

**Voices From the North**  
**The Books of Amos and Hosea**

by  
Daniel J. Lewis

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Troy, Michigan  
United States of America

## **Preface**

The division of the monarchy under Rehoboam, David's grandson, was more than just a footnote about taxation relief in the history of Israel. It was a fundamental parting of the ways in ideology, tradition and theology, as well as in politics. The threat of rupture did not begin in the reign of Solomon. Traces of it can be found during the history of the tribal league in the civil war against Benjamin as well as in the Danite migration and erection of the shrine in the far north. The civil war between the clan of Saul and the clan of David was roughly along the same lines as the eventual political rupture, which came later. The temporary northern secession in the Sheba revolt during David's declining years also suggests the instability of the united monarchy. While it is customary to think of Israel's united monarchy as the norm and the divided monarchy as an unfortunate deviation, the fact is that the union was always precarious and carried barely beneath its surface a potential for disaster.

One can be sure that not only was there jealousy in the north when their heroes such as Deborah, Gideon and Jephthah were replaced by the southerner, David, but there was resentment over the fact that the central shrine at Shiloh had been replaced by Jebus (Jerusalem), when David elevated it as the political and religious center for all Israel. David's innovations were tolerated for the most part during his lifetime, but the stories in David's court history reveal that beneath the veneer of peace there was a smoldering bitterness. Saul's family, from further north, had not been granted the privilege of dynasty, but David's family continued to rule supreme. The ancient pattern of worship, which included not only Shiloh but also the various high places of Ephraim and the other northern tribes, had been replaced by the Zion innovation and a new set of traditions. The covenant of Moses, while still in effect, seemed to be encroached upon by the covenant with David. Thus, when David's grandson offered his foolhardy gesture concerning heavy taxation and forced labor for Israelite citizens, it is small wonder that the northerners seceded from the union, never to reunite.

Many of the factors, which led to this division, were never resolved in the north. While the dynasty of David remained sacrosanct in Judah, the northern nation passed through a series of dynasties and coup d'etats. It was almost as though the craving for charismatic leadership, so prevalent in the days of the judges, could not be satisfied. Rejecting David's family meant rejecting David's covenant, his style of kingship, his worship innovations and the whole religious calendar, which revolved around Mt. Zion. It is not unlikely that the northern nation considered David's covenant to be a heresy, in any case, and they equally resisted the notion that the Jerusalem shrine was the only legitimate place for worship. So, the differences between north and south were a collision of political, theological, and ideological standards.

When Yahweh commissioned two prophets to preach in the north during the eighth century B.C., it is noteworthy that neither of them directly raised the issues behind the national division. Rather, they concentrated primarily on what the Israelites in the north already claimed as their charter--the laws of Torah. It wasn't what the northerners had rejected that condemned them, but rather, what they held to be central and sacred. Judgment was coming! It was not coming because Israel had theological differences with Judah over Davidic theology, however. It was coming because the Israelites had terribly failed to live up to the very covenant they claimed as their own, the Sinai covenant made between Yahweh and their ancestors.

So, the northern nation was a kingdom under judgment. This coming judgment within history may not have been Yahweh's final word, but it was certainly his most vivid one! Still, the future was not without hope, and both Amos and Hosea speak of a future for Israel. However, such hope would materialize only out of the ashes of the near future. This is the message of the voices to the north.

