key to their message (plumb line/basket of fruit). They have a similar structure which deviates from that of the preceding two reports (see Introduction) and are connected by means of verbal repetition: *Amos, what do you see?; my people Israel* (contrast Jacob in 7:2, 5); *I will never again pass them by* (7:8 = 8:2). On the other hand, the third vision has a special connection with the fifth (9:1-4). They are the only two that begin with a vision of God himself, formulated in exactly the same way: *the Lord [was] standing beside* ('*ādōnāy niṣṣāb 'al*). Thus, the third vision, which marks the transition between the first pair (7:1-6) and the following fourth and fifth visions, binds the whole together.

Alec Motyer: We may put it like this, within the terms of the vision itself: a person may claim to possess every building skill and qualification, but the plumb-line applied to the wall will soon reveal whether that claim is valid or bogus. It must be exactly the same with the people of God: they may well claim every heavenly and spiritual blessing and qualification, but the **plumbline of divine testing applied** to certain assessable aspects of their lives and persons will soon show with what reality that claim is made. Therefore Amos does not pray, for testing such as this belongs to the very terms of reference of God's people; it is part of the constitution. . .

What, then, in sum, is the distinctive life of the people of God? They are brought to Him by grace, redeeming grace expressed in blood-sacrifice; they walk with Him according to the pattern of the law, the pattern of His very own life; and they are accompanied by the same redeeming grace so that they may resort to it for atonement, cleansing, forgiveness, renewal and whatever else they may need in order to remain in His holy fellowship. The grace of law and the law of grace make up the interwoven strands of the divine plumb-line. . .

No more will the Lord turn the 'blind eye' of patient forgiveness; the plumb-line is to be set up in the midst and only those who live by its standards can reckon themselves among His true and accredited people.

The first to fall before this test will be the **high places of Isaac**... and the **sanctuaries of Israel (7:9)**. We need not retrace in any detail the religion of the high-places and shrines. They were places where grace was abused and law was neglected. Grace was abused first of all in its nature. The grace of God in the Mosaic tradition was God's freely given love reaching out to draw sinners to Himself. It was spiritual throughout: in its origin in God and in its benefits among men. But at the shrines the grace sought was the benefit of worldly prosperity through fertility in the land, in the stock and in the family. Grace was abused, secondly, in its appropriation, for in Scripture grace is bestowed in answer to prayer, but in the sanctuaries the blessing of God was sought by means of ritual fornication—the human fertility act being used as a visual aid to prompt the God to perform His parallel function for the world. Is it any wonder that this abuse of grace fell before the plumb-line? Furthermore, as we have seen, there was nothing more to the shrines than this, no pressure for a reformed life, no voice of the law of God calling to obedience. The shrines therefore were judged by the plumb-line and were found inadequate: they abused grace and forgot law.

The second candidate for rejection was the **house of Jeroboam (verse 9)**. This politically able king—the first to be named after the founding king of the schismatic northern kingdom and the last king to achieve anything like affluence and stability for his kingdom—receives scant attention in the narrative of the book of Kings, but it is recorded that *he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin (2 Ki. 14:24)*. Now the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat—dealing with the matter broadly and not at all in detail—was basically the sin of disobedience to the law of the Lord. His kingdom was given to him upon moral conditions: *If you will hearken to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments... I will be with you, and will build you a sure house... (1 Ki. 11:38)*. But Jeroboam did no such thing. Indeed his first major act was to disobey Yahweh in the matter of the shrines at Bethel and Dan and in the setting up of golden calves. Jeroboam, therefore, is the man who rejected the law of the Lord and proceeded to corrupt the grace of the Lord also.

We see in these two examples of rejection what a unity the will of God is. In the shrines, when the law of grace was abused the grace of law was forgotten; in the royal house, when the grace of law was forgotten the law of grace was abused. Both alike fall before the test of the plumb-line.

Lloyd Ogilvie: God set a living, ever-present plumb line in history in the Incarnation. Christ is our plumb line. And the walls of our lives are constantly being measured by Him. He is both the Chief Cornerstone and the One who measures us by His plumb line of absolute love, forgiveness, service, purity, and honesty. The good news is that He is the Master Builder of our character and not only shows us what is out of plumb but helps us straighten the wall. We do not have to remain as crooked saints. But sometimes we refuse to admit our wall is crooked.

I have often wondered if the reason that God decided not to pass by Israel again was that the thing He found most out of plumb was the people's lack of response to the first two visions. They would not repent when He offered to relent. The worst thing ever to be out of plumb for a saint is the unwillingness to accept forgiveness. That pride, coupled with the refusal to return to righteousness and justice, brought forth the announcement that the wall of Israel would be destroyed.

TEXT: Amos 7:10-17

TITLE: HISTORICAL INTERLUDE -- CONFRONTATION AT BETHEL: DEALING WITH OPPOSITION

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S MESSENGER MUST STAND UP TO OPPOSITION BY RELYING ON DIVINE AUTHORITY

INTRODUCTION:

Gary Smith: The incident focuses on two factors:

- (1) the authority of Amos's vision about the future destruction of Israel's temples and ruling family, and
- (2) the nature of Amos's prophetic calling.

Amos and Amaziah have conflicting points of view on both issues and dispute the validity of Amos's words from the Lord.

Billy Smith: The issue in the narrative of the encounter between Amos and Amaziah was one of authority. **Who was in charge** of the people called Israel? Was it Jeroboam the king, or Amaziah the priest at Bethel, or Amos the prophet of God, or God himself? The prophet's report of his vision of a plumb line (7:7-9) ended with a strong judgment word against Israel's religious sites, such as Bethel, and against the nation's ruling dynasty, represented by Jeroboam II.

James Mays: This story of the encounter between Amos and Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, the only piece of prophetic biography in the book, falls into three parts:

1. the priest's report to the king (vv. 10f.);
2. the priest's command to Amos (vv. 12f.);
3. Amos' answer to the priest (vv. 14-17).

This answer contains an oracle against the priest, the only example in Amos of an oracle of judgment against an individual. The oracle may have occasioned the composition of the narrative; it supplies the introduction of characters and the setting which the oracle pre-supposes. The occasion must have been a crisis in Amos' career, and may have marked the end of his activity, at least at Bethel. But what happened as a sequel to the encounter is unknown.

Thomas Constable: [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. Her children would die by the sword. This may also imply the end of Amaziah's family line. Amaziah's 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).

Alec Motyer: This little piece of personal narrative about Amos reveals him at his courageous best, but, more than that, provides us with deep instruction about the nature and function of the man of God, the experiences he may expect to encounter, the resources on which he can draw and the persevering fortitude which is to mark his career. . .

There is no service of God without **opposition, persecution and trial**. This truth lies on the surface of the story before us, and it is well worth our while to face it and accept that it is so. How often servants of God are knocked off course by the onset of difficulties and oppositions!

Robert Martin-Achard: **Verses 10–17** rest upon a direct witness; they comprise actually three wordy confrontations.

1. In the first one Amaziah denounces the prophet to the king (**vv. 10 f**).
2. In the second, he takes Amos to task himself and orders him to leave the country as quickly as possible (**vv. 12 f**).
3. In the last, the prophet justifies himself by referring to his vocation (**vv. 14 f**), and ends the dialogue by uttering a terrible oracle against Amaziah that seems indirectly to involve also the Israelites as a whole (**vv. 16 f**).

He speaks with the marvelous and terrible freedom of one who knows himself to be the **messenger of the God of Israel**. Nothing then can restrain him, neither political nor religious powers, nor can anything divert him from his calling.

John Goldingay: The Amos scroll is more interested in the bigger picture:

- that the prophet confronts the priest,
- that the word of Yahweh confronts the state,
- and that the resistance of the latter indeed means that Yahweh must bring about the calamity that he has shown Amos.

I. (:10-11) OPPOSITION TO AMOS INTENSIFIED BY AMAZIAH'S APPEAL TO THE KING

A. (:10a) Unholy Power Partnership of Priest and King

*“Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel,
sent word to Jeroboam, king of Israel, saying,”*

Gary Smith: Amaziah's authoritative tone and strong statements suggest that he is the high priest at the Bethel temple. He seems to be an important government official with the power to regulate and supervise what happens at this sanctuary and to protect it from foreign ideologies that might undermine its state-approved religious activities. Amaziah's strong accusations (**7:10–13**) that Amos's words are a “*conspiracy*” (*qšr*, falsehood, treasonous act) suggest an organized plot to overthrow the government. This

would be considered rebellion, sedition, or subversion by those in authority. No wonder Amaziah thinks the land cannot possibly allow him to speak like this in Israel (7:10). As a loyal political appointee and protector of the status quo of that culture, Amaziah communicates his concern over Amos's words to King Jeroboam II.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Of all the people in Israel who should have been alarmed by a direct word from Yahweh, it should have been the head of the religious establishment. But then, down through history religious leaders from popes to pastors have sometimes been the least responsive to revival or reform—these threaten their vested interests.

Allen Guenther: Amaziah, then, appears to be fulfilling a double obligation: informing Jeroboam of the content and source of prophecies directed at him, and expelling prophets who have spoken as madmen or without authorization (cf. **Jer. 29:26**).

B. (:10b) Unsubstantiated Rumors Reported to the King

“Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words.”

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The claim that the land is not able to bear all his words implies that there is widespread dissatisfaction with Amos's preaching. This may be a self-serving exaggeration, but it could very well reflect accurately the situation. The oracles in the rest of the book indicate that the prophet's provocative statements met with scepticism and unbelief.

Gary Cohen: Amos did not “conspire against” the king, as Amaziah charged. The prophet who condemns the evil is not the cause of the evil, or of the punishment that follows the evil. Similarly, in **1 Kings 18:17**, wicked Ahab accused Elijah by his question of denunciation, “*Is this you, you troubler of Israel?*” Note Elijah's classic reply, “*I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and you have followed the Baals*” (v. **18**).

C. (:11) Unfavorable Misrepresentations of Amos' Message

“For thus Amos says, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.’”

J. Vernon McGee: Amaziah went in and deliberately **lied** to the king about Amos. Amos had not said that Jeroboam would perish with the sword, and Jeroboam did not. Amos had said, “*And I [God] will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword,*” which meant that warfare would come, and it did come. Israel was finally taken into captivity to Assyria.

Allen Guenther: The fact that Amaziah's report does not quote Amos's words precisely as they are given in **7:9** has raised some questions.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: Amaziah's report could be taken either as a quotation of an oracle which did not find its way into the book (Soggin 1987: 131), or as an accurate and fair representation of the gist of Amos's preaching (Sweeney 2000: 258).

II. (:12-13) OPPOSITION IMPLEMENTED BY THREATENING CONFRONTATION WITH AMOS – DELIVERING ULTIMATUM OF DISMISSAL

A. (:12) Dismissal Based on Imputation of False Motives to Amos

*“Then Amaziah said to Amos,
‘Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah,
and there eat bread and there do your prophesying!’”*

Gary Smith: The motivation that Amaziah provides to encourage a positive response is that Amos can make money in Judah. This comment imputes negative financial goals (he is a professional prophet who wants to get rich off the people of Israel with his wild prophecies) as Amos's primary reason for prophesying. Finally, Amaziah legitimates his own authority by stating that this is a state temple that is controlled by the king; thus, he has the power to deny permission for anyone to make negative political statements about the king in the temple area.

Billy Smith: Stacking two imperatives together, “get out” (*lek*, “go,” or “walk”) and “go back” (*berah*, “flee,” i.e., “run for your life”), reveals Amaziah's sense of urgency in dealing with the problem Amos created by his preaching. He wanted Amos out of Bethel, back in Judah, and out of his way.

Allen Guenther: From Amaziah's perspective, Amos's prophesying in Israel means that some enemy of Jeroboam's is financing a revolt, or perhaps the prophet is being paid to invoke evil on the kingdom, in the manner of Balaam (**Num. 22-24**).

B. (:13) Dismissal Based on Elevating Human Institutions over Divine Authority

*“But no longer prophesy at Bethel,
for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence.”*

Tchavdar Haejiev: Amaziah disparagingly brushes aside Amos's accusations as politically motivated drivel. The prohibition to prophesy at Bethel is explained by pointing out its status as the king's sanctuary and a temple of the kingdom. If there was any doubt about the close link between cult and monarchy, this final remark removes it completely. It also demonstrates why cultic and social criticism are so closely tied in Amos's preaching. Israel's worship is governed and administered by the royal court and serves to legitimize royal power.

III. (:14-17) OPPOSITION INVALIDATED BY RELIANCE UPON DIVINE AUTHORITY

A. (:14-15) Confirmation of His Divine Calling and Commission

“Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah,”

John Goldingay: In the way Amaziah has spoken of Amos as a seer or prophet, however, he has shown that he misunderstands who Amos is. He is not a prophet in either of the senses that Amaziah might assume (the personal counselor or the royal counselor). He isn't someone who went to prophetic school; he didn't belong to the “*sons of the prophets*,” to a prophetic community such as the one at Beth-el with which Elijah and Elisha were involved (**2 Kings 2:3**). He wasn't sent by a prophet mentor whom he might call “father,” like Elisha in relation to Elijah. He isn't on the sanctuary payroll. He works as a cattleman, and as a dresser of the trees that produce mulberry-figs down in the Jordan Valley (or in the Shephelah, according to Tg) for human beings and/or cattle to eat. It sounds like a much humbler role than being a sheep-farmer in Teqoa (**1:1**). If he is being ironically self-deprecating, this supports the suggestion that he is being ironic throughout **v. 14**.

1. (:14b) Clarifying His Background

*“I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet;
for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs.”*

James Mays: When Amos answers Amaziah, does he deny that he is a prophet (*nābī'*), or does he say that he had not been a prophet until Yahweh called him (**v. 15**)? Are the sentences in **v. 14** to be translated in the present tense or in the past tense? The problem lies in the ambiguity of Hebrew syntax; the sentences are nominal sentences which could be translated in either tense.

Gary Smith: Since Amos was sent to prophesy, his statement that he is not a prophet (**7:14**) can make sense only if *nby'* (*prophet*) is interpreted to mean a professional prophet who makes his living by being paid for prophesying.

Billy Smith: Jeroboam claimed authority in Bethel as the king of Israel. Amaziah claimed authority in Bethel as the high priest there. But Amos claimed no authority. He had no official title. Neither a *bôqer* nor a *bôles* of sycamore figs had any professional clout in Bethel. Nevertheless he did not flee before Amaziah (cf. **1 Kgs 19:2**). The only authority Amos needed rested in the God who took hold of him for service as his spokesman. **Wolff** considered it notable that “the first classical and canonical prophet stresses that he is a layman.” He observed that Amos denied three times “the connection between his own self and what he proclaims: I—no prophet! I—no prophet's disciple! I—a livestock breeder!” Then Amos gave a threefold pointer to Yahweh as the way Amaziah and Israel should hear what he had to say: “*But Yahweh took me from following the flock, and Yahweh said to me: ‘Go, prophesy unto my people Israel! Now therefore hear the word of Yahweh!’*” The prophet explained that he could not resist God's word and that Amaziah and Israel should not resist God's word. Only those chosen and sent out by God have authority to speak God's message.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: Amos's opening response ‘*I [’ānōkī] am not a prophet, and I [’ānōkī] am not a prophet's disciple, I [’ānōkī] am a cattle breeder*’ (njps) contains a

threefold recurrence of the first-person singular pronoun 'ānōkī (on which see 2:9–13 above) which in Hebrew sounds very much like the 'ānāk object seen in the third vision (7:7–8). Scholars have long suspected that the choice of this exotic word in the vision has, in part at least, been dictated by desire to convey some meaning via wordplay. The similarity between 'ānāk and 'ānaḥā 'groaning' is often noted, and it is possible it played a role, especially in the original formulation of the visions. The link between the narrative and the third vision **identifies the prophet Amos with the plumb line**. He is the final test of the nation's spiritual condition. Israel's response to Amos's ministry will demonstrate whether the wall is salvageable or bent beyond repair.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Sycomores did not grow in the area of Tekoa but rather in the Shephelah to the west of Tekoa (1 Kgs 10:27; 2 Chr 1:15; 9:27–28) and in the Jordan and Jericho Valleys to the northeast. The text does not say whether Amos owned the land on which the sycomores grew or leased it, but their mention confirms that he worked with flocks and herds (*nôqēd*, 1:1; *bôqēr*). The tree's leaves and fruit can serve as fodder, so it is likely that Amos (and perhaps others of his group) went down to one of these areas (the Jericho Valley would have been closer) for pasturage at the end of the summer. The dense foliage of the sycomore and the presence of the figs would have served him well for several months and would not have led him too far from Jerusalem. He could have harvested the figs for his stock and perhaps sold some of the excess, as well as stored some for future need. The principal intent was probably not to have another source of income but to nourish his animals throughout the year.