Voices From the North.....	1
The Books of Amos and Hosea .....	1
Preface.....	2
The Fourth Sin -The Message of Amos.....	6
The Political and Economic Background of the Book .....	6
The Religious Background of the Book .....	7
Amos, the Man.....	9
The Coming Judgment (1:2--2:16) .....	10
The Sins of Damascus (1:3-5).....	12
The Sins of the Philistines (1:6-8) .....	12
The Sins of Tyre (1:9-11) .....	13
The Sins of Edom (1:11-12) .....	13
The Sins of Ammon (1:13-15).....	14
The Sins of Moab (2:1-3).....	14
The Sins of Judah (2:4-5).....	15
The Sins of Israel (2:6-16) .....	15
Oracles of Judgment Against Israel (3:1--6:14) .....	16
Election and Judgment (3:1-2).....	17
Yahweh, the Divine Lion (3:3-8).....	17
The Witnesses are Summoned (3:9-11).....	18
The Evidences of a Lion Attack (3:12).....	18
The Day of Punishment (3:13-15) .....	18
Rich Leisured Women (4:1-3) .....	19
Sinful Worship (4:4-5).....	19
Refusing to Repent (4:6-13) .....	20
Dirge for the Nation (5:1-3).....	21
The Purpose of Worship (5:4-6) .....	21
The Sins of Social Injustice (5:7-13).....	22
Perhaps, but Not Likely (5:14-17) .....	22
The Day of Yahweh (5:18-20).....	23
When God Hates the Worship Service (5:21-27).....	23
Complacent, Apathetic Men (6:1-7) .....	24
Doomsday is Coming (6:8-11) .....	25
The Unbelievable has Happened, the Unmentionable is On the Way (6:12-14) .....	25

Parabolic Visions (7:1--9:10) .....	26
The Vision of the Locust Swarm (7:1-3) .....	26
The Vision of Judgment by Fire (7:4-6) .....	27
The Vision of the Plumb Line (7:7-9) .....	27
Amos and the Bethel Priesthood (7:10-17) .....	28
The Vision of the Fruit Basket (8:1-3).....	29
Judgment is Coming for Social Sins (8:4-14).....	30
The Vision of Execution (9:1-4).....	31
The Sovereign Lord and His Sovereign Purpose (9:5-10) .....	31
The Restoration (9:11-15).....	32
For I Desire Steadfast Love -The Message of Hosea .....	35
Hosea, the Prophet .....	35
The Politics of Israel Immediately Prior to Hosea.....	36
An Ominous Beginning (1:1-9) .....	38
Hope Beyond Despair (1:10--2:1) .....	39
God, the Husband Lover (2:2-23).....	39
Hosea Redeems His Faithless Wife (3:1-5).....	41
Israel in Court (4:1--5:15).....	42
Israel, the Fickle Lover (6:1--7:16).....	44
The Horrible Internal Sickness of the Nation (8:1-14).....	46
The Shock of God's Future (9:1--10:15).....	47
The Restoration (11:1--14:9) .....	49

## **THE FOURTH SIN -The Message of Amos**

Like the repeated blows of a hammer on an anvil came the ringing words of Yahweh to the northern nation of Israel: *For three sins...even for four...I will not turn back* (Am. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). Of course, the first three of these sins are not named. Rather, the phrase is a rhetorical device intended to place emphasis on something that is especially distressing against the background of more general troubles.<sup>1</sup> What was especially distressing was the broken covenant of Torah and its norms for social justice (cf. 2:6-8; 4:1; 5:7, 10-15; 5:24; 6:12b; 8:4-6).<sup>2</sup> Israel, the nation that under Jeroboam I seceded from the confederacy of the twelve tribes, was a kingdom under judgment. Her sins, which were many (cf. 3:2; 5:12a), had aroused Yahweh, the divine lion (cf. 3:4, 8). Judgment was coming, and the nation must prepare itself to meet God (cf. 4:12).

### **The Political and Economic Background of the Book**

The politics of the northern nation were, if anything, mercurial. By rejecting the dynasty of David, the northern clans reverted back to a monarchy in which the charismatic figure, rather than the dynastic one, had the edge. During the period of the judges, leaders arose because of their charismatic gifts (primarily their military prowess), and any attempt at a dynasty was firmly resisted (cf. Jg. 8:22-23). Later, at the death of King Saul, the lack of precedent for the transfer of power erupted into civil war (2 Sa. 3:1ff.). David emerged victorious, and due to Yahweh's covenant with him, his son Solomon was confirmed as the next monarch. The unity of the nation was relatively short-lived, however. When Solomon died, the nation split again (1 Kg. 12), and this rupture never healed.