2. (:15) Citing His Divine Call and Commission

*"But the LORD took me from following the flock
and the LORD said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.'"*

Gary Smith: Amos makes his living by secular employment and is not motivated to come to Israel to prophesy for money. The motivation for his prophecies is the call of God that has instructed him to prophesy in Israel (7:15). He is under divine compulsion to do what Amaziah says he may not do. Amaziah is in rebellion against God's plan and opposes God's power. His command to Amos is a conspiracy against the divine command and God's obedient servant. Amaziah's rejection of both the message and the messenger of God puts him in opposition to God.

Alec Motyer: **The man of God rests upon his divinely given authority.** The essence of what Amos says to Amaziah can be summed up in the words '*Not I... the Lord*'. He rests his whole case on the single fact of obedience to the vocational word of God. As against Amaziah's attempt to 'pull rank', Amos replies that he has,

1. first, the **authority of vocation**, the Lord said to me, *Go*;
2. secondly, the **authority of revelation**, the possession of a word from God to speak: *the Lord said... prophesy*;
3. thirdly, the **authority of commission**: *Go... to my people Israel*.

Amos underlines this authority by a denial and an affirmation. He denies that his authority is in any way whatsoever self-generated. He was neither by nature nor self-

appointment a prophet, nor had he ambitions or plans such as would have made him enter the probationary stage by becoming a prophet's son, a member of a school or guild presided over by a senior prophet (cf. 2 Ki. 6:1). His life and attentions were directed in a humdrum, secular job, herding sheep and farming sycamore-figs. On the other hand he affirms that the Lord took me. The added words from following the flock imply the element of surprise and suddenness, that is to say, while he was (contentedly) engaged in his daily concerns, he was arrested, apprehended, conscripted. An authoritative hand from outside gripped him and he became what he was not before and what he would never have made himself.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: That Yahweh uses a spokesperson from another country, who is not a trained prophet, to condemn the Northern Kingdom makes the indictment more impactful. God will use whom he wills—in this case a well-placed foreigner and true follower—to denounce Israel's sociopolitical and religious world and its unjust and wrongheaded national ideology.

B. (:16-17) Confirmation of His Prophetic Message from the Lord

James Mays: The oracle against Amaziah is in the standard form of an **oracle of judgment**. It opens with a summons to hear (**16a**), states the indictment against its addressee (**16bc**), then uses the messenger formula (**17a**) to introduce the verdict of punishment (**17b-e**). Amaziah is guilty of having contradicted the command of Yahweh to Amos. The messenger of a king who came bearing the king's own word was an extension of the royal person; Amaziah has pitted his order against the very will of Yahweh in presuming to exercise authority over his messenger. In doing so the priest stands in a company of others who have opposed prophets raised up by Yahweh and so added to the guilt of Israel (**2.11f.**). His punishment will be to suffer the judgment which will fall upon the nation as a whole, and therein lies its poignant appropriateness. When the divine sentence of exile for Israel is carried out Amaziah will go too. His wife will be publicly shamed, used as a harlot for the soldiers of the victorious enemy (**Isa. 13.16; Zech. 14.2**). His heirs will be slain. His own property will be divided up and parcelled out by the victors (**II Kings 17.24; Micah 2.4; Jer. 6.12**). He himself, the priest whose office it was to protect the cult and people against all uncleanness (**Lev. 10.10**), will be carried away to die in a land that is unclean because it is the dominion of foreign deities (**I Sam. 26.19; Hos. 9.3f.; Ezek. 4.13**). All this will happen to others, but it has a terrible particularity for Amaziah. The desecration of his wife, the end of his house, the loss of his inheritance in Israel, and his contamination—all, in effect, constitute a fearful divesting of office. His priesthood will be brought to a terrible and final end.

1. (:16) Fatal Fallacy of Rebuffing Divine Warnings of Judgment
*“And now hear the word of the LORD:
you are saying, 'You shall not prophesy against Israel
nor shall you speak against the house of Isaac.'”*

2. (:17) Five Covenant Curses to Be Executed Without Fail
“Therefore, thus says the LORD,”

Alec Motyer: The Word of God has a steely insistence on being heard and requires an insistent ministry. No matter how much the Amaziah’s of this world say *Do not prophesy*—or, to put the matter for today, Do not preach the Bible—the reply must always be the same: *Therefore thus says the Lord (17)*. The man of God abides **faithful to the Word of God**.

Gary Cohen: To that one who wanted Amos’s message of judgment against the Northern Kingdom stopped, God addresses a castigation of the utmost severity: “*Your wife will become a harlot in the city*” (v. 17). The word spoken of Amaziah’s wife is *zanah*, “to commit fornication.” Thus Amos’s stinging rebuke to the clergyman who seeks to silence Amos’s denunciation of the immorality of the day was, “*Your wife [Amaziah’s]”* would end up in such desperate conditions that for survival she would turn to the most demeaning, illegal, and immoral form of self-support. In his sophistication, Amaziah resented Amos’s direct, upbraiding speech, which indicated there would be a disruption of the smooth, royal high society in which he and his wife mingled. The cities of Samaria and Bethel, with their false religion, pseudo-sophistication, and immorality, would be destroyed and degraded by the ungodly Assyrians. Those who longed to engage in so much paganism would soon feel what the forces of complete paganism would bring when unleashed upon a group. Women, whose husbands had been slain, would turn to prostitution to earn a living. Men and women, who were the children of Amos’s day, would be slain by the Assyrian sword. The land of Israel would be divided by the conquerors and given away to foreign people. The nation of Israel would “*certainly go from its land into exile*” (v. 17).

- a. Wife Humiliated via Public Prostitution
“*Your wife will become a harlot in the city,*”
Deut. 28:30

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Amaziah’s wife will become a prostitute (*znh*) in the city. In context, this could very well mean in **Bethel**. That is, the wife of one of the foremost individuals in the city of the nation’s premier sanctuary will be publicly humiliated in that very place. Opinions differ about exactly what is pictured here. One possibility is that she will be **raped** by the conquering enemy troops (e.g., **Isa 13:16; Lam 5:11**). The evidence for such behavior, however, is not as clear as one might suspect. Victorious armies could be incredibly cruel, but this act is not listed among the ways that they would humiliate defeated peoples. In addition, the Old Testament uses different verbs than the one here to describe forced sexual violation: *’nh* (piel; e.g., **Gen 34:2; Judg 19:24; 20:5; 2 Sam 13:12, 14, 22, 32; Lam 5:11**) and *šgl* (**Isa 13:16; Zech 14:2**). A better interpretive option is that she will be **driven to prostitution to support herself after the death of her children** and the removal (and ultimate death) of Amaziah in another land. A middling view is that both rape and prostitution were likely outcomes of war. The vocabulary of the verse and the contextual data endorse the

second option. His wife's tragic status would disqualify Amaziah from his priestly office (**Lev 21:7–9, 13–15**).

b. Children Eliminated

“your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword,”
Deut. 28:30; also Lev. 26:32

M. Daniel Carroll R.: It was not uncommon to kill younger children if the vanquished were to be deported. Little ones would be a burden in such a trek. There is no reason, however, for Amaziah's children to be thought of as small; they could be older. Whether they will die in the taking of the city or be executed afterward is not said. Either way, the family will be left without heirs.

c. Land Confiscation

“your land will be parceled up by a measuring line,”
Deut. 28:30; also Lev. 26:32

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Amaziah's land will be confiscated and distributed among the victors (**2 Kgs 17:24; Jer 6:12**; cf. **Mic 2:4–5**). Priests normally did not own property (e.g., **Deut 10:9; 18:1; Josh 13:14, 33; Ezek 44:28**), but there are a few instances where priests and their families did possess land (Abiathar, **1 Kgs 2:26**; Jeremiah, **Jer 32:6–15**), whether it was granted to them for some reason, such as loyalty to the crown, or purchased. If the former were the case with Amaziah, it would reveal deeper, intertwined commitments to Jeroboam's regime and its ideology. This man of means will be reduced to **pauper's status** with the loss of heirs and inheritance.

d. Disgraceful Death

“and you yourself will die upon unclean soil.”
Lev. 26:38–39

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The meaning is most likely that the priest will die in another country far from Yahweh's residence and Israel's religious system and be buried in an unclean place and so permanently defiled (cf. **1 Sam 26:19; Ps 137:4; Ezek 4:13; Hos 9:3–4**). Amaziah's end is similar to others who opposed God's prophets, such as Zedekiah (**1 Kgs 22**) and Hananiah (**Jer 28**).

e. National Exile

“Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.”
Amos 5:27; 7:11

Billy Smith: The narrative of the encounter between Amos and Amaziah settled the issue of **authority**. Jeroboam was king of Israel, but he was supposed to rule the Lord's people under the Lord's authority. As a high priest Amaziah's concern should have been to serve the Lord's people under the Lord's authority. As God's prophet, Amos spoke to the Lord's people under the Lord's authority. The Lord was in charge in Israel because the people there were the Lord's people. The same is true in the church, where leaders

as well as congregations all serve under the Lord's authority. Each one is accountable directly to God, and each one has accountability to the others in the church.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: As the priest represents Israel in its rejection of the Lord, so his fate **embodies the doom of the nation**. The five-line oracle deals with the judgment on the priest whose exile in an unclean land prefigures the exile of Israel from its land. He will lose everything when his sons and daughters . . . fall by the sword, and when his land is parcelled out by line. His present possessions and the future of his line will come to nothing. Wrapped in this description of total loss is a dual statement of his utter humiliation and defilement. The fact that his wife will become a prostitute is the source of unimaginable disgrace and defilement that will result in the loss of his priestly status (**Lev. 21:7**). Dying in an unclean land also implies defilement and contradiction of his priestly calling. The oracle ends with the explicit statement of the reality symbolized by the priest's dire fate: Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land. This line, which frames the narrative (**v. 11**), highlights the **unstoppable nature of the word of God**. Amaziah's efforts to ban Amos from Bethel do not prevent the disaster from happening, but only ensure the ultimate fulfilment of his oracles.

Allen Guenther: The fate of the nation will enclose his own fate. The national sin of consistently silencing God's spokespersons (**Amos 2:12**) is mirrored in Amaziah's rejection of Amos for personal and political reasons. For Amaziah, exile is certain. The story of the interchange between Amos and Amaziah may be inserted between these visions as a way of pointing to overall unresponsiveness. This prepares the reader for the subsequent vision of judgment. **Nothing can any longer avert the judgment.**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does God so often use “**outsiders**” (like Amos) to perform significant service to His kingdom – despite the fact that they seem to lack the expected credentials of establishment figures?
- 2) Where have you faced **opposition** to your spiritual ministry as you seek to carry out your God-assigned responsibilities?
- 3) How can you prepare yourself to trust God's grace to **boldly** face the opposition of powerful enemies who might try to shut down your spiritual ministry?
- 4) Do you take seriously your **calling** related to your spiritual giftedness and the **authority** Christ has delegated to His disciples to carry out His Great Commission?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Goldingay: In a moment the scroll will present its account of Amos's fourth revelation, which completes the quartet, and maybe Amos originally delivered the four together, but meanwhile the scroll adds an incident that relates to the third revelation. Maybe Amaziah's action was precipitated by Amos's relating that third revelation, though it wouldn't be surprising if Amos delivered this kind of message at Beth-el on a number of occasions. . .

Amaziah "is completely unable to grasp the reality of Amos's message or even the possibility that God could speak such a message through this man at all." Pastors who support and are supported by an institution such as a church are always in a tricky position because they have **conflicting loyalties**. Paul deals with this dilemma by insisting that he has the right to being financially supported but by not exercising that right; being a tentmaker is like being a cattleman and tender of mulberry-fig trees. Corporately, First Testament prophets share his double commitment—some are state supported, some are not. Amaziah's words to Amos "were the communications of an ecclesiastic (not a heathen ecclesiastic, but a representative of the Church of Yahweh) who obviously regarded as self-evident the union not only of throne and altar (the altar of Yahweh) but also of mammon and altar." Pastors who receive salaries from their churches must assume that they are in danger of being Amaziah and should cultivate Amos-like figures who will stand up to them. Otherwise they and their people may pay a terrible price.

Lloyd Ogilvie: We all know people with an **Amaziah complex**. The complex is made up of a combination of control, defensiveness, and pride. People who have this complex are master manipulators and power brokers and will use people against one another to get their own way. Many of those who suffer from this spiritual malady are religious but do not know God or have a deep communion with Him. They usually say they believe in Him, but they resist His claims on their lives. And when the demands of righteousness are proclaimed, they can cheer if it does not invade their own priorities. There are always a few Amaziahs in most churches. Often, they seek positions of leadership.

But before we begin to single them out, we need to get in touch with the ways the complex may have invaded our own psyches. A good test is to question how we might have responded to Amos's visions, especially the plumb line. The only sure antidote to the Amaziah complex is to let the plumb line fall on our lives every day in honest, open prayer. Then our cry will be, "Lord, forgive!" That is the one thing Amaziah would not do; and the one thing we will never outgrow. We are called to be saints in plumb with a new commitment to pray for opportunities to practice our gift of righteousness. As **Elizabeth Barreth Browning** said, it is a "gift with a gauntlet in it."

M. Daniel Carroll R.: A common view is that **7:10–17** is designed to establish the **authority of the prophet** -- some would say in conscious allusion to Moses or Jeremiah. Certainly the issue of Amos's authority is an important component of the

narrative, and this view makes sense in the light of the high priest's challenge to Amos. Another potential motive behind the passage is **to explain why Amos no longer intercedes**. His efforts end because of the kind of response depicted in this passage, in which the priest at Bethel, as representative of the people and the king, rejects the divine messenger and word. **Forgiveness is now impossible**. Even if the placement of the passage is not chronological within the vision sequence, literarily it is well-placed to **confirm Israel's obstinacy**.

Amaziah is not the focus of **7:10–17**; neither is Amos. Ultimately, the passage **validates God's definitive announcement of judgment** on the religious and sociopolitical world of Israel (**7:8–9**). This substantiation of the judgment occurs in the nation's central sanctuary in a face-to-face encounter with Israel's supreme religious leader and revolves around speech (Amaziah's, Amos's, and Yahweh's).

Trent Butler: Supporting Idea: God's ministers serve at his call and command; they do not owe allegiance to any human official or institution.

Anthony Petterson: The announcement at the end of the third vision – that corrupt worship in the northern kingdom of Israel, along with its monarchy, will come to an end – leads to this narrative that illustrates the problems at the heart of the kingdom. While Bethel was where Jacob first encountered God (**Ge 28:19**), it was also where Jeroboam I erected the golden calf and hence was associated with **idolatry (1Ki 12:28-29)**. The priest Amaziah shows he is opposed to God by opposing Amos. Amaziah twists Amos's message of coming judgment by expunging any reference to God, effectively portraying Amos as a political conspirator (**Am 7:10**). He also implies that Amos is only after money – but perhaps it takes one to know one (**v. 12**). While Amaziah concedes that Amos is a prophet and that he has an extensive ministry since the land cannot bear all of Amos's words, Amaziah fails to acknowledge that Amos is speaking the word of God. Amaziah is an example of those **who command the prophets not to prophesy (2:12)**. His loyalty to the human king supersedes his loyalty to the divine king. Amos responds that he is not a professional prophet but made his living from other means before the Lord called him to prophesy (**7:15**). Amos is on a mission from God. Because of Amaziah's rejection of the word of God, God will reject him and the people he represents. The **curse**s of **v. 17** are the curses of the national covenant (see **Dt 28-30, 32, 41, 63; Lev 26:32, 38-39**).

TEXT: Amos 8:1-14

TITLE: VISION OF THE PERISHING SUMMER FRUIT – ISRAEL DESTINED FOR IMMEDIATE JUDGMENT

BIG IDEA:

THE ROTTEN NATION OF ISRAEL CONDEMNED TO ITS DESERVED JUDGMENT WITH NO MORE OPPORTUNITY FOR RECOVERY

INTRODUCTION:

John Goldingay: Chapter 8 begins with another report by Amos of a revelation concerning Yahweh's intention to bring disaster on Ephraim; this report, too, goes on to material that elaborates on the nature of the disaster and the reasons for it. Here the material comprises a series of sayings that once more takes up themes and also phrases from earlier messages in the scroll. It thus both suggests that those earlier messages are finding fulfillment and also that the inevitability of the disaster can be understood in light of the earlier messages. The disaster will involve widespread death and grief; total gloom will settle on the country. People will then long to discover what Yahweh is saying to them, but they will not be able to find it. Even young people will faint and fall. And the necessity of the disaster derives from people's focus on making money at the expense of ordinary people, and from their basing their commitments on a willfully false understanding of who Yahweh is and how he may be approached.