Consequently, the northern nation of Israel was repeatedly plagued by the problem of throne succession. Various strong kings emerged who established dynasties, but usurpers often broke these dynasties. In its full history, the northern nation saw eight different families on its throne, and the changes between them were inevitably the result of *coup d'etats*.

As the political climate shifted back and forth, and especially as the northern nation contended with the pull and tug of the empire-builders from Mesopotamia and Egypt, the economy also rose and fell. At the time Amos preached, the nation was

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<sup>1</sup>H. Wolff, *Amos the Prophet: the Man and his Background*, trans. F. McCurley (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 40. This rhetorical device, sometimes called the "graduated numerical sequence," appears frequently in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Sometimes it is in a two-three pattern (Ps. 62:11-12; Sirach 26:28; 50:25), sometimes, as here, a three-four pattern (Pro. 30:15b-17, 18-19, 21-23, 29-31; Sirach 26:5), and sometimes other sequences (Job 5:19; Pro. 6:16-19; Sirach 25:7-11). It also appears in other literature from the ancient Near East, cf. Wolff, 35.

<sup>2</sup>The two key words in this regard are *mishpat* (= justice) and *tsedeqah* (= righteousness).

under the leadership of Jeroboam II (1:1). During the reign of Jeroboam's grandfather, Jehoahaz, Israel had been reduced to a vassal state under Aram on her northern border (2 Kg. 13:1-3). Much of the Israelite army had been destroyed (2 Kg. 13:7). Eventually, however, Jehoahaz managed to disentangle himself from his vassalship (2 Kg. 13:4-5). His son Jehoash, Jeroboam's father, did even better, recapturing the cities on his northern border that had been lost during the vassalship to Aram (2 Kg. 13:25) and reducing to helplessness Judah in the south (2 Kg. 14:8-14). By the time Jeroboam II ascended to the throne, the kingdom was politically stable.

Jeroboam, taking advantage of a power vacuum, continued in the aggressive restoration of former Israelite lands,<sup>3</sup> recovering major cities to the north of his kingdom (2 Kg. 14:25-28).<sup>4</sup> With political stability also came economic prosperity, at least for the upper classes.<sup>5</sup> Such prosperity is well documented in the Book of Amos, with its references to splendid beds (3:12; 6:4),<sup>6</sup> leisured upper-class women (4:1), expensive mansions (3:15; 5:11a), lush vineyards (5:11b) and rich food (6:4b). It is further supported by archaeological evidence.<sup>7</sup>

## The Religious Background of the Book

When the northern nation seceded from the union (1 Kg. 12; 2 Chr. 10-11), her leaders rejected the dynasty of David and everything associated with it (1 Kg. 12:16, 19; 2 Chr. 10:19). This abandonment included the Mt. Zion temple, its services and its priesthood (1 Kg. 12:26-33, 2 Chr. 11:14-15). The southern nation had embraced not only the Torah but also the covenant God had made with David's family, the Mt. Zion temple and its priesthood (Ps. 89:1-4, 19-37; 132:1-18).<sup>8</sup> The northern nation, however, returned to the older ancestral shrines within its borders<sup>9</sup> and embraced the

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<sup>3</sup>This recovery was predicted by the prophet Jonah, though the only reference to it is not in the Book of Jonah (cf. 1 Kg. 14:25b).

<sup>4</sup>Lebo Hamath provided him access to the Euphrates in the north, cf. T. Hobbs, *2 Kings [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1985) 182-183.

<sup>5</sup>The general opinion about the Israelite economy in the time of Jeroboam II has been that it was very prosperous, based on the findings of archaeologists and the internal references in the Book of Amos, cf. B. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966) 228-229. An appropriate modification of this view is that such prosperity was probably primarily experienced by members of the upper-class who were associated with the royal court. After years of tribute payments to Aram, the conditions for the average citizen could not have been good. Furthermore, Jeroboam II's rapid rebuilding of the army, his expanded control over the transjordan, and his state reconstruction projects must have cost the citizens dearly in terms of taxes, cf. J. Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth Century Prophets* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988) 140.

<sup>6</sup>The text of 3:12 is uncertain, here, but this is the conclusion of J. Mays, *Amos [OTL]* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 66.

<sup>7</sup>J. Thompson, *The Bible and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 131-132; A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) 409-415.

<sup>8</sup>It is hard to imagine anything other than that Psalms 89 and 132 were composed in the southern nation of Judah.

<sup>9</sup>The most famous of these, of course, was Bethel, the place where Jacob had once dreamed of a ladder reaching into

Mosaic covenant alone. Still, the central rebuke of the Book of Amos is not that the north seceded or even that they rejected David.<sup>10</sup> The central burden of Amos is that they had egregiously violated the very covenant of Moses, which they claimed as their own!

In the forefront of their covenant failure was their tolerance and facility for social injustice. The Torah, which they embraced, had a good deal to say about social justice. Because Yahweh himself was a God of justice, he expected his holy people also to be a community concerned with social justice. The Israelites were to be careful about such things as weights and measures (Lv. 19:35-36). They were warned not to pervert justice in their courts by tolerating bribery, fostering partiality or allowing unfair lawsuits (Ex. 23:6-9; Lv. 19:15; Dt. 16:18-20). They were to avoid unreasonable collateral on loans, especially for those who were at an economic disadvantage (Ex. 22:26-27; Dt. 24:17-18). Money was to be loaned to their fellow Israelites without interest (Ex. 22:25; Lv. 25:35-38; Dt. 23:19-20). Workers were to be paid each day before sunset (Lv. 19:13; Dt. 24:14-15). In general, property sales were not to be permanent transactions, but land contracts (Lv. 25:23-24). All family properties were to revert to the original owner every fifty years (Lv. 25:25-28). Prices for the sale of properties were to be figured against the remaining time until the Jubilee (Lv. 25:14-17). The only exception was for plots sold within walled cities (Lv. 25:29-31).

In such statutes, Yahweh demonstrated his special concern for those who were powerless in society, especially the small farmers. No one was to take advantage of them (Ex. 22:21-24). Persons in authority were obliged to be spiritual leaders as well as political leaders. The king was called upon to keep a Torah scroll beside his throne for ready reference (Dt. 17:18-20). Later, Jesus (and Paul after him) would say that the whole law hung upon love toward God and love toward one's neighbor (Mt. 22:36-40; Lk. 10:25-28; Ro. 13:8-9). These very issues were central to the preaching of Amos. As it was, the poor were being severely oppressed by foreclosures, lawsuits, unreasonable collateral, bribery, intimidation, usury and taxation (2:6-8; 3:10; 4:1; 5:7, 10-13; 7:1; 8:4-6).

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the heavens (1 Kg. 12:28-29a; Ge. 28:10-19). Second to Bethel was Dan, a shrine in the far north originally built during the period of the judges (1 Kg. 12:29b-30; cf. Jg. 18:30-31). Tel Dan, the longest continuous excavation in Palestine, has yielded a considerable number of artifacts, one of the most fascinating being a *bamah* (= high place) with an eighth century altar and various cultic objects, such as, incense shovels and carved figurines, cf. "Is the Cultic Installation at Dan Really an Olive Press?" *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1984) 52-58; "Avraham Biran: Twenty years of Digging at Tel Dan," *BAR* (Jul-Aug. 1987) 12-25; A. Biran, "Tel Dan Scepter Head," *BAR* (Jan.-Feb. 1989) 29-31; "David Found at Dan," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1994) 26-39. Other places, also, were reconstructed as shrines by the northern Israelites because of their ancient sacred associations, such as, Shechem and Peniel (1 Kg. 12:25; Ge. 12:6-7; 32:30; 33:18-20; 35:4) as well as Gilgal (Am. 4:4; Ho. 12:11; cf. Jos. 4:20-24; 5:9).

<sup>10</sup>Amos, however, does look forward to the restoration of "David's fallen tent" in the future (9:11).