Warren Wiersbe:

I. The end is coming (Amos 8:1-3)

God often used common objects to teach important spiritual truths, objects like pottery (**Jer. 18-19**), seed (**Luke 8:11**), yeast (**Matt. 16:6, 11**), and in this text, a basket of summer (ripe) fruit. Just as this fruit was ripe for eating, the nation of Israel was ripe for judgment. The Hebrew word translated "summer" or "ripe" in **verse 1** (*qayis*) is similar to the word translated "end" in **verse 2** (*qes*). It was the end of the harvest for the farmers, and it would be the end for Israel when the harvest of judgment came (see **Jer. 1:11-12** for a similar lesson). "*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved*" (**Amos 8:2**).

II. Why the end is coming (Amos 8:4-6)

The reason was simple: Israel had broken God's Law and failed to live by His covenant. They trampled on the poor and needy and robbed them of the little they possessed (**Amos 8:4**), an indictment that Amos had often brought against the people (**2:6-7; 4:1; 5:11-12**). When they did business, the merchants used inaccurate measurements so they could rob their customers. The Law demanded that they use accurate weights and measures (**Lev. 19:35-36; Deut 25:13-16**), but they cared only for making as much money as possible. Added to their deception was their desecration of the Sabbath and the religious holy days. The worship of God interrupted their business, and they didn't like it! These evil vendors would not only alter their weights and measures and inflate

their prices, but they would also cheapen their products by mixing the sweepings of the threshing floor with the grain. You didn't get pure grain; you got the chaff as well.

III. How the end is coming (Amos 8:7-14)

The prophet used four pictures to describe the terror of the coming judgment.

- The first was that of an **earthquake** (v. 8) with the land heaving like the rising waters of the Nile River. (The Nile rose about twenty-five feet during its annual flooding stage.) Even the land would shudder because of the people's sins. Earlier Amos referred to an earthquake (**1:1**), but we aren't sure whether it was the fulfillment of this prophecy.
- God would also visit them with **darkness** (**Amos 8:9**), perhaps an **eclipse**. (There was one in 763 B.C.) The Day of the Lord will be a day of darkness (**Isa. 13:9-10; Joel 2:30-31**).
- The third picture is that of a **funeral** (**Amos 8:10**), with all their joyful feasts turned into mourning and wailing.
- Finally, the judgment would be like a **famine** (**vv. 11-14**), not only of literal food but also of spiritual nourishment.

Allen Guenther: This vision and its explanation are characterized by play on words and metaphors of contrast and reversal. The writer gathers together strands of thought from **chapters 5-7**. The air of death and sounds of mourning carry over from the funeral scene. Here is the last appeal to those still able to hear the word of the Lord. The temple songs of praise have become wailings for the dead.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: This passage serves as a preliminary conclusion to the book, summing up, and perhaps even reapplying to a new situation, some of its previous main themes. The end of Israel is announced in the fourth vision. The following oracles describe it in detail and explain again the reasons for its arrival. They are framed by two complementary glimpses into Israel's depravity: unjust commercial practices at the start and worship of foreign gods at the end. They build on the prophet's earlier social and cultic criticism, but the focus is different. Idolatry and oppression combine to strike at the very heart of the just order of creation established by God. Therefore, the people will experience the Lord's withdrawal, followed by a reversal of creation and the onslaught of the forces of chaos. These forces will bring darkness, undermine security, and sap all strength until even the young men and women fall into the bitter embrace of death. A frantic and pointless search for God's word, loud wailing and stunned silence at the descending horrors is in store. The silence is the most salient detail of the picture. As Israel tried to silence the prophet (**7:10-17**), so God now withdraws in silence as a response.

Lloyd Ogilvie: We run the danger of becoming ripened fruit through the long process of **persistent hypocrisy**. Israel's religious hypocrisy ripened and now would be cut off.

The image of the ripened fruit is hypocrisy at its final stage. Spoilage and putrefaction began. Decomposition was not far off. The vision of the basket of ripened fruit suddenly hits home with contemporary force. We all suffer from the danger of duality, of pretending to be pious while our actions contradict our words.

I. (:1-3) VISION OF A BASKET OF PERISHING SUMMER FRUIT = ARRIVAL OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

A. (:1-2a) Presentation of the Vision

"Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, there was a basket of summer fruit.

² And He said, 'What do you see, Amos?' And I said, 'A basket of summer fruit.'"

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The **summer fruit** (*qayis*; **2 Sam 16:1–2; Isa 16:9; Jer 40:10, 12; 48:32; Mic 7:1**) most likely includes figs, grapes, and pomegranates. This vision could be quite ironic in light of Amos's work with sycamore fig trees, but this is a reference to different kinds of fruit. The summer fruit was harvested in August and September. The Gezer Calendar (tenth century BC) calls the eighth and final month of the agricultural season "*the month of summer fruit*" (*yrh qš*). This phase of the agricultural cycle contrasts with the late spring planting of the first vision (**7:1**), when the destruction by the locusts threatened starvation. This harvest, after the hot summer months with the autumn rains in the offing, was a time of celebration of divine provision and of hope for good things in the coming months.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The connection between *summer fruit* (*qayis*) and *end* (*qes*) is achieved via wordplay, which the NIV tries to convey with its translation "*basket of ripe fruit / The time is ripe*". The two words are derived from different roots but sound similar, and in the dialect of Northern Israel may even have been pronounced the same. A similar technique is employed in Jeremiah's vision of the almond tree (**Jer. 1:11-12**).

B. (:2b) Purpose of the Vision = Judgment Has Come for Rotten Israel

"Then the LORD said to me, 'The end has come for My people Israel. I will spare them no longer.'"

Trent Butler: A people who do not obey God are ripe for his harvest of judgment. . . A disobedient nation whose political and religious leadership was more interested in personal power and in political position than in obeying God finds they are not as secure as they thought. God can declare "time's up" for any people, even a world power.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Yahweh announces, "*The end has come*" (cf. **Gen 6:13; Lam 4:18; Ezek 7:2–6**). The intercession is over (**7:1–6**), and Israel's leaders have proven themselves incapable and unwilling to accept God's prophet (**7:10–17**). That all the nation is implicated, not just the royal court and high priest, is clear in the declaration that the judgment is for my people Israel.

Allen Guenther: “*I will never again pass them by.*” This reminds readers of the first Passover and the escape from Egypt. The angel of death did “*pass over*” the homes of those who applied the blood of the Passover lamb to the doorjambs of their houses (**Exod. 12**). God has again come to visit his people, but this time the oppressors are the Israelites themselves. Will the sovereign Lord distinguish between those who are the oppressors and oppressed as he did in Egypt? Or will all suffer alike? The answer rushes forward on the heels of the question: *The end has come for my people, Israel.* The nation has passed the point of no return. The prophecy carries a strong note of finality.

James Mays: The decree which interprets the symbolic word announces a decision of Yahweh concerning his covenant people that is severe and unrelieved in its finality. Bā’ haqqēs: ‘*the end has come!*’ The key-word ‘end’ includes a temporal and a qualitative dimension. The time of punishing to correct and of passing over sin is at an end. The next event of Yahweh’s dealing with Israel will bring them to an end of death and destruction.

C. (3) Picture of the Aftermath of Judgment – Mourning and Death

“*The songs of the palace will turn to wailing in that day,*’ declares the Lord God. *Many will be the corpses; in every place they will cast them forth in silence.*”

M. Daniel Carroll R.: What causes this **wailing** (cf. **v. 8**)? It is the overwhelming number of dead bodies. The multitude of corpses is so painful and repugnant because they are left publicly exposed, rotting (cf. **Isa 34:3**), and as potential food for wild animals (cf. **1 Sam 17:46; 2 Sam 21:10; 1 Kgs 14:11; 2 Kgs 9:36; Ps 79:2; Jer 8:2; 9:22 [MT 9:21]; 16:4**). This devastating grief (cf. **Jer 4:8; 25:34; Lam 2:10; Mic 1:8; Zeph 1:10-11**) is exacerbated by the ignominy of not being able to properly bury the dead. These bodies have been thrown out into the open (cf. **4:3**), although by whom the text does not say. Perhaps they lay where they fell (cf. **Nah 3:3**). This scene may be linked to the judgment on the Bethel sanctuary in 9:1. Otherwise, contextually, the deaths would be due to the armed conflict mentioned in **7:7-17**.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The interjection *Be silent* (*hās*; cf. **6:10**) creates a harsh contrast with the beginning of the verse as it brings the loud wailing to a sudden stop. The magnitude of the disaster is conveyed through both noise and silence.

Jorg Jeremias: [Verse 3] strikes up two themes for what follows. First, all gaiety disappears and is transformed into lament, even within the sphere of the royal palace, the paradigmatic locus of the celebration of festivals; this constitutes a prelude to the thematic material of **v. 10a**. Second, it picks up ideas from **6:10**, with its reference (1) to the accumulation of corpses for which funeral personnel is no longer available—the catchword “cast” may be clarifying the fate of Samaria’s women (**4:3**)—and then (2) to the powerless attempt to defend oneself against God’s deadly nearness through silence, as is required in worship services in the presence of the holy (cf. the discussion of **6:10**); this constitutes a prelude to **v. 10b** and **vv. 13f**.

Thomas McComiskey: Just as the apparent promise of the summer fruit was turned into the assurance of Israel's destruction, so the joyous temple hymns (cf. **6:5**) will give way to the wailing of the populace of Israel when the wrath of Yahweh falls on them.

II. (:4-6) CATALOG OF SINS REQUIRING JUDGMENT

A. (:4) Selfish Mindset of the Prosperous Proud Elite

*"Hear this, you who trample the needy,
to do away with the humble of the land,"*

Gary Cohen: The previous three verses showed that the Northern Kingdom was reaching the point at which it would be fully ripe for judgment. Now, in the next three verses the **sins of moral decay** in Israel are described.

Israel was conducting harmful and dishonest business practices. She trampled the needy. Here the word *sha'af* means "to pant after, to breathe hard in racing after the prey," God saw Israel racing at full speed to catch up with the needy so she could pounce upon them as a wolf pounces upon a lamb. (See **Isa. 59:7**.) She was doing away with the humble, literally "*causing them to cease*" (from the Hebrew word *sabbath*, or *shabat* as the modern Israelis pronounce it).

James Mays: This saying is essentially another of Amos' indictments of those who oppress the poor (see **2.6ff.; 4.1; 5.12**). The normative presupposition of the indictment is not so much any single instance or list of commandments in Israel's legal tradition, as the total tendency and intention of the covenant law to protect and maintain the disadvantaged members of society. The weak and unfortunate were not to be exploited; they should be treated with the respect and concern due to kinsmen and neighbours.

Gary Smith: The acts of oppression (**Amos 8:4**) include "*trampling on the needy*" and "*doing away with the poor of the land*." Those who need help and cannot make it on their own receive no compassion or assistance but are taken advantage of. In their weak and defenseless position, they cannot protect themselves from those more economically powerful. There were manageable ways outlined in God's law for the poor to regain their self-respect and begin to stand on their own two feet. Israel's tradition encouraged people to help and share freely with the needy (**Ex. 22:21–23; Deut. 16:11, 14; 24:17–21**). In the present situation, however, those with the economic ability to help refuse to assist them; in fact, they purposely exacerbate the problems by manipulating things to their own advantage. In this way they "*do away with*" the poor. Such deeds, in other words, result in their annihilation, probably through starvation, poor health, or slavery.

B. (:5a) Greedy Materialistic Drive that Prioritizes Money over Worship

*"Saying, When will the new moon be over, So that we may sell grain,
And the sabbath, that we may open the wheat market,"*

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The greed of the merchants is so great that even a day of rest and celebration is seen as a tragic loss of opportunity to cheat and make profit.

James Mays: The quotation paints them as respectful of religion. They observed the holy days but underneath their piety was a **restless impatience**. ‘Ah, we can hardly bear the interruption of holy days, so impatient we are to get on with our business, our wheeling and dealing that brings the property and person of every man into our hands!’ New Moon, the first day of the lunar month, was observed in ancient Israel as a festival occasion and is often paired with Sabbath in lists of holy times (e.g. **II Kings 4.23; Isa. 1.13f.; Hos. 2.11**). It seems to have been of wide provenance in the ancient Near East, was adopted as a family festival by Israel, and later regularized in the temple cult. The observance of the Sabbath was required in the earliest strata of Israel’s law (**Ex. 23.12; 34.21; 20.8**). Both days were times for **cessation from normal work**. Those whom Amos quotes observe the days and show how devout they are in matters of public religion. But what matters this keeping of holy days, this proper piety in the sight of God and man, if all the while they are straining toward the ‘unholy days’ when their **true dedication to greed** fills the time? Once again the prophet shows the failure of faith which accompanies the success of religion, for the business they were so eager to continue was the enterprise of **betraying their Lord**.

J. Vernon McGee: God is saying that even when the rich went to the temple to praise God, they were so greedy and covetous that they were thinking about business the next day and how they could make more money by cheating their customers. They not only practiced their sin during the week, but they carried it into the temple. What a picture this gives us of Israel in that day—and of modern man as well.

West Palm Beach Church of Christ: God does not judge without cause. God is not acting out of emotional anger but out of justice because the sins of the nation have become so great. **Verses 4-6** describe the condition of the people’s hearts. Listen to what they are doing. They have become so worldly and so materially minded that they do not want to keep the feast and holy days to the Lord. In verse 5 they are asking when the new moon will be over so they can get back to selling grain. They want to get back to their schedules. They want the Sabbath to hurry up and end so they can get back to making money. In the process they are acting unjustly, destroying the poor and oppressing the needy as they try to acquire more for themselves. “When will worship be over? We want to get back to our schedules.” Can you see these people as clock watchers, hoping for the Sabbath to end so they can get back to making money? There is no joy in worship.

<https://westpalmbeachchurchofchrist.com/old-testament/amos/dark-days.html>

C. (:5b) Unethical Business Practices

*“To make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger,
And to cheat with dishonest scales,”*

Trent Butler: A people more devoted to commerce and coins than to the poor and to praise invite God's judgment. . . . At the trade booths, they oppressed the poor who had

to come to them to buy food. The rich shopkeepers reduced the amount of grain they measured out, used scales they knew to be inaccurate, and charged the poor higher prices (**Deut. 25:13–16; Mic. 6:9–12.**)

Lloyd Ogilvie: Weights and measures, so crucial to the economic order of the nation, were being falsified in the sale of grain, wheat, and produce. The ephah, a dry measure of 36.92 liters, or 65 pints, or about the size of our bushel today, was distorted by placing an object in it other than the commodity being weighed. If grain was being measured, the ephah would therefore contain less grain. The shekel (not to be confused with the coin by the same name) was a weight used on a scale. It was a limestone ball flattened at the bottom that weighed about 11.46 grams. If these weights were enlarged or made heavier, the purchase price would be fraudulently raised. The shekels were no longer “*just weights*” (**Lev. 19:36**) but had become “*deceitful weights*” (**Deut. 25:13, 15**). “*Falsifying the balances by deceit*” (**Amos 8:6**) meant to bend out of shape the cross beam of the scale, thus tampering with the scales themselves. All this was done to take advantage of the buyer, especially the poor and needy. The merchants sold contaminated wheat from the bins mixed in with the good wheat. Furthermore, profiting at the expense of the poor, the rich merchants used the money they had earned dishonestly in dealings with the poor to buy them for slavery.

Billy Smith: “**Skimping the measure**” is literally “*to make small the ephah.*” The ephah was a standard unit of dry measure, a half bushel. Using a container that would hold less than half a bushel in measuring bulk commodities allowed the merchants to cheat the customers.

“**Boosting the price**” is literally “*to make large the shekel.*” Before the use of minted coins, a shekel served as a standard weight by which to measure the silver used to purchase commodities. An enlarged shekel on the scale weighed against the customer's silver meant that he was paying more than he ought to pay for his purchase.

“**Cheating with dishonest scales**” was another method the merchants used to deceive their customers. They fixed the balance beam on the scales and made them into “*dishonest scales.*”

D. (:6) Goal of Exploitation and Oppression

*“So as to buy the helpless for money
And the needy for a pair of sandals,
And that we may sell the refuse of the wheat?”*

Billy Smith: The merchants took over property belonging to the needy as payment of debts. This greedy practice often resulted in slavery of the needy.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: They are even selling the sweepings of the wheat, that is, corn which had fallen to the ground, been trampled upon and mixed with straw and dirt.