In addition to their covenant failure with respect to social justice, the northern nation for a long time had flirted with the religions of its pagan neighbors. The alternative shrines and religious festivals in Bethel and Dan were rife with syncretistic tendencies (1 Kg. 12:28-33). The resurgence of worship at the old sacred places was a clear violation of the Torah instructions (Dt. 12), and the Israelite kings without exception came under censure for failing to eliminate this evil, including Zimri, who only lasted on the throne for seven days (1 Kg. 13:32-34; 15:25-26, 33-34; 16:13, 19, 25-26, etc.). When Ahab of the Omri dynasty came to the throne, he set about importing foreign religion at the prompting of his Phoenician wife, Jezebel (1 Kg. 16:30-33; 21:25-26). Thus, it is no surprise to find that Jeroboam II, like his predecessors, continued in this same pathway of religious syncretism (1 Kg. 14:23-24).

The prophet Amos attacked such false religion with fervor (2:8; 5:26-27; 8:14). The people had subverted their true prophets (2:12). They resented any impositions upon them from the law of Moses (8:5a). Their worship at the ancient sacred places was so perverted that Amos described it as an act of sin (4:4-5; 5:21-23). So, Yahweh promised to totally destroy their cult centers (3:14; 5:5-6; 7:9).

### **Amos, the Man**

Amos belongs to a quartet of prophets in the eighth century B.C.<sup>11</sup> Two of them, Amos and Hosea, preached to the northern nation of Israel. The other two, Isaiah and Micah, preached to the southern nation of Judah. All four had deep concerns about social justice, covenant loyalty and the problem of religious syncretism.<sup>12</sup> What little can be discovered about Amos as a person comes from the book that bears his name. He did not descend from a professional religious background and certainly not from the guild of court prophets who supported the kings (i.e., 1 Kg. 22:6). Rather, he stood in the line of such prophetic voices as Elijah, Micaiah and Elisha before him. Prior to his call to prophetic ministry, he was a shepherd<sup>13</sup> and a dresser<sup>14</sup> of sycamore fruit (1:1; 7:14-15). Yet his call was

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<sup>11</sup>It should be noted that the order of the books of the prophets in the English Bible are arranged neither geographically nor chronologically. Furthermore, they are not arranged in the same way as in the Hebrew Bible, where the prophets appear in the second of three divisions in the Hebrew Bible, the *Nebiim*. In the Hebrew Bible, the writings of Amos appear in the scroll called "The Twelve," and it is third in the list. In the Septuagint, it appears second in the list of the Twelve, between Hosea and Joel.

<sup>12</sup>B. Anderson, *The Eighth Century Prophets [PC]* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

<sup>13</sup>Two different words are used, *noqed* (= herdsman of small cattle, i.e., sheep and goats, 1:1) and *boqer* (= herdsman of large cattle, 7:14).

<sup>14</sup>The Hebrew participle *boles* means "to scratch open," a procedure that promoted ripening, cf. W. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 41; R. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 883-884. Thus, some scholars describe him as "pincher" of fruit, cf. J. Smart, *IDB* (1962) I.117.

compelling (3:8), and he responded with alacrity.

His home was in Tekoa (1:1), which, oddly enough, was not in Israel but in Judah, some six miles south of Bethlehem (cf. 7:12). Thus, on his trip to the Bethel shrine in Israel, he must have passed directly by Jerusalem and the temple on Mt. Zion. The one place where it is known that he delivered his oracles was at the Bethel shrine, since he was expelled from the premises (7:10-13). Probably the vision in 9:1ff. was also at the Bethel shrine. It is not unlikely that he may have delivered oracles elsewhere, such as, the diatribe against Samaria, which may have been given in Israel's capital city (3:9ff.; 4:1ff.; 6:1ff.).

The time of his oracles can be approximated with a fair degree of accuracy from the opening statement (1:1). While both Uzziah and Jeroboam II had long reigns, Amos' prophecy was probably given between 760 and 750 B.C.<sup>15</sup> Nothing is known of the great earthquake mentioned in the opening, and while it must have been a clarifying detail in Amos' own time, any specific information has been lost in antiquity.<sup>16</sup>

Amos came from Tekoa in Judah to the northern nation of Israel to deliver his oracles (1:1).<sup>17</sup> They were given during the reign of Uzziah in Judah, which roughly puts Amos as a contemporary of Isaiah (cf. Is. 1:1) and Hosea (cf. 1:1). Though both Isaiah and Hosea seem to have had longer ministries than Amos, and somewhat later than his, Amos' sermons were no less powerful than theirs.