Trent Butler: Such oppression soon emptied the pockets of the poor, who had to sell themselves into slavery to the rich or remain so deep in debt to them that they had to do whatever the rich commanded.

John Goldingay: The accusation closes (v. 6) by resuming the two kinds of critique.

1. First there is the more serious wrong involved in the treatment of the needy and the lowly to which v. 4 refers.
2. Then there is a further aspect of the cheating, or a reference to selling for human consumption the sweepings that would usually be fed to animals.

Allen Guenther: At root, all the sins mentioned grow out of greed and materialism. Instead of addressing the outrage of poverty, the well-to-do focus on ridding themselves of the poor (**Amos 8:4**), probably by enslaving them or forcing them into exile and out of their sight. Out of sight, out of mind, they reason.

Jorg Jeremias: Though one might perceive the contempt for human beings to be stronger in **Amos 2:6–8**, the intensification in **8:4–6** consists in the fact that the numerous infinitives disclose a methodical, multilayered strategy through which human beings become disposable goods for other human beings as a means of increasing wealth.

III. (:7-14) METAPHORS OF JUDGMENT

(:7) Transition from Accusation to Announcement of Judgment

*“The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob,
Indeed, I will never forget any of their deeds.”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: This oath is God’s answer to the injustice in the marketplace of **8:4–6**. In the second clause of the verse, Yahweh asserts, *“Surely, I will never forget any of their deeds.”* **Emphasis** is communicated by *never* and *any*. There will be no escaping the wrath of God for their actions and the misery they have caused the defenseless. This is a dramatic change from the first two visions, in which Yahweh relented from what he said he would do (**7:3, 6**). The end has come for those who have brought an end to the poor (v. 4). This is no “colorless threat”!

“pride of Jacob” -- correlate the phrase with **6:8**, its only other occurrence in the book. In this case, Yahweh sarcastically swears by Israel’s confident self-importance. In **6:8**, Israel’s haughtiness was **grounded in military self-sufficiency**. This was quickly disabused by the announcement of the destruction of the city that the fortresses were designed to protect (**6:9–11**), a play on words regarding the insignificance of their military victories (**6:13**), the prediction of foreign occupation (**6:14**), and the plea for mercy because Israel is so small (**7:2, 5**). In **8:4–6**, the arrogance is not rooted in an aura of invincibility but in **attitudes of unaccountability**. This conceit now is turned against the unjust; their greedy insolence prompts the judgment of God.

Thomas McComiskey: In the oath formula, the “Pride of Jacob” (v.7) is best understood as an appellation for God (cf. 4:2; 6:8; cf. also Hos 5:5; 7:10). “Glory” is used as a surrogate for God in **Jeremiah 2:11**. It is the pride of Jacob—that is, the Lord, Jacob’s glory—that guarantees this oath. The judgment that follows (v.8) will surely come because **God does not allow his glory to be sullied**.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The phrase can mean one of two things. It could refer to the land of Israel (**Ps. 47:4**), the Promised Land. Or, it could mean the arrogance of Israel, in which case Yahweh’s oath was more unchangeable than Israel’s persistent, unchanging refusal to reform. In either case, Yahweh’s oath is definite: He will not forget what His people had done to distort the privilege of being chosen and called to be His people.

Robert Martin-Achard: We note that the prophet blames the guilty one for coveting (shaaph) or for trampling on (*shuph*, with the Versions) the poor (2:7), for seeking to ruin the poverty stricken (lit. put an end to them, annihilate them), or by manipulating them for their own ends, or again by buying them for money, for a derisory amount, probably by forcing them to pay their debts with the complicity of the judges. The land of Israel had become the place of ‘trafficking in human beings’, more precisely in peasants so deeply in debt that they were incapable of escaping from the clutches of pitiless moneylenders (v. 6).

A. (:8) Judgment of Earthquake Turmoil

1. Earthquake

*“Because of this will not the land quake
And everyone who dwells in it mourn?”*

Robert Martin-Achard: The land falls and rises like the swelling of the Nile. Amos is once again in all probability referring to an earthquake. He is indicating particularly that it is just at that point where iniquity has its seat that world order is turned upside down. Injustice has cosmic consequences. Through their own fault people can imperil the harmony and even the existence of the earth. The consequences of scorning the ‘poor’, that is to say, of scorning the will of Yahweh go even as far as that, a fact that no one must ever forget!

2. Cosmic Disturbance

*“Indeed, all of it will rise up like the Nile,
And it will be tossed about,
And subside like the Nile of Egypt.”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The first thing to notice is that **sin negatively impacts creation**, a reality stated in other prophetic books (**Isa 24:4–6; Jer 12:4; 23:10; Hos 4:3**) and a fundamental theological principle since the transgression in the Garden of Eden (**Gen 3:17–19**). The series of natural calamities in **4:6–9** had been sent to drive Israel to repentance. That time has passed; this natural disaster will surpass anything that they have experienced heretofore.

Gary Cohen: The **Nile River** flows north from the Sudan, where the White and Blue Niles meet at Khartoum. In June the water turns green from the microorganisms; in July the color becomes red as the organisms die. Then from August through October the waters rise twenty-one to twenty-five feet in good years. If the river rises less than twenty-one feet, the lateral water flooding is insufficient. If it rises more than twenty-eight feet, the towns along it become flooded. This “life of Egypt” river, “El Nil,” leaves not only its irrigating waters but also a thin red-brown layer of natural fertilizer that annually renews the land.

By using **earthquake and river metaphors** God has pictured the initial, violent shaking of the Assyrian attack, which would be followed by the rising floods of invading Assyrians. The tossing of the waters pictures the havoc that would be raised by the Assyrians once they had conquered Samaria and had begun to deport the population and replace it with foreigners. Finally, after thoroughly subjugating the land, the Assyrians would subside like the Nile and would withdraw the major portion of their armies back into Assyria.

B. (:9) Judgment of Darkness Descending -- Gloom

*“And it will come about in that day,’ declares the Lord God, ‘I shall make the sun go down at noon
And make the earth dark in broad daylight.’”*

Gary Cohen: Darkness is often used in Scripture to signify calamity and God’s displeasure (cf. **Jer. 15:9; Ezek. 32:7-10; Mark 15:33**).

Tchavdar Hadjiev: Fraud in trade and exploitation of the poor undermine the just order of creation. The outcome is the undoing of creation harmony and the disintegration of the world into an abyss of darkness and grief. The point is similar to that of 5:7–9; note the repetition of turn in both places.

C. (:10) Judgment of Funeral Mourning -- Grief

1. Verbal Expressions of Grief

*“Then I shall turn your festivals into mourning
And all your songs into lamentation;”*

Billy Smith: Festivals usually characterized by joyous celebrations of the Lord’s blessings would become rituals of mourning (cf. **5:21**). The Lord’s intervention would turn all of Israel’s songs into lamentation (*qînâ*). Israel’s songs of praise and exultation celebrating life would become dirges for the dead (cf. **8:3**).

2. Physical Expressions of Grief

*“And I will bring sackcloth on everyone’s loins
And baldness on every head.”*

Billy Smith: “Sackcloth” was a rough garment (usually made of hair) worn at the hips as a symbol of mourning (cf. **Joel 1:8, 13**). So widespread would be the calamity and

grief that all Israel would don these garments. Shaving the head was another symbol of mourning (cf. **Ezra 9:3; Isa 22:12; Jer 48:37**). Baldness on every head suggests that every person in Israel would be touched by the grief-causing calamity.

3. Emotional Bitterness of Grief

*“And I will make it like a time of mourning for an only son,
And the end of it will be like a bitter day.”*

James Mays: The **bitterness** of the experience could be compared only to the extreme grief felt at the death of an only child whose funeral dashed every hope for the future (**Jer. 6.26; Zech. 12.10**). But dread of darkness and intensity of grief is not what determines the experience so much as the repeated first-personal verbs which beat through the whole passage in throbbing announcement that Yahweh is the author of it all. The only worship that will be left to Israel will be lament, the only life one of mourning, the only feeling hopelessness.

Billy Smith: This verse is marked by careful and concise poetic parallelism and is an “ironic litany of reversals.” The Hebrew verse consists of three lines with two parts to each line. The first part of each line has a verb that functions for both parts of the line. This style is difficult to translate into English and retain its uniqueness. Literally, the verse reads:

*I will turn your religious festivals to mourning,
and all your praises to dirges.
I will place upon all of you sackcloth
and upon (your) head baldness.
I will make it like mourning an only child
the end of it like a bitter day.*

Consequently, all three verses convey a similar message: **mourning comes because judgment has come**. Because Israel had turned God's justice and righteousness into bitterness and poison (cf. **5:7; 6:12**), he would turn their joy into grief.

E. (:11-14) Judgment of Famine for the Word of God

Anthony Petterson: The most devastating punishment is a famine of the word of God. Since his people have rejected his word, God will give them what they have chosen; the lifegiving word of God will be gone. People will stagger everywhere in search of it but will not find it. Young women and men, the strongest in the community, will faint. Those who have aligned themselves with false worship and idolatry will fall, never to rise again.

1. (:11) Famine of Hunger for the Word of God

*“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord God,
‘When I will send a famine on the land,*

*Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water,
But rather for hearing the words of the LORD.”*

Robert Martin-Achard: This oracle, which opens in almost the same way as the preceding one, announces still another catastrophe; an extraordinary famine is to strike the whole land, not one brought about by an invasion of locusts or by a prolonged absence of rain (**4:6 ff**), but one that Yahweh himself brings about by remaining silent. When they had had the chance, his people had not wanted to listen to the prophet. They had chased him from their territory. So now they find themselves facing the silence of their God. All communication between God and his own people is broken (**v. 11**). Now, Israel cannot live without the Word of Yahweh (**Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:3 f**). She is thus condemned to wander from one corner of the land to the other—the expression ‘*from sea to sea*’ describes symbolically the two extremes of the region (**Ps. 72:8; Zech. 9:10**)—but in vain. Yahweh has shut himself up in his silence and in this way manifests his condemnation of a guilty nation. The Israelites are running foul of the ‘No’ that their God utters in the absence of all dialogue with them, in fact, they are excommunicated. For God too there exists ‘*a time to keep silence, and a time to speak*’ (**Eccles. 3:7**). It is a question of being prepared to listen when the God of the Bible addresses his Word to us.

James Mays: The failure of prophetic vision and word would mean that Yahweh had turned away from them and abandoned them to their troubles (**Ps. 74.9; Lam. 2.9; Jer. 37.17; Ezek. 7.26**). Amos called upon Israel to seek Yahweh and his will that they might live (**5.4–6, 14**), but the time when Yahweh’s help was available was almost gone (cf. the same notion and imagery in **Isa. 55.1–7**). The time of the famine of Yahweh’s word approached, and it meant the absence of God for Israel (cf. **Hos. 5.15**).

2. (:12) Futile Search for the Word of God

*“And people will stagger from sea to sea,
And from the north even to the east;
They will go to and fro to seek the word of the LORD,
But they will not find it.”*

Allen Guenther: The inevitable deluge of questions will follow: Why? Why? Why, O Lord? In desperation the nation will search its world for answers and hope (**8:11-12**). They will find none. God will be silent. Israel refused to heed the lord’s words when he spoke in warning (cf. **Amos 4**). Now even the warnings have ended, and God will not listen to their prayers, no matter how shrill the pleading. Israel has been depending on her own resources, reveling in luxury and gluttony. The people’s sumptuous fare, elegant robes, and vaulted hairdos are replaced by fasting, sackcloth, and shaven heads. The land will mourn its dead.

James Mays: God’s wrath has two expressions, his absence and his action; both are equally terrible manifestations of his judgment.

3. (:13) Fainting from Thirst

*“In that day the beautiful virgins
And the young men will faint from thirst.”*

James Mays: Virgins and young men are the element of the population just coming to maturity, the ones with the greatest physical vigour and endurance; when they swoon from exhaustion, the rigours of the time will have overcome all (cf. **Isa. 40.30**). The thirst by which they will be overcome is the need and lack of any response from Yahweh in their plight (v. 11).

Lloyd Ogilvie: We can identify the **famine of hearing** in our own time. Mark the similarity to the famine of food. When people substitute hypocrisy for a dynamic relationship with God, there is an unsatisfied spiritual hunger. They go through the same process as in physical starvation. First agitation, then acrimony, followed by criticism and negativism. They run to and fro in search of meaning. Every religious movement, cult, cause, or activity is sought after as a source of feeding the terrible emptiness inside. Then there is the hollow look of discouragement and despair. And, long before the pulse stops, there is spiritual death.

4. (:14) Fatality of Religious Errors

a. Error of Religious Syncretism

“As for those who swear by the guilt of Samaria,”

b. Error of Religious Corruption

“Who say, 'As your god lives, O Dan,'”

c. Error of Religious Superstition

“And, 'As the way of Beersheba lives,'”

d. Fatality of Religious Errors Summarized

“They will fall and not rise again.”

Robert Martin-Achard: The blame lies upon those young people who reveal a dubious, syncretistic attitude, in the way in which they associate the worship of Yahweh with idolatrous practices that are probably of Canaanite origin.

Alec Motyer: In Samaria, therefore, there was either **syncretism** or an acceptance of a **multi-faith situation**, and neither of these would accord with Amos' theology or with truth. Syncretism takes the characteristic features of many religions and attempts to fuse them into one 'great religion' which will presumably attract and hold the adherents of the previously separated systems. The multi-faith approach is less sophisticated, simply tolerating side by side the worship of different gods—though it may, of course, be more sophisticated in saying that these are simply different names for the same God and that Yahweh was worshipped 'incognito' in all that was true in the worship of Ashimah. . .

Secondly, we have to guard the truth and worship of God against **corruption**. Dan (14b) was one of the schismatic and corrupt sanctuaries set up by Jeroboam I (1 Ki. 12:29). It was depraved much more in its tendencies and influence than in anything Jeroboam actually did. For example, the golden calves were a pedestal for the invisible throne of Yahweh just as were the cherubim in the Jerusalem shrine. In their idea therefore they could hardly be called heretical, but inevitably, as we have seen, their visibility wrought a popular identification between the invisible God and the sort of symbol with which He was identified. In effect therefore Yahweh became a **fertility deity**. This sort of defect ran through the cult Jeroboam set up. His central feast was ‘like’ the feast in Judah (1 Ki. 12:32), but its motivation was erroneous: **Jeroboam stands in the Bible as the man who sought to make religion serve the ends of politics**. The cult was a technique for establishing his own monarchy (1 Ki. 12:26-30): even God became a means to an end. This has good claim to being considered as ‘*the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin*’. The truth and worship of God must be safeguarded from that (however small) which detracts from the God who is revealed in Scripture, and responsibility rests with each worshipper to purify the thoughts and motives of his own heart so that God is worshipped for what He is and not for what we want from Him.

The third matter on which Amos focuses is by no means easy or certain in interpretation. RSV expresses what the Hebrew says: *As the way of Beer-sheba lives* (14c), an odd and elsewhere unexemplified expression. NEB ‘*By the sacred way to Beersheba*’ offers what can surely be the only possible interpretation: some religious merit or benefit was thought to accrue from the journey itself and people began to ‘*swear by it*’. Let us accept this as a good and likely understanding. It tells us that true religion must be safeguarded from **superstition**. It is very understandable that a thing as laborious as the journey from Israel through Judah to Beer-sheba would be looked upon as no small duty accomplished for the sake of religion and God. From this it is a small step to superstitious veneration for the doing of the thing. Superstition is a non-moral technique for securing God’s blessing: walking the road to Beer-sheba brought its own, automatic rewards. And in this sense there is very little which cannot become a superstition whereby we say ‘God must bless me because I have done...’. But slot-machine religion finds no place in the Bible.

Man lives by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God. If this food is withdrawn or corrupted there is no other way of satisfaction or security. In this regard **verse 14** must be taken as defining the people of **verse 13**, as indeed the Hebrew requires. Why are these folk suffering from thirst? Because they have only the cults to satisfy them and they remain unsatisfied. But more, at the end, they fall, and never rise again. Nothing but the Word of God can sustain and keep secure for all eternity. It is in keeping with what we have seen of the over-all pattern of these chapters that the notion of eternal security—that preoccupation of Amos—should find its way back into his teaching here. Religion as such (14) can only lead to the eternal loss of falling and never rising. But by contrast those who live by the Word live for ever.

Gary Cohen: The “*guilt of Samaria*” is the calf altars at Dan and Bethel. Those of Samaria swore their oaths with the formula “*As your god lives, O Dan,*” rather than “As Jehovah lives,” or “As the LORD lives.” They were guilty of an idolatrous worship of Jehovah. Their fate would be worse than that of the new young generation who would thirst and faint—namely, those idolaters were earmarked for absolute judgment, to “*fall and not rise again*” (Compare **Isaiah 40:30-31.**)

Tchavdar Hadjiev: **Oaths** played an important role in the social life of Ancient Near Eastern peoples. They were used to seal contracts, undertake obligations and confirm the veracity of statements. Swearing by the name of a particular god meant invoking that god’s power to oversee the established relationships and enforce required norms of behaviour. People swore by the gods they worshipped, and the expression ‘by the life of X’ (or ‘as X lives’) was a common oath formula (**Jer. 38:16**). Israel was expected to swear only by the Lord (**Deut. 6:13; 10:20**), so swearing by the name of Baal (**Jer. 12:16**) or Milcom (**Zeph. 1:5**) was tantamount to idolatry. The indictment is the worship of other gods.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How quickly does ripe fruit become rotten fruit?
- 2) In what ways are the poor oppressed and exploited in our economic culture today?
- 3) Are we just going through the motions of Sunday worship service – eager to get on with our entertainment activities – or are we genuinely worshipping from the heart?
- 4) Are we taking every advantage to hear and respond to the Word of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

J. Vernon McGee: When we study prophecy, we need to remember that whether God promised judgment or blessing, **the land was involved** as well as the people. That is one reason why I cannot accept the idea that the prophecies of the Scripture are being fulfilled in the present return of Jews to that land. Although they have returned physically to the land, they have not returned spiritually to the Lord. It is obvious today that God’s blessing is not upon that land. It hasn’t changed. It is true that a great deal of hard work has gone into it, areas have been recovered from swamps, and irrigation has reached the desert in many places (which has made it blossom like a rose), but those places are few and far between even in that small land. Therefore, **it cannot be said that these great prophecies are being fulfilled.** Israel’s last return to the land has not yet taken place. Let’s remember that there are more Jews in New York City than there are in the entire nation of Israel—that ought to tell us something.

Alec Motyer: The End

This then is the situation. Their religion had utterly failed to alert them to a God of judgment and therefore the fact would spring upon them all unready, when their expectancies were all geared to **diametrically opposite outcomes**. This theme of the sudden onset of disaster appears in the illustrations which Amos uses: songs become wailings (3), the solid land is felt to tremble, rise and be tossed (8), the sun sets at noon and the earth becomes dark in broad daylight (9), feasts are turned into mourning, songs into lamentation of a particularly bitter kind (10).

Something of the structure of the passage has begun to appear as we have focused on these illustrations. Amos begins and ends the oracle by showing the divine Agent (2b, 7) and the desolation of the day (3, 8—10). In verses 2b and 7, though the Hebrew wording differs, the sentiment is identical, namely that the Lord can never forgive or forget. The exact expression in **verse 2b** has occurred earlier at **7:8b**, where we discerned it to mean *'I will never forgive them'*. This determination in the mind of God brings terror and death into the experience of people. How lightly expressions like 'God-forsaken' are used! They are part of terminology of casual blasphemy in cultures where religious formalism prevails or where the mass of the population is in a post-religious phase. Neither formal religion nor post-religious man can take seriously the possibility that such a thing could ever happen. Surely God is not like this! But He is! Let Him but just decide that probation is over, that the *'one year more'* (cf. **Lk. 13:1-8**) of life's last opportunity has run to its autumnal harvest-time, then for a time the air will be filled by the wailings of lost grace (3a; cf. **Ex. 12:30**) until the death which sin brings has had its way (3b) and a silence even more terrible than the wail enfolds all (3c). . .

What are the marks of a society which has reached the autumn of probation and concerning which God has drawn the line of finality? Total insecurity (8, 9), sorrow, death and eternal bitterness (10). It is entirely allowable to treat **verses 8 and 9** as metaphorical of a society which has suffered the loss of stability and regularity, that is to say, where absolutes are no longer recognized and rules are there to break, where, maybe, human personality is showing more and more signs of breakdown and unreliability. This is abundantly true: the further man gets from his moorings in God the further he gets from all moorings. . .

There is, then, one thing which the Almighty cannot do: **He cannot bestow mercy on those who do not show mercy**. Nothing is left for those who turn their faces away from the needy—or who exploit the needy for their own gain—than that God will turn His face away from them. This is the grim but biblically realistic truth of **Amos 8:1—10**. The plumb-line hangs vertical in the unmoving hand of God, a mute summons to eternal wrath to flash forth, terrifyingly, disastrously, unendingly against those who are pitiless towards the poor, the central evidence of false religion (cf. **Jas. 1:27**) and dead faith (cf. **Jas. 2:14-17**).

Gary Smith: This great disaster for Israel will lead to great mourning, weeping, wearing of sackcloth, shaving of heads, and bitter lamenting (**Amos 8:10**, continuing the theme of **8:3, 8**). A great transformation will occur, which will turn the happy and optimistic oppressors in Israel into a deep depression. Joyous festivals and feast days will be filled with the sorrow of death and the hopelessness of bitter weeping. This change will come about because God causes it. “*I will turn*” and “*I will make*” are central to understanding the disaster about to encompass the people at the Bethel temple. Their God will turn against them and bring the nation to a final end (**8:10**; cf. **8:3**). They think that the God they worship will protect them; but instead, he will annihilate them from the face of the earth.

The final paragraph (**8:11–14**) warns the people that on that final day there will be no word of help or comfort from God or from any of the pagan gods they worship. These two statements about what will happen on that fateful day are introduced with the clauses “*the days are coming*” (vv. **11–12**) and “*in that day*” (vv. **13–14**).

In the midst of this death and mourning, the Israelites will remember that the Creator is all-powerful, and they will look to him for help in their deep distress. But when they go to a temple or inquire of a prophet for a word of hope from God, there will be nothing. When they have lost all power and there is nowhere else to find hope, they will thirst for news from God. In their deepest moment of need, they will finally turn to God for some response and explanation (cf. **Amos 4:6–12**, where they were unwilling to turn to God). But at that point God will abandon his people (cf. a similar situation in Judah in **Ezek. 9:9; 11:22–23**), refuse to listen to their prayers, or respond with a prophetic word of reassurance (**Isa. 59:1–2; Lam. 2:9; Ezek. 7:26**).

The severity of this famine for God’s words is illustrated by the **extensiveness of the search**. Like a desperate and confused traveler who does not know where to find water, these confused people will be unable to find any message from God. Their deep desire is evident in their extensive and thorough search throughout the land, but their efforts will produce nothing. They will stagger around, roaming in misguided steps based on ignorance. It is as if the people have lost contact with God for so long that they do not know how to find him any more. The tragedy of this blind groping after an answer is shocking, but God will not be found (see **Ps. 32:6; Isa. 55:6**). The final verses (**Amos 8:13–14**) deepen the **hopelessness** of “*that day*” by noting that the strongest members of society will grow faint and end up resorting to other gods.

The Israelites were to fear God and swear by his name (**Deut. 6:13; 10:20**) and not swear by the names of other gods (**Jer. 12:16; Zeph. 1:4–5**). But when God abandons them, these people will swear oaths of loyalty to other gods to try to get an answer from them (**Amos 8:14**). The translation of **verse 14** is difficult, but there appears to be three oath formulas used in reference to deities at three different places: Samaria, Dan, and Beersheba.

TEXT: Amos 9:1-10

TITLE: *VISION OF THE LORD BESIDE THE ALTAR – ISRAEL DOOMED WITH NO ESCAPE*

BIG IDEA:

THE AWESOME ALL-POWERFUL GOD JUDGES WITH THOROUGHNESS AND FINALITY REGARDLESS OF CLAIMS OF SPECIAL PRIVILEGE

INTRODUCTION:

Billy Smith: The **climactic fifth vision** is unlike the other four from start to finish. Among the differences are the following: no introductory formula declaring divine enablement of the prophet to see (cf. “*This is what the Sovereign LORD/he showed me,*” **7:1, 4, 7; 8:1**), no symbolic component as an interpretive key, and no words of Amos. There is a progression of the Lord's control in the visions and a receding of Amos's involvement. In the first pair of visions Amos spoke more than the Lord; in the second pair Amos spoke only a word or two; here Amos is silent. The Lord's words in first person dominate the report (**9:1b-4**). **No escape from divine retribution** is the unrelieved theme.

Gary Smith: The three paragraphs in this section remove any remaining false hopes that Amos's audience may still have. His final persuasive arguments are contained

1. in a vision emphasizing that no one can escape God's judgment (**9:1-4**),
2. in a hymnic fragment about the overwhelming power of God (**9:5-6**),
3. and in a disputation against Israel's false belief that its special status will prevent it from being overcome by any enemy (**9:7-10**).

This fifth and final vision has no paired element, unlike the previous four visions, but is balanced by the dispute in **9:7-10** (similar to the dispute in **7:10-17**, which comes after the vision in **7:7-9**). One reason why there is no parallel vision is because God actually executes his final judgment in this vision, and no one is allowed to escape. Thus, there is nothing left to warn the people about.

The hymn that follows the vision (**9:5-6**) emphasizes the power of the God who will bring an end to the nation of Israel. Parts of the hymn are identical to the hymnic fragments in **5:8** and **8:8**; thus, the prophet reemphasizes the unavoidable and overpowering strength of God's controlling hand. God's sovereignty is legitimated by claims that he is the One who has control over the heavens, the land, and the sea.

The dispute (**9:7-10**) further undermines the audience's confidence by attacking the theological basis of their false hopes. Does their elect status and their past Exodus experience guarantee God's favor forever? No, God relates to people primarily on the basis of either their sins against him or their love for him.

Warren Wiersbe: In this final chapter of the book, the Prophet Amos shares four affirmations from the heart of the Lord—three of which deal with **judgment** and the fourth with **mercy**.

“I will strike!” (Amos 9:1)

In a vision, Amos saw the Lord standing by an altar and announcing that the worshipers would be slain because the building would be destroyed and fall upon them. This was probably not the temple in Jerusalem because Amos was sent to the Northern Kingdom of Israel; and when the Babylonians destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, it was by fire (**Jer. 52:12-13**). This may have been the king’s royal chapel at Bethel, although we don’t know what kind of building that was.

God’s warning in **Amos 3:13-15** seems to parallel this vision, describing what the Assyrian army would do when it entered the land. The altar was the place of sacrifice and atonement, but God refused to accept their sacrifices and forgive their sins (**5:21-23**). Their man-made religion, carried on by unauthorized priests, was an abomination to the Lord; and He would now destroy it.

“I will search!” (Amos 9:2-4)

Any idolatrous worshiper who tried to escape would be tracked down and slain. Though they dug down into Sheol, the realm of the dead, God would search them out; and if they could reach heaven, there would be no protection there. They couldn’t hide from God on the highest mountain or in the depths of the sea (see **Ps. 139:7-12**). Even if they were taken captive to a foreign land, He would find them and judge them. His eye would be upon them for judgment, not for blessing (**33:18; 34:15; Rev. 6:12-17**).

“I will destroy!” (Amos 9:5-10)

Nine times in his book, Amos calls God “*the Lord of hosts*,” that is, “*the Lord of the armies of heaven and earth*.” The people of Israel created their gods in their own image and held such a low view of Jehovah that they thought He would approve of their sinful ways. Amos reminded them of the greatness of the God they thought they were worshiping. He is the **God of creation**, who can melt the earth with a touch and make the land rise and fall like the swelling of the Nile River. He controls the heavens, the earth, and the seas, and no one can stay His hand. Jehovah is the **God of history**, who showed His great power by delivering the Jews from the bondage of Egypt (**v. 7**). He claimed them for His own people. Yet they turned against Him and went their own way. Therefore, He will have to treat the Jews (His special people) as He treats the Gentiles! But He is always the **God of mercy** (**vv. 8-10**), who will keep His covenant with Abraham and his descendants and not destroy the nation. The nation would be sifted, and the sinners punished, but not one of His true worshipers would be lost.

“I will restore!” (Amos 9:11-15)

In contrast to God’s destroying the Israelite house of false worship, God will raise up the “hut” of David, thereby assuring a bright future for the people of Israel and Judah. Like a rickety shack, David’s dynasty was about to collapse. From the Babylonian Captivity to this present hour, there has been no Davidic king ruling over the Jews; and

though a Jewish nation has been restored, they have no king, priest, temple, or sacrifice. But one day, the Lord will restore, repair, and rebuild the dynasty of David and establish the kingdom He promised. When Jesus Christ comes again, the breach between Israel and Judah will be healed, and there will be one nation submitted to one King. God will bless the land and the people, and His people shall live in peace and security. It will be a time of peace and prosperity to the glory of the Lord. Amos ends his prophecy with the wonderful promise that Israel shall be planted, protected, and never again pulled up from her land “*says the Lord your God.*” Your God! What a great encouragement for the Jews to know that, in spite of their unbelief, their God will be faithful to keep His covenant promises.

Lloyd Ogilvie: There is a **unity** to this final chapter of Amos. We are called to behold our God. We behold Him as a God with whom we cannot trifle, a God who is inescapable, a God who is sovereign over all nature and all nations. A God who is Lord of the future.

I. (:1-4) THE VISION: NO ESCAPING GOD’S JUDGMENT . . .
NO EXCEPTIONS –
GOD IS INESCAPABLE

A. (:1) Comprehensive Execution – No Fugitive Escapes

1. Powerful Vision of the Lord beside the Altar

“I saw the Lord standing beside the altar,”

Lloyd Ogilvie: The Lord stands on (*niṣṣāb ’al*; cf. 7:7) the altar, symbolizing His **supremacy** over the false and distorted worship of Israel. Note that Amos uses the word *Adonai*, ’ādōnāy, rather than the name Yahweh. This probably expresses the prophet’s reverence for the invisibility of God and communicates his vision of a manifestation of the presence of God. *Adonai* means “sovereign” and “king.” Perhaps Amos wanted to underline the supremacy of God, the Sovereign One, over Israel’s kings who offered sacrifices on the altar.

James Mays: The sanctuary in question must be the one at Bethel. It is the only holy place at which tradition locates Amos during his ministry (7.10ff.); in 3.14 he speaks of ‘*the altar*’ which is to be smitten in judgment. Jerusalem is an unlikely setting because it is the congregation assembled in the shrine who are the object of Yahweh’s wrath. The pronoun ‘*them*’, which occurs repeatedly without specific identification, can only refer to the congregation assembled at the sanctuary, perhaps for the autumn festival. . .

The altar was the point in the sanctuary upon which communication with the deity focused. Through the sacrifices offered upon it the worshipper reached the deity, established community with him, and opened the way for the divine ministry of blessing. That a prophet should announce that Yahweh was present by the altar was an auspicious revelation. The congregation would have anticipated next some divine word that Yahweh accepted their offerings and regarded them with favour. But the announced word contradicts their assumption. The attitude of the deity is hostile (4b);

altar and sanctuary are to be destroyed, a way of saying that from his side Yahweh breaks off the intercourse through the cult. Yahweh has commanded that the sanctuary be shaken to its foundations.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: Within the framework of Ancient Near Eastern thought, the vision carries a symbolic significance that far outstrips the mere prediction of a natural disaster. In both Egypt and Mesopotamia, the temple, as the meeting point of the divine and the human spheres, had cosmic significance. It was a mirror image of creation, a celebration and actualization of the triumph of order over chaos. Its proper maintenance ensured the stability of the world and the prosperity and security of the nation (Hundley 2013: 41–48, 76–84). A similar worldview may underline some Old Testament texts, such as **Psalm 24**, where the created world is parallel to the ‘*hill of the Lord*’ and the gates of the temple are synonymous with the ‘*ancient doors*’ of the heavenly sanctuary. The shaking thresholds of the temple in Amos’s vision, then, indicate that the boundaries between the holy and the profane are compromised and the world itself is in danger. Bethel, which once was a ‘*gate of heaven*’ (**Gen. 28:17**), now no longer fulfils this function (Riede 2008: 207–208). The strike against the temple shatters the world of the Israelites and is followed by a cosmic pursuit that will end only with their total extermination. . .

The shattering of the temple has deprived the world of security and stability.

2. Powerful Image of Smiting

*“and He said,
‘Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake,
break them on the heads of them all!’”*

Billy Smith: A strike against the support pillars would shake “*the thresholds*,” the cut-stone bases for the doorposts (cf. **Isa 6:4**). Collapse of the sanctuary would be the result of the strike. Destruction would be total, from top to bottom.