The structure of the Book of Amos falls into four major divisions. The *first division* is God's impending judgment upon all the nations of the Levant, including Israel (1:1--2:16). The *second division*, which, is characterized by several short oracles announcing judgment on the northern nation addresses only the nation Israel (3:1--6:14). The *third division* comprises a series of parabolic visions (locusts, fire, plumbline, fruit basket, execution) as well as some biographical material (7:1--9:10). Finally, the *fourth division* concludes the work with a vision of a restored Israel in the last days (9:11-15).

## **The Coming Judgment (1:2--2:16)**

The first series of oracles are directed to Israel's neighbors. The order in which Amos addresses these nations is such that each oracle brings the message of judgment closer to Israel itself. A brief look at a map of the ancient Near East makes it obvious that geographical progression was not Amos' concern. Rather, he begins with those

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<sup>15</sup>J. Robertson and C. Armerding, *ISBE* (1979) I.115; also, O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 396.

<sup>16</sup>Some scholars have speculated that Amos' initial authority may have derived from a prediction of this same earthquake, cf. B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 401.

<sup>17</sup>For more on Amos as a person, see the introductory comments on "Amos, the Man."

foreign nations, which had limited relationships with Israel. Damascus of Aram is first, for it was the most unconnected of the nations in relationship to Israel. Next comes Gaza, in the land of the Philistines, with whom Israel had frequent contact since the days of the judges. Then comes Tyre in Phoenicia, a foreign country with whom Israel had been on somewhat friendly terms ever since a former king, Ahab, had married a Phoenician princess (1 Kg. 16:31).

Moving to the next level of relational proximity, Amos pronounced judgment on Edom, Ammon and Moab, nations that were closely related to Israel in their origins. The Edomites descended from Esau, Jacob's brother (Ge. 36). The Ammonites and Moabites descended from Abraham's nephew, Lot (Ge. 19:30-38).

Finally, the closest national relative of Israel was Judah, the nation immediately to the south from which Israel had seceded during the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kg. 12//2 Chr. 10). In the end, judgment was pronounced upon Israel, too. It is not unlikely that Amos' denunciations of all the others may have been greeted with favor, since, after all, these nations were enemies of Israel to varying degrees. But the prophet's oracles edged closer and closer to home, until finally, he denounced Israel as equally under the scrutiny of a holy God who would bring judgment.

A reoccurring metaphor in the Book of Amos is the depiction of Yahweh as a divine lion.<sup>18</sup> In some passages, the metaphor is direct (e.g., 3:4, 8), and in other places it is indirect (e.g., 1:2). One thing is clear, the metaphor depicts God in the role of an attacker, and the nations of the Levant were his prey. The divine lion roared from Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, the place where he was enthroned between the cherubim.

While the northern nation had seceded from the union, they must realize that Yahweh had chosen Mt. Zion as his residence! His divine roar shattered the complacency of the northern nation. From the valleys of the shepherds to the heights of Mt. Carmel, the blast of Yahweh's roar shook the land (1:2).<sup>19</sup>

As the reader will shortly notice, the crimes of Israel's neighbors were war crimes. They included brutality, slave trading, treaty violation, the extermination of innocents, and desecration. Reading such oracles, one wonders how the modern atrocities of war are to be reckoned by Almighty God. Especially, one wonders how God assesses the American slave trade in the early decades of this country as well as the holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis in World War II. Perhaps Abraham Lincoln had in mind such biblical passages as these when, in his second inaugural address, he

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<sup>18</sup>The lions in ancient Palestine were a subspecies of the lions also found in Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Mesopotamia and northwest India. All were fierce carnivores. While lions became extinct in Greece in about 100 A.D., they lasted in Palestine until the end of the 13th century, R. Harrison, *ISBE* (1986) III.141-142.