Worshippers and worship leaders would be crushed by the collapsing sanctuary. “*Bring them down*” (also a singular command, lit., “*cut them off*”) is a second order following the command to “*strike*.” The object is the “*pillars*” coming down on the heads of “*all the people*” (lit., “*all of them*”). Emphasis again is on the completeness of the devastation.

J. Vernon McGee: At the time of the siege [by the Assyrians], the people would seek refuge in the temples, but the temples would be brought down so suddenly that many of the people would be trapped when the pillars crumbled.

Allen Guenther: These pillars (literally: *capitals*) may support a roof over a shrine or several rooms reserved for priests. On the other hand, they may be free-standing pillars (male sex symbols?) like those placed before Solomon’s temple by his Phoenician craftsman, Hiram (**1 Kings 7:15-22**). In both cases, each pillar is topped by an elaborately carved or cast *capital*. These pagan symbols are to be brought down on the

assembled worshipers with such a crash that the thresholds will tremble. The temple is destroyed from top to bottom (cf. **Judg. 16:23-30**). False gods will be unveiled for what they are: impotent. The people who worship them must bear the consequences of their perversion.

3. Powerful Elimination of Survivors

*“Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword;
They will not have a fugitive who will flee,
a refugee who will escape.”*

Jorg Jeremias: This is not, however, a world from which God has withdrawn, but rather a world full of God’s pernicious presence; since the third vision (**7:7f.**), he has, after all, become **Israel’s enemy**.

Gary Smith: The action within the vision involves an unknown power (some suggest an angel) shattering the columns that hold the roof of the temple. If this structural damage to the columns and the shaking of the foundations of the building are connected to Amos’s other predictions of an earthquake, then it is unnecessary to hypothesize any other power at work. God himself is behind this enormous earthquake, which happened about two years after Amos spoke (**1:1**).

Once the earthquake begins, the building crumbles on the heads of those gathered for worship. Instead of providing security and hope, this temple will bring deadly panic. Its destruction is a direct sign of divine disapproval. These events lead to the divine determination to kill the remaining Israelites “*with the sword*” of an enemy army (**9:1**; cf. **2:14–16**; **3:11–12**; **4:2–3**; **5:2–3, 27**; **6:7–11**; **7:17**). No one will escape God’s judgment. This vision removes all hope and security; **no exceptions** are noted until we get to **9:8**.

B. (:2-4) Concealment Impossible -- No Place to Hide

Gary Smith: To convince the audience of the impossibility of any hope of survival, a series of five conditional clauses are presented (**9:2–4**). Each gives a possible way one might try to escape from God’s mighty hand of judgment, but each is a useless waste of effort because there are no limits to the power of God’s eyes or hands.

Billy Smith: Five conditional sentences in **vv. 2-4a**, each introduced by the Hebrew particle *‘im*, cover five possible hiding places for escaped Israelites seeking to avoid divine retribution. The connection here with **Psalm 139** (esp. **vv. 7-12**) and the biblical theme of the inability to escape from God is apparent. More so, the Book of Jonah is dominated early on by this same theme. **No one can escape God's presence.**

Robert Martin-Achard: Yahweh’s presence over the altar is normally a pledge of safety for his own people. In the present case it is just the contrary, since the divine announcement is explicit: what Yahweh intends is nothing less than the total annihilation of the sinful Israelites (**vv. 1b–4a**). There will be **no possibility of**

escaping the justice of Yahweh. All possible hypotheses are considered only to be successively discarded. Those who might escape the initial catastrophe, probably an earthquake, (*ra'ash*), will fall with the sword from which not one of them shall escape (v. 1b), even if the Israelites in their panic, and using the most desperate means, should attempt not to fall into the hands of God, God is able to catch up with them to punish them. He will find them even if they have taken refuge in the underworld, Sheol, where nevertheless Yahweh intervenes so rarely that he seems to have no contact with the dead (Ps. 6:5; 88:5; etc.; conversely at Prov. 15:11; Job 26:6; etc.). Neither heaven (v. 2), nor the abundant vegetation on the top of Carmel will serve as an adequate hiding place from God. The bottom of the sea seems to be so far removed from Yahweh that it might appear to offer a sure refuge; but, Yahweh says: *'There I will command the Serpent'*, a sort of marine monster, *'and it shall bite them'* (v. 3); Finally, the hope that in exile, beyond the land of Israel, it should be easier to escape from their God was in vain (v. 4a). There is something grandiose and terrible about this relentlessness of Yahweh in pursuing his own people in order to judge them.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: Yet 9:1–4 is connected to the cycle both thematically and formally. Its five conditional sentences with five places where the Israelites will not be able to hide (9:2–4a) correspond to the five visions. The first four (Sheol/heaven; Carmel/sea) are paired just like the first four visions, and the last stands on its own. The fifth vision brings the message of the report to a climax: the inexorable fate of Israel. The end of the people, avoided in 7:1–6 and announced in 7:7–9 and 8:1–3, is now described in detail.

1. (:2) No Possibility of Escape to the Invisible Extremes of the Universe

a. Down into Sheol

*"Though they dig into Sheol,
From there shall My hand take them;"*

Jorg Jeremias: The cosmic significance of the temple corresponds to the cosmic effects of God's disasters in a world without the temple. For both Amos and his tradents, **God's power is limitless**, extending even into the underworld, which **Psalm 88** presents as separate from God; its instruments are mythical powers which traditionally were considered to be anti-divine powers of chaos (*"serpent"*; cf. **Isa. 27:1; Job 26:13**).

b. Up into Heaven

*"And though they ascend to heaven,
there will I bring them down."*

2. (:3) No Possibility of Escape to the Visible Extremes of the Earth

a. Heights of Mt. Carmel

*"And though they hide on the summit of Carmel,
I will search them out and take them from there;"*

b. Depths of the Sea

*"And though they conceal themselves from My sight
on the floor of the sea,*

From there I will command the serpent and it will bite them.”

Gary Smith: The second set of comparisons contrasts the many good hiding spots in the thick forests and caves of Mount Carmel and the unexplored coral reefs in the dark, uninhabitable depths of the ocean. Those who imagine that they can hide from God in these places will not escape either, for God will hunt them down or send a divinely controlled sea serpent to find them.

Billy Smith: “*The top of Carmel*” and “*the bottom of the sea*” represent the limits of the nearer world. No terrestrial hiding place could conceal them from God's determined pursuit (cf. **Ps 139:7-12; Rev 6:15-17**). As **G. Smith** points out, “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.”

3. (:4) No Possibility of Escape to Enemy Nations

a. God Still Controls All and Executes His Judgment

*“And though they go into captivity before their enemies,
From there I will command the sword that it slay them,”*

Billy Smith: The fifth hypothetical place to hide would be as unsuccessful as the previous four places. Even **captivity** would not grant immunity from the Lord's determined pursuit. The “*sword*” under his command would slay them. Mention of the term “*sword*” in **vv. 1, 4** encloses the **chiastic structure** and stresses that Yahweh's sovereign control extended to every possible hiding place an Israelite escapee might consider.

Lloyd Ogilvie: As we will see in our commentary on Jonah, some of the Israelites had a funnel-like concept of providence, that Yahweh's power was limited to the geographical territory of Israel and Judah. We can imagine that some of the people said, “What's the worst that can happen? Defeat and captivity? At least then we will be out of the sphere of Yahweh's judgment.” Serious miscalculation. Yahweh was going to use even Israel's enemy to execute His judgment.

John Goldingay: To go into captivity might seem to mean they have escaped from the realm where Yahweh has any involvement. No, there is no such realm. Yahweh is Lord of the entire universe. There is no place of escape. From the very realm of their captivity, he will commission slaughter.

b. God Still Sees All and Holds People Accountable

*“And I will set My eyes against them for evil
and not for good.”*

Billy Smith: The reason no one could escape the judgment of God was his decision to turn against them (**v. 4b**). Usually God's gaze was upon his people for good. His decision to set his eyes upon them for “*evil*” (*ra'a*, here “*calamity*”) and not “*good*” (*tobâ*) represented a radical departure from the norm.

Trent Butler: The person who disobeys God, who refuses to repent and turn to God for forgiveness—that person finds God's acts to be evil. Not evil in the sense of absolutely bad, but evil in the sense of bringing harm and destruction to the people who are suffering God's judgment.

II. (:5-6) THE HYMN: PRAISING THE NAME OF THE LORD WHICH PROCLAIMS HIS AWESOME POWER AND MAJESTY – GOD IS MIGHTY

Alec Motyer: **Omnipotence** is forthwith described (**5, 6**). God can speak with certainty that there will be no escape for these people anywhere in His universe, because He is God of the whole. He has absolute mastery over all the earth in its physical substance (**5a**), its human inhabitants (**5b**) and its condition at any time (**5c**); the celestial (**6a**) and the terrestrial (**6b**) are equally open to His use, and all the elements, represented here by water and earth (**6c**), are His to do what He wills with.

Allen Guenther: The hymn fragments in Amos have all centered in the **divine name**, the Lord (**4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6**). In each instance they constitute the climax of the message, whether as the concluding element in a linear development of thought or the central element of a chiasmic literary structure. The effect is to press home to Israel that it is God with whom they have to do. In form and function, Hymns focus attention on the nature and acts of God. This God is awesome. Escape from him is impossible, a point made initially with the lion's roar (**1:2**), and again in conjunction with the day of the Lord (**5:19**), and now in the finale.

The hymn fragments also draw attention to Israel's preoccupation and perversion of worship. The defective worship consists of things – animals, offerings, gifts. God intends to be the center of their worship.

Finally, these hymn fragments present God's alternatives to the lamentations of a nation in mourning (**5:1, 16-17**), the shallow worship of a pleasure-oriented people (**5:21-23**), and the entertaining compositions of the idle rich (**6:5**). God commends worship which acknowledges the Lord of nature and history from the core of one's being.

A. (:5) Awesome in Power

*“And **the Lord God of hosts**,
The One who touches the land so that it melts,
And all those who dwell in it mourn,
And all of it rises up like the Nile
And subsides like the Nile of Egypt;”*

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The vehement rhetoric of the fifth vision is designed to convey one message: the end of Israel is going to be an utter and complete disaster from which no-one will be able to escape. This end is presented as destruction of creation, the

shattering of the temple and universal death. The personal presence of the Lord dominates the passage but provides little basis for comfort. His omnipresent power is bad news for the victims of his judgment. As King of the world, every sphere of his creation is under his surveillance and control, which means there can be no hope, and no escape.

B. (:6) Awesome in Majesty

*“The One who builds His upper chambers in the heavens,
And has founded His vaulted dome over the earth,
He who calls for the waters of the sea
And pours them out on the face of the earth,
The LORD is His name.”*

James Mays: The effect of the hymnic section as a conclusion of the vision-report is to exalt the unqualified power of the God who passes judgment on Israel. His role as covenant Lord does not so exhaust his nature that Israel can find in her election some security from his anger. The whole world is in his hands!

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Each doxology describes the incomparable power and rule of Yahweh, the Creator, who is God of Israel. Yahweh has announced the reasons for judgment, and these doxologies declare that he has absolute authority and incalculable force to accomplish this task. This third doxology, which concludes the section of the last vision, presents the grandest picture of all of this incomparable one. **Yahweh is his name.**

III. (:7-10) THE DISPUTE: JUSTIFYING JUDGMENT DESPITE ISRAEL’S PRIVILEGED STATUS – GOD IS JUST

M. Daniel Carroll R.: This subsection has been categorized form-critically as a **disputation speech** that responds to questions that might have been raised about Israel’s unavoidable and devastating fate announced in **9:1–4**. On the one hand, Israel has to accept the fact that, like any other nation, it deserves punishment. The cherished belief that its special status is a safeguard against judgment is misplaced (**9:7**). But the predicted devastation of the nation will not eliminate everyone. Not all will perish, even though the Northern Kingdom will cease to exist as a political entity (**9:8–10**).

A. (:7-8a) Counteracting Pleas of Privileged Status

1. (:7a) Is Israel too Special to Be Judged?

*“Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?”
declares the LORD.”*

James Mays: The opening questions are rhetorical; they are in fact assertions made by Yahweh in an assault upon the theology of the addressees. Both questions take up the theme of ‘Israel and Yahweh’, but their intention is to bring to light a dimension of that

relationship with which Israel does not reckon. Precisely why Amos chose the Cushites for comparison with Israel must unfortunately remain somewhat obscure. Cush was the Old Testament name for the territory of Ethiopia and Nubia, but Cushites are seldom mentioned. An isolated tradition in **Num. 12.1** reports that Moses' Egyptian wife was a Cushite, and that Aaron and Miriam opposed him because of her. Cushites appear as servants and eunuchs in Israel occasionally (**II Sam. 18.21; Jer. 38.7**). Jeremiah's proverb about the Cushites' colour is at least a play on their strangeness (**Jer. 13.23**). On the evidence one can say no more than that the Cushites were a distant, different folk whom Israelites knew mostly as slaves. 'You are to me,' says Yahweh, 'as these Cushites are to you.' What the comparison does is to humiliate Israel completely with respect to Yahweh, to reduce them to the role in Yahweh's order of things which the Cushites played in their own society. The relation of Israel to Yahweh creates no privileges, no special status which qualifies his sovereignty; it is rather one which manifests that sovereignty in radical fashion.

Trent Butler: God led Amos to make the audacious claim that God directed the history of these people just as much as he did Israel's. The prophet rejected Israel's claim to fame as the one nation whose history the Lord planned and directed. God directs the history of every nation. No nation can claim pride of place and set demands on God because they are an elect nation—the people whose history God oversees. God can pronounce judgment on all nations (**Amos 1:3 – 2:16**), and he can claim to be Lord of the history of all nations. No nation is exempt from God's discipline or destruction.

2. (:7b) Is Israel's Deliverance from Egypt a Free Pass?

*"Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt,
And the Philistines from Caphtor
and the Arameans from Kir?"*

Gary Smith: Amos refers to the common exodus experiences by the Syrians, Philistines, and Israelites. This comparison clearly puts Israel on the same level as two of her bitterest enemies. Certainly no Israelite would believe that the exodus experiences of the Syrians and Philistines guarantees them eternal protection from God's judgment.

Billy Smith: In **Deuteronomy 2** Moses had affirmed **God's involvement with other nations**, declaring that he had given Edom the land of Seir, from which he had driven the Horites (**2:5,12, 22**); he had given Moab the land of Ar, from which he had driven the Emmites (**2:9-11**); he had given Ammon their land, from which he had driven the Zamzummites (**2:19-21**); and he had given the Caphtorites (Philistines) the villages that included Gaza, from which he had driven the Avvites (**2:23**). In the same way the Lord was about to give Israel the land of the Amorites (**2:24**). In **Amos 9:7** this same concept is in view but is seen from the perspective of God's declared judgment against the Arameans in **1:3-6** and the Philistines in **1:6-8**. As God had brought the people of Aram from Kir1 (**9:7**), he also had declared his intention of driving them back to Kir (**1:5**) for their sins. And as he had brought the Philistines from Caphtor (**9:7**) to the villages of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron, he had also determined to destroy them for their sins (**1:6-8**). The messages of judgment in **Amos 1-2**, then, are assumed in **9:7**, where

the point is that God's involvement with Israel does not immunize them from judgment any more than his involvement with any nation immunizes it from judgment.

James Mays: In the second question the Exodus from Egypt is listed along with the migration of the Philistines and Arameans, and therefore put on the same footing. The reference is a clue to Amos' surprisingly full knowledge of the general historical traditions of the region, even more striking than the material used in the oracles against the nations (1:3 – 2:3). The migrations of the philistines from the Aegean area (Caphtor = Crete) and of the Arameans from Kir (a Mesopotamian locale; cf. 1:5) had occurred early in the twelfth century, not long after Israel was settled in the hill country of Palestine. The Philistines and Arameans had been the classic foes of Israel; and yet their history, says Yahweh, was none the less his work than the Israelites' move from Egypt. Putting the matter in this way brings into focus the pivotal utterance in the texts: "*Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt . . . ?*" This basic datum of Yahweh's historical relationship with Israel is neither denied or robbed of emphasis by its expansion to include the Philistines and Aram. What is denied and shattered is a theology based on that datum – that Yahweh's act in the Exodus established Israel in a special status vis-à-vis the other nations. The Exodus is set in the context of international history and becomes in this context a manifestation of Yahweh's unconditional sovereignty. It cannot be understood as a point of departure for an automatic history of salvation which runs comfortably and inevitably from it, a kind of history which holds Yahweh the captive of Israel's own existence, a feature of the history which the people make for themselves. Instead it is the act of the world-God who thereby in no way qualifies or limits his sovereign freedom. The effect of this formulation of the Exodus announcement is the same as the question about the Cushites. Yahweh is exalted over against Israel, exalted in such a way that their existence as the people of Yahweh is stripped of all self-assertion and self-security that protects and hides them from the reality of Yahweh.

Robert Martin-Achard: Amos is not doing away with the privileges of Yahweh's people, as once was thought, he is just reminding the Israelites that their God remains Master of his choices, and that his solicitude is not limited to Israel. He opposes the pretensions of the people of the northern kingdom in their monopolizing of Yahweh's benevolent activities and in making use of his interventions when he acts in their favour, yet disobeying his commandments and treating his will with contempt. This short verse opens up universalistic perspectives that are not foreign to the message of the Old Testament, but which are only too often neglected. The election of Israel does not imply that Yahweh is uninterested in the other nations; in fact, on the contrary, he set free Israel first (the Exodus) in order to guarantee the liberation of the whole of humanity (**Gen. 12:1 ff**).

3. (:8) Does the Lord Look the Other Way When It Comes to Israel?

*"Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom,
And I will destroy it from the face of the earth;"*

Lloyd Ogilvie: Verse 8 makes it clear that Israel is the focus of Yahweh's attention alright, but as a sinful kingdom deserving destruction. Amos alone uses the term "*the sinful kingdom*." The article stresses the apostasy, unrighteousness, and rebellion of the northern kingdom. However, there is a **thin ray of hope** that pierces the darkness of the judgment. There will be a remnant saved. Some scholars suggest that the "*sinful kingdom*" refers to the monarchy and the *house of Jacob* to the people. What is most significant, however, is that Yahweh had a future planned for His people. He always has plans for working His purposes out in ways beyond our imagination. This, too, is a basis of **hope**.

Alec Motyer: One divine government rules all, and (8a) one moral providence observes all, and judges all. The Lord does not look on people in the light of their historical past but in the light of their moral present. Every nation is equally under this moral scrutiny. Again there is no difference between Israel and the nations. But once more let us stress that this is not a negative, as if to say, 'You do not possess the special relationship you once enjoyed.' **Amos is not talking about privileges removed.** It is positive: You stand where you have always stood, alongside every other kingdom, subject to the moral enquiry of a holy and all-seeing God. Again, therefore, there is no benefit gained by appeal to the remote and historical past. The Lord says, I am not looking for a lesson in history, I am examining the facts of life and character. And at this point, as Amos has already taught (3:2), Israel is in fact worse off than any of the nations, for alone (and thanks to the Exodus, indeed) Israel had been taught how sinners might become aware of their sin, through the law of God, and be cleansed from their sin through the grace of God in the blood sacrifices.

B. (:8b) Covenant Promises Require Showing Mercy to a Remnant

"Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob," Declares the LORD."

Gary Smith: God judges sinful, oppressive people and sinful, oppressive nations. If the Syrians, Philistines, or Israelites sin, all God's past grace will not prevent his future judgment (see 1:3 – 2:16).

But this principle is not a blanket condemnation of every person in a sinful nation. It is true that sometimes the innocent suffer as God judges the guilty, but God confirms through Amos that not every person in Israel will be killed (9:8): "*I will not totally destroy*" is God's commitment that sin makes a difference in determining who will be destroyed and who will be spared. There is hope for the remnant who seeks God (5:14–15). This clause clarifies the message of no escape in 9:1–4 and maintains God's mercy in the midst of judgment. It also explains how God will finally fulfill his past promises to his people in the distant future, when he establishes his kingdom (9:11–15).

C. (:9-10) Condemnation Will Target the Smug Sinners

1. (:9) Process of Sifting and Separation

*"For behold, I am commanding,
And I will shake the house of Israel among all nations*

*As grain is shaken in a sieve,
But not a kernel will fall to the ground.”*

James Mays: In threshing, wheat was first beaten or shredded on the threshing floor to separate the grains from stalk and husk, then winnowed to allow the light chaff to blow to one side. The remaining grain would contain trash and small stones. The large mesh sieve was used to catch the larger debris and let the smaller grains fall through. The primary point of the metaphor is catching the undesirable. The stones represent the sinners (10a). The focus of the metaphor is upon their inexorable elimination, and not so much on the grain.

2. (:10) Puncturing the Myth of Arrogant Exceptionalism

*“All the sinners of My people will die by the sword,
Those who say, 'The calamity will not overtake or confront us.'”*

Billy Smith: Here is the last of eight references to the “sword” in Amos. “*By the sword*” occurs first in the verse, perhaps echoing its last occurrence in the final vision in vv. 1, 4. Some warring nation would serve as God's agent of judgment. “*All the sinners among my people*” implies that all the people of Israel were not sinners and thereby were not destined for death by the sword. “*The sinful kingdom*” (v. 8) was made sinful by “*all the sinners among my people.*” The purpose of judgment was to remove them.

They are further specified as “*all those who say, 'Disaster will not overtake or meet us.'*” Some in the prophet's audience were contradicting his message. They were saying that “*disaster*” (*ra'a*, “*evil*,” or “*calamity*,” cf. 3:6; 9:4) was not their destiny. Thus they were ones who rejected the word of God (cf. 2:12; 7:16). Amos was saying that only a remnant could hope to survive the coming disaster.

Trent Butler: Just as Jesus surprised people as he identified the sheep and the goats in **Matthew 25**, so God surprised Israel by bringing judgment on people who felt secure in the divine arms of love.

James Mays: The “*Day of the Yahweh*” was a hard and fast scheme for them – always catastrophe for the enemies of the nation, a dogma therefore of their invulnerability. This characterization of his audience is a significant extension of Amos' definition of “sinful”. When Amos speaks of Israel's guilt, he usually cites specific deeds. But here he speaks of a sin of belief, **the sin of excepting oneself from Yahweh's judgment and therefore from his sovereignty**. Israel's dogmatic security is a real declaration of independence from Yahweh which lies behind all their other transgressions.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some of the reasons people think that they can escape divine accountability?

- 2) Why is it essential to sing hymns of praise that focus on God's attributes?
- 3) How do you explain the tension between the promise that all will be executed in judgment and the promise that God in His mercy will spare a remnant?
- 4) What is the significance of the Lord standing beside the altar?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Alec Motyer: In order to bring this scene into focus let us return to how it all began. One hundred and eighty years before the time of Amos, in the year 931/930 BC, Jeroboam I led off the ten northern tribes to make them into the kingdom of Israel. Even though he had come into his kingdom on a wave of popular feeling, Jeroboam knew that his position was essentially insecure. People were disaffected by the exactions of Solomon's later years and the final blow was the refusal of Rehoboam to negotiate a more favourable constitution. But, as Jeroboam saw it, if the people continued to make annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem (**1 Ki. 12:26 f.**) they would remember only the golden days of David and soon the claims of the old dynasty would re-exert themselves and he would be cast off with the same alacrity as he had been accepted. To mend this situation he devised '*the sin of Jeroboam*': **the use of religion in the interests of politics**. He contrived a feast of which we are told three main facts: first, that it took place on the fifteenth day of the eighth month (**1 Ki. 12:32**); secondly, that it was like the feast that was in Judah (**1 Ki. 12:32**); and thirdly, that Jeroboam himself officiated at the altar or, at the very least, stood prominently at the altar during the ceremonies. Three times the Hebrew uses the same expression which appears in RSV as *he offered sacrifices on the altar* (**1 Ki. 12:32**)... *He went up to the altar... and went up to the altar...* (**33**). Very possibly the first of these three phrases should be harmonized with the other two: Jeroboam went up (the altar steps and stood) by the altar. This is the position in which he is at once found (**1 Ki. 13:1**) by the man of God out of Judah: Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. The whole thing was a counterfeit: a counterfeit feast on a counterfeit altar to prop up a counterfeit monarchy!

The years pass. By the grim coincidences of God another Jeroboam is on the throne of Israel and another man of God out of Judah, not an anonymous prophet but Amos, is there to see him take his stand by the altar. One vision is about to be succeeded by another, the autumnal presentation of the ripe fruits (**8:1**) by the great autumnal and royal festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. Amos watches Jeroboam but even as he watches the scene changes. '*I saw the Sovereign One who had taken His stand by the altar*' (cf. **9:1**). **The counterfeit is replaced by the real**, the human by the divine, the king who had come to prop up his dynasty by the King who had come to throw it down. The day of pretence was over and the war on pretence had begun. Long, long ago Samson had pulled the temple of Dagon down from below, but when the Sovereign calls up His forces the building receives great shattering blows from above,

on the capitals, driving them down upon their own thresholds until the whole edifice crumbles in on its occupants' heads. Many rush away from the downfall, but none escape (1b).

Gary Smith: The Awesome Power of God –

God's power to rule the world is described with great vividness in this section, and it forms the fundamental theological basis for fearing, loving, and honoring God. Since his power universally reaches to the heights of heaven and the depths of Sheol, and since he has designed the earth and the far reaches of the heavens, there is nothing outside of his frame of influence or knowledge. He not only has complete knowledge about the creation of all the diverse parts of the earth; he also has eyes and hands that control the expanse of the universe.

The magnificence of what God has created relates to its size, its beauty, and the way it works together as a unified whole. The breadth of God's control far outstretches anything we can imagine or hypothesize, for humankind has never even seen the vast majority of what God has created. Even our ability to control a minor part of this creation is limited. Although we can dig a ditch and change the course of a stream in order to irrigate a field, God has the ability to set boundaries for oceans and then change those boundaries. People can shake a flimsy man-made wagon so that someone cannot stand up in it, but God can move the solid ground up and down so violently that it destroys strong buildings made by human beings. Truly, God is powerful, and his creative ability extends far above what people can imagine. We can only praise him and stand in wonder and amazement at what he has made.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The heart of Israel's problem was the heart. The distortion of their worship of God had permeated the heart of the nation. Greed, unrighteousness, and injustice were pumped like virulent poison into the bloodstream of an apostate people. Outward conduct was caused by contradicted convictions. Everything was wrong because the nation was not right with God. Nothing works right when we alter the worship of the altar. It is true for us as individuals and for our churches. God demands absolute obedience.

Anthony Petterson: The final vision of Amos is not of an object (like the first four) but of the Lord himself, standing by the altar and calling on the temple to collapse on those who worship in it – presumably on account of false worship and idolatry (cf. 8:3). It brings to mind the story of Samson (**Jdg 16:30**). There will be no escape for the survivors. Even if the wicked escape to the extreme points referenced in **Amos 9:2-4**, God will track them down and punish them (cf. 5:19). Even exile from the land will provide no escape (9:4). Those who have rejected the Lord and serve themselves will find God has his eye on them for judgment (v. 4). The God who will judge is the Lord of all creation (vv. 5-6). The same realms mentioned in **verses 2-3** are claimed as the Lord's dominion. This statement of God's power undergirds the certainty of judgment. The Israelites thought that since they were God's chosen people, they could live as they pleased (cf. 3:1-2). Yet God had delivered other nations as well (the Philistines and Arameans), and that did not make them or Israel immune from judgment. God will

punish his people thoroughly, but he will not totally wipe them out. Just as pebbles are sifted from sand, so the arrogant sinners will die – but a remnant will be saved.

TEXT: Amos 9:11-15

TITLE: CONCLUSION: PROMISE OF MILLENNIAL RESTORATION AND PROSPERITY

BIG IDEA:

RESTORATION TO THE PROMISED LAND AND REVERSAL OF FORTUNES CHARACTERIZE FUTURE MILLENNIAL BLESSING

INTRODUCTION:

Gary Smith: This final promise of hope contains two salvation oracles that introduce positive promises about Israel's "day" of restoration: **Verses 11–12** discuss the coming day when the kingdom of David is restored, while **verses 13–15** deal with the restoration of the land. The first paragraph focuses on first-person action that God will do, while the second describes what will happen to the fertility of the land when God pours out his abundant blessing on it. Ruins, desolation, and breaches are replaced by building, planting, and possessing the land to demonstrate the great reversal that will take place in the future.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: This final section of the book of Amos has two parts, **9:11–12** and **9:13–15**, which are introduced respectively by *in that day* and *behold, days are coming*. Both conclude with reference to Yahweh's speech (*a saying of Yahweh, v. 12; says Yahweh your God, v. 15*).

Allen Guenther: As the winds of judgment die down and the waters recede, a few chastened survivors appear (**9:8b-9**). The prophetic voice comes to those few survivors with the word that help is on its way (**9:11-12**). The hope for reconstruction lies not in the survivors' strength, in number, nor in history, but in God alone. This restored people will experience the full complement of blessings promised within the covenant but previously experienced only in limited measure (**9:13-15**).

Tchavdar Hadjiev: From the ashes of partial destruction (**vv. 8–10**) suddenly a new age of restoration emerges. The transition is abrupt and unmotivated. There is no mention of repentance, pursuit of justice or Israel's seeking the Lord that can explain the different divine handling of the nation. What follows is an expression of the sheer mercy of God, given to a still-undeserving people.

Billy Smith: First-person verbs mark this final passage in Amos as divine speech. It completes the book on a positive note, a note radically different from most of what precedes it. For that reason and others, interpreters commonly assign the final pericope to the disciples of Amos after the fall of Judah in 587 B.C. Many interpreters, however, conclude that this final message is from Amos. **S. Paul**, for example, concluded that arguments for a late date for **Amos 9:11-15** based on linguistic and ideological grounds are "seriously open to question." **Wendland** also supports the integrity of **9:11-15**, saying that to dismiss it in any way is to miss "the essential thrust

of the prophet's message...it represents the striking consummation of a thematic potential that was already planted much earlier in the prophecy...(i.e., **5:4, 6, 14 and 15**) but also by its very structure subtly prefigures the tremendous physical and spiritual reversal to come.”

The message of hope and restoration following repeated oracles of doom may be startling to some, but the typical pattern of oracles in the other eighth-century B.C. prophets is that of hope for salvation following oracles of judgment. **Hosea 1:2-9** is a message of judgment followed by a message of hope in **1:10 - 2:1**. **Hosea 2:2-13** is a message of judgment followed by a message of hope in **2:14-23**. This pattern of alternate messages of judgment and salvation is visible throughout the prophecies of Hosea. **Micah 1:3-16** is a message of judgment followed by a message of hope in **2:12-13**. A similar pattern of judgment in **Mic 3:8-12** is followed by a message of salvation in **4:1-5**. The messages of **Isaiah 1-5** alternate between judgment and salvation.

Furthermore, there are words of hope throughout Amos before this point; so this final oracle of salvation is but a melody produced from those earlier notes (cf. **3:2,12; 5:3-6,14-15; 9:8-10**). Our God always manifests his grace as greater than all our sin. God's sending Amos to condemn Israel's sins in itself indicates that God had not given up on his people. Messages threatening judgment were aimed at Israel's redemption, not their destruction. Reference to Israel's chosenness (**3:2**) suggests a permanent relationship already established. God's threat of punishment for their sins meant that with the privilege of being chosen came the responsibility of maintaining a proper relationship with God.

I. (:11-12) RESTORATION OF THE KINGDOM OF DAVID

A. (:11) Jewish Impact – Rebuilding Davidic Kingdom

*“In that day
I will raise up the fallen booth of David,
And wall up its breaches;
I will also raise up its ruins,
And rebuild it
as in the days of old;”*

John Goldingay: Yahweh does not specify when “*that day*” (v. 11) will be, but at least he is saying that on “*that day*” a time of blessing will replace the time of destruction (contrast **2:16; 8:3, 9, 13**).

Trent Butler: Amos addressed his message to Israel, the Northern Kingdom. But his claim has always been that God “*roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem*” (**Amos 1:2**). The final promise thus centers in the Jerusalem tradition of David, not in the northern tradition of Jeroboam.

Allen Guenther: The Davidic kingdom is designated as *a booth*. The word originally referred to the temporary shelters erected during the Feast of Booths, commemorating

God's gracious care during their precarious existence in the years of wilderness wanderings (**Lev. 23:42-43**; cf. Neh. 8:14-17). The term could also refer to overnight shelter (possibly a light tent) on the battlefield (**1 Kings 20:12, 16**). Here it would probably point to the dynasty of David as promised by the Lord (**2 Sam. 7:11-16, 27**), existing as a **fragile reality** in its current disobedience [*Tabernacles*, p. 396].

Walter Kaiser: "*Their*" refers to the two kingdoms of the divided monarchy (cf. **Ezek. 37:15-28**). This points forward to the reunification of the ten Northern and two Southern tribes. The *broken places* (lit.: *breaches*) refers to the many sources and occasions of conflict between the two kingdoms.