<sup>19</sup>The translation of the verb is problematic because of the homonym '*abl*'. Two different words could be intended, either "mourned" (so KJV, RSV, ASV, NASB, AB) or "withered" (so NIV, NEB). Still, the general meaning is clear enough that Yahweh's roar was to be heard throughout the land.

said:

*Fondly do we hope--ferently do we pray--that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.'*

### **The Sins of Damascus (1:3-5)**

The first oracle is to Damascus in Aram.<sup>20</sup> God's indictment of this nation concerned its war crimes. The imagery of threshing with an iron-toothed sledge speaks of cruelty and violence in war. If taken literally, it might even mean that the Aramean army used machines to drive over the bodies of Gileadite prisoners of war, tearing them to shreds. If figurative, it refers to the devastation of the land through war (cf. Is. 41:15; 2 Kg. 13:7).<sup>21</sup> In either case, it suggests that war crimes do not go unnoticed by God. The act of war does not exempt a nation from the demands of social justice.

Because of its war crimes, Yahweh would bring the fires of judgment to the land of Aram and her leaders. The "house of Hazael" and the "fortresses of Ben-Hadad" refer to powerful ruling families in the history of Aram. The name Ben-Hadad (lit., "the son of Hadad") was apparently a throne name in Aram.<sup>22</sup> Hadad was the proper name of the storm god, Ba'al,<sup>23</sup> and it is possible that the Canaanite nations viewed their kings as sons of their patron deity.<sup>24</sup> The place names Biq'at Aven (= "valley of evil") and Beth Eden (= "house of delight") are likely puns for the Aramean city-states of Damascus and Bit-adini.<sup>25</sup> Because of their war crimes, Yahweh would send the citizens of Aram into exile to Kir (cf. 2 Kg. 16:9).<sup>26</sup>

### **The Sins of the Philistines (1:6-8)**

The second oracle is directed to the Philistine cities of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon

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<sup>20</sup>For the rhetorical expression, "For three sins, even for four...", see the introduction.

<sup>21</sup>F. Anderson and D. Freedman, *Amos [AB]* (New York: Doubleday, 1989) 237-239.

<sup>22</sup>The name Ben-Hadad appears several times in the Old Testament (1 Kg. 15:18; 20:1; 2 Kg. 6:24; 8:7, etc.), and these citations can hardly all refer to the same person, given the years of difference between their appearance. During the reign of Jeroboam II's great grandfather, Hazael had come to power in Syria by assassinating his predecessor, Ben-Hadad (2 Kg. 8:7-15). However, he named his own son with the same throne name, Ben-Hadad (2 Kg. 13:3). In Assyrian documents, Hazael's dynasty is referred to as the "house of Hazael," cf. Mays, 29.

<sup>23</sup>H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, trans. J. Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973) 132-133.

<sup>24</sup>Ringgren, 171-172.

<sup>25</sup>L. LaSor, *ISBE* (1979) I.465.

<sup>26</sup>The exact location of Kir is as yet undetermined, cf. W. LaSor, *ISBE* (1986) III.40.

and Ekron, though Gaza is treated as the leading city among the four.<sup>27</sup> Here, the social sin is slave trading. The Philistines had invaded entire communities in order to populate the slave trade, and they sold captured citizens, old and young alike, as slaves to the Edomites.

Slavery was common enough in the ancient world, and even in the Torah, there are regulations for debt slavery (i.e., when someone was reduced to slavery in order to pay a debt). However, the holiness code placed a statue of limitations on debt slavery, a maximum of forty-nine years (Lv. 25:39ff.). Kidnapping for slavery was considered to be a capital offense (Ex. 21:16; Dt. 24:7). So, while the Torah does not legislate against slavery directly, it contained regulatory statutes, which aimed at lessening the abuse. For the Philistines to ruthlessly attack other communities in order to traffic in human lives was not overlooked by Yahweh. He determined that the Philistines must be destroyed because of their sins.

### **The Sins of Tyre (1:9-11)**

The third oracle also concerned the slave trade. Directed against Tyre, this denunciation carried an additional element, the