Tchavdar Haadjiev: The prophecy avoids the more widespread expression '*house of David*' in favour of the unique image of the *booth* (*sukâ*). The word refers to a temporary shelter made of branches (**Neh. 8:15-16**), erected by people working in the fields (**Isa. 1:8**) to provide protection from the sun and rain (**Isa. 4:6; Jon. 4:5**). It is also used as a synonym of the '*tent*' where the ark of the Lord is housed (**2 Sam. 11:11**). Since this is a term related to agriculture, its main point here is to convey the simplicity of the new community into which the house of Jacob (**v. 8**) has been transformed. It stands in contrast to the rich houses and strongholds of the Israelite elite (**3:13-15; 5:11; 6:8**; **Hubbard** 1989: 239-240). The other significant contrast is with the '*booth of your king*' in **5:26**, the only other place where *sukâ* is used in Amos. There it has cultic connotations and is part of the description of Israel's idolatrous worship. The contrast becomes even more meaningful once we appreciate the fact that the booth in **Amos 9** refers to Jerusalem primarily as a centre of worship, the city of the temple (**Goswell** 2011: 250-256; cf. **Radine** 2010: 199-210). The raising of the booth, then, is a rejection both of the idolatry and of the injustices of the old Israel and an embrace of worship that is acceptable to God.

To sum up, what God restores in the booth of David is a worshipping community of people living in their restored cities, symbolized and led by the Jerusalem temple. The Northern monarchy is dismantled (**7:9**) and replaced by the Davidic dynasty.

James Mays: Here [booth] is a metaphor for the kingdom of David and the point of the image is shelter. The promise looks back to the remembered security of national life under the umbrella of David's rule and announces that freedom from fear of foes will be established again by the revival of the Davidic kingdom. Yahweh will free the nation from the enemies round about, working as he once did through the political instrumentality of Davidic rule. The oracle is spoken in a time when the kingdom has fallen. It is like a city whose walls are breached and whose buildings are ruins. Indeed, the halcyon period of David belongs to the "*days of old*", a past distant in time and different in conditions. The expression is redolent with nostalgia and yearning for a time that memory has idealized, and appears in laments, prayers, and prophecies that harken back to days thought of as the time of salvation (**Isa. 51:9; 63:9, 11; Micah 7:14, 20; Mal. 3:4; Pss. 77:5; 143:5; Lam. 1:7; 5:21**). Perhaps the verb "*build*" reflects the influence of Yahweh's promise to David (**II Sam. 7:5, 7, 13, 27**). In any

case the promise is a poignant formulation of Judean hopes nourished by the theology which regarded the political achievements of David as the acts of Yahweh.

Alec Motyer: The raising up of the *booth of David* signifies the bringing in of the perfect royal Mediator, the king who will be everything that was ever wished for in a royal priest. This very much fits in with the use of *booth* (RSV *pavilion*) in **Isaiah 4:5, 6**, where, overshadowed by the cloud and fire signifying God's own presence, it will provide a place of refuge and refreshment. **Isaiah 32:1, 2** links this with the reign of the Messianic king. The conjunction of these three lines of thought concerning the *booth of David* is that by the act of God a king will reign whose mediatorial work will be fully acceptable to the Lord and whose presence will bring safety and refreshment to his people.

B. (:12) Gentile Impact – Remnant of Foreign Nations Grafted In

*"That they may possess the remnant of Edom
And all the nations who are called by My name,"
Declares the LORD who does this."*

John Goldingay: The result of the restoration (v. 12) will be not only that Israel is one under David once more but that the restored Davidic people will rule over the entire area that Amos surveyed at the beginning of his book (**1:3 – 3:2**).

Fellowship Bible Anne Arbor: Note the use of **Amos 9:11-12** in **Acts 15:16-18**. James understands Amos to allow the present age of calling out the Gentiles after which ("*after this*") the Lord will reestablish the house (monarchy/rule) of David. It is therefore consistent that since there will be Gentiles "*called by My name*" that the Gentiles do not need to come into Israel through circumcision. The works of the law are not required for salvation.

<http://www.fellowshipbibleannarbor.org/BibleStudies/collegesundayschool/Sum2005/AmosOutline.pdf>

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The phrase *a saying of Yahweh* adds a note of finality to this prediction of a new social vision. It is followed by *who does this*, forming a unique combination in the Old Testament. The presence of the participle *'ōseh* could remind the reader of the hymnic passages of **4:13** and **5:8** (cf. **4:12**). If this is a legitimate intertextual allusion, then these closing words of **9:11–12** assure that the Creator and the One who in the past has acted in history and who will soon intervene in judgment will surely accomplish this vision of reversal and restoration. No human agent is mentioned. **This is solely Yahweh's initiative.**

Allen Guenther: The language of possessing the *remnant of Edom* implies conquest with the focus on people rather than territory. Only here in the OT are Gentiles designated as a *remnant*. This remnant of the future consists of those peoples who shall identify themselves as worshipers of the Lord. Israel will yet become a light to the nations (cf. **Isa. 19:18-25; 49:5-7**). Israel's restoration will be even more glorious than

the Davidic kingdom because it enfolds that remnant of the Gentiles which are called by the Lord's name.

II. (:13-15) LAND PROSPERITY / RESTORATION / SECURITY -- ABUNDANT, UNPARALLELED AND PERMANENT

A. (:13) Prosperity -- Time of Abundant Harvests

*“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD,
‘When the plowman will overtake the reaper
And the treader of grapes him who sows seed;
When the mountains will drip sweet wine,
And all the hills will be dissolved.’”*

Trent Butler: Words do not adequately paint the picture of blessing. A farm metaphor fails. Reaping will not be complete before plowing begins for a new crop. New seeds will be sown before the grape harvest is turned into wine. The crop is so abundant it cannot be harvested before it is time to start another. Everywhere, grapes will appear. Their product will flow down the hills like rivers so people can quench their thirst without the bother of harvesting and squeezing out the juice.

Thomas Constable: 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 plant more vines. 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**). Even though these may be hyperbolic images, the point is clear.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: What a powerful word of hope for a people who had experienced hunger, drought, and the ruination of crops (**4:6-9**)! The enjoyment of this gift of lavish provision will not be limited to indulgent, indifferent, powerful elites (**6:4-6**). What a contrast, too, to the image of thirst in **8:13**!

James Mays: Such fertility is the manifestation of Yahweh's benediction, the sacrament that the people live within the sphere of the covenant and enjoy the light of their God's favour (cf. **Lev. 26:5**).

Billy Smith: Four participles define four agricultural activities in **Amos 9:13**: plowing, reaping, treading, and planting. Plowing began the agricultural year after the first rains in October-November. Reaping ended the agricultural year in April-May. Usually a gap of six months separated these two activities. Here a compression of time has the one plowing overtaking the one reaping. It is a picture of harvests so abundant that the gathering of one crop will not be finished before time to begin the next crop.

The next part of the verse has the grape treader close on the heels of the planter. Pressing grapes was an activity performed during the months of August-September, and planting was a job for November-December. Again, a time lapse usually separated these two activities. Here a compression of time has their work overlapping. This picture of vigorous activity reflects the abundance of a new era.

B. (:14) Restoration -- Time of Rebuilding, Growth and Productivity in the Land

1. Possessing the Promised Land

“Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel,”

Gary Cohen: Thus God announces that in the end time the children of Israel, once scattered by Him into Assyrian or Babylonian slavery, will be freed and will return to the promised land. This always has been the dream of the Jewish people, and one of the medals of the modern state of Israel has a motto that reads, “We shall remain free men.” (See **Deut. 30:1-5**.)

2. Preparing the Land for Ongoing Growth and Productivity

a. Rebuilding the Cities

*“And they will rebuild the ruined cities
and live in them,”*

Gary Cohen: Recall that in 722-721 B.C. the Northern Kingdom people were driven out of their cities by the Assyrians. In 606-586 B.C. the Babylonians drove the people of Judah out of their cities. In 168 B.C. the Jews were again suffering as the Syrians drove them out of their cities; in A.D. 66-72 the Romans drove them out; in A.D. 134 the Romans under Hadrian again drove them out; in the eighth century the Muslims conquered them; in the eleventh century it was the Turks; in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was the European Crusaders; also in the thirteenth century there were the papal persecutions.

In the fourteenth century the Jews were expelled from Paris by Philip the Fair (1306) and from Germany when they were blamed for the “Black Death” plague (1398). In the fifteenth century they were expelled from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella (1492—the same year in which God opened the New World wherein they could flee to safety), and from Portugal (1498). In the sixteenth century the Jews were ordered by Russia’s Ivan the Terrible to be “baptized or drowned” (1563).

In more recent times the Jews continued to be persecuted. In the nineteenth century they were driven out of Romania (1866, 1870, 1873). At the start of this century they were

persecuted in Austria and Germany (1900). Mobs attempted to slaughter all of the Jews in Hebron (1929). Hitler drove the Jews out of the European cities and murdered six million of them in a satanic attempt at genocide (1939-45). Under the British mandate (1917-1948) European Jews who survived the holocaust of Hitler were severely limited concerning entry into Palestine. Even today many would again cast the Jews out of their newly rebuilt cities.

Only in light of the above-listed chronicle of suffering and exile can one even come close to comprehending the grandeur and the hope that the precious promises of God found here in Amos offer to Israel.

b. Replanting the Vineyards and Gardens

*“They will also plant vineyards and drink their wine,
And make gardens and eat their fruit.”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The renewal envisioned in **9:11–15** is a reversal of the various dimensions of judgment; it will be political, social, economic, ecological, and religious. Six verbs with the people as the subject follow. The activities of building, dwelling, planting vineyards, drinking wine, and making gardens and eating their fruit respond to Israel’s recent scarcities (**4:6–9**) as well as to the imminent destruction of its cities (e.g., **3:11; 4:3; 6:9–11**). This description also reverses the judgments of **5:11** (cf. **Lev 26:16; Deut 28:30, 38–40**), except that this promise of security and prosperity is directed at everyone, not at the ones who have taken advantage of the vulnerable.

C. (:15) Security -- Permanent Possession of the Promised Land

*“I will also plant them on their land,
And they will not again be rooted out from their land
Which I have given them,’ Says the LORD your God.”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The soon-to-arrive day and days of doom (**2:16; 4:2; 5:18–20; 6:3; 8:3, 9, 11, 13**) will be replaced by a day and days of renewal. The mercy extended earlier on two occasions (**7:1–6**) rematerializes with great force and permanence. . .

As had **v. 14**, this verse begins with a first-person verb with Yahweh as its subject. He declares that he *will plant* the people. The reoccurrence of the verb *plant* (*nt’*) from **9:14** connects the two verses and provides continuity even as it presents a contrast between human planting and harvesting and Yahweh’s planting and the impossibility of removal in the future. That *they will not be uprooted again* is a guarantee that another exile does not lie in their future, a promise reinforced by the closing speech formula.

Warren Wiersbe: In contrast to God’s destroying the Israelite house of false worship, God will raise up the “*hut*” of David, thereby assuring a bright future for the people of Israel and Judah. Like a rickety shack, David’s dynasty was about to collapse. From the Babylonian Captivity to this present hour, there has been no Davidic king ruling over the Jews; and though a Jewish nation has been restored, they have no king, priest, temple, or sacrifice. But one day, the Lord will restore, repair, and rebuild the dynasty

of David and establish the kingdom He promised. When Jesus Christ comes again, the breach between Israel and Judah will be healed, and there will be one nation submitted to one King. God will bless the land and the people, and His people shall live in peace and security. It will be a time of peace and prosperity to the glory of the Lord.

Amos ends his prophecy with the wonderful promise that Israel shall be planted, protected, and never again pulled up from her land “says the Lord your God.” Your God! What a great encouragement for the Jews to know that, in spite of their unbelief, their God will be faithful to His covenant promises.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do the OT land promises undermine the foundation of replacement theology where the church assumes the fulfillment of the promises made to national Israel?
- 2) What are the Messianic implications of the raising up of the fallen booth of David?
- 3) What relationship does the present salvation of individual Gentiles and incorporation into God’s people bear to the end time references to Gentile nations?
- 4) How do we know that past returns from various captivities do not adequately fulfil these eschatological promises?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Lloyd Ogilvie: We must acknowledge that many scholars do not consider these last five verses to be a part of Amos’s original prophecy. It is reasoned that, because of what seems to be a change in tone and theological content, this section was a **later addition**, probably from a **Judean source**. In addition to the change in tone, this conviction is based on the reference to “*the tabernacle of David*” (9:11) and to the possession of the remnant of Edom that occurred after the Babylonian exile of Judah.

None of these arguments seem conclusive. **There is an obvious change of tone, from judgment to hope.** However, if the Lord “*took*” (7:15) Amos to prophesy judgment on Israel with precise vision about how that judgment would be carried out years later, why should it be difficult to accept that the Lord could also reveal to the prophet the vision of the restoration? I think Amos was charged with both tasks and having accomplished prophecy of judgment with unswerving incisiveness, went on to predict aspects of the restoration. Amos spoke in the context of Yahweh’s covenant relationship with Israel, and that restoration was necessary to accomplish His long-range purpose for His people. Without this we must assume that Yahweh only revealed

His wrath to Amos and nothing of His plan for after the Exile. This seems unlikely, especially when the prophet was given the vision of the remnant. . .

There are five promises in this final section of Amos. The first is the tabernacle or booth of David. We have discussed some of the possible meanings of this term. Of these, the most plausible is that there will be a new day in which the northern and southern kingdoms will be reunified under a new David. Beyond the judgment of the Exile, there will be a new time of rebuilding. The brokenness of the chosen people would be healed.

The second promise is that the new kingdom will “*possess*” or have power over all old enemies. “*That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name*” (v. 12). Edom had been an old and constant enemy of the Israelites. The Edomites would finally be subdued and distress Israel no more. . .

The third promise is on prosperity and bounty for the land. . .

The fourth promise is that the captives will be brought back to the land. The cities that have been devastated will be reinhabited and rebuilt. The people will settle down to a peaceful life able to pursue normal agriculture without fear of invaders and danger. . .

The first person intensity of the promises is repeated in the fifth and final promise. “*I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them*” (v. 15). The pronouns “*I*” and “*their*” communicate the bliss of the reestablished covenant between Yahweh and His chosen people. Once again the people will know that all they have and are is a gift from their only God.

Gary Smith: These final promises convey a powerful message of **hope in God**. It may have persuaded some listeners to join the small remnant of Israelites who still trusted in God. This message of restoration demonstrates that God is still sovereign over the affairs of his people and will faithfully fulfill everything he has promised to their forefathers. It will happen in spite of the failures of the people in Amos’s day and in spite of the failures of the church today. God’s love is gracious beyond measure and his power to transform is unlimited. . .

The final words of Amos offer hope to the faithful remnant who will suffer with the wicked when God brings destruction on the nation of Israel. It also challenges unbelievers with the choices they can make: Reject God and suffer his curse, or turn to God and accept this offer of hope. Everyone needs to have some hope in his or her life. Hope is not based on an eschatological chart or eliminated by difficult circumstances. God is the One who offers hope to those who will believe in him. Therefore, he must be at the center of all eschatological teaching.

S. Lewis Johnson: Amos in the final analysis acknowledges that while that generation of which his listeners or readers as the case may be were a part, may pass off the scene and be utterly destroyed. The promises, however, still hold, for as he puts it in **verse 8**,

“*The house of Jacob.*” In other words, he concludes with a divine never to the thoughts that they might not possess eternally their promised inheritance. So the prophecy of this rugged man from the rock-strewn hills of Judea, this simple plain man of judgment concludes rather strikingly, I think, with an epilogue of hope in which is painted a glorious picture of the golden age that is to come. In fact, it’s hard to find in the Old Testament where there are many such pictures, one more notable than the one presented by Amos the prophet of judgment. . .

The promises have been given to the nation as a nation and will be fulfilled. But each generation as it comes along is responsible to believe. And those who do not believe of the nation Israel down through the centuries, their destiny is the same as Gentiles who do not believe. If the generation does not believe it has no hope, no more hope than gentiles. . .

John Schultz: The house of David has become David’s fallen tent. The descendants of the one who was the man after God’s own heart have fallen into a state of dilapidation. Nothing but a ruined hut is left of David’s vision, his surrender to God, and his love for God. God takes this rubble and rebuilds. He plans to reveal Himself again to man and through a man from the house of David. Jesus says in Revelation: “*I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.*” In Him, the fallen tent is not only rebuilt into a palace, but He is the origin, and the continuation, the perfection of everything David ever wanted to be. This promise concurs with the prophecy Nathan gave to David: “*I declare to you that the LORD will build a house for you: When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever.*” This promise clearly refers to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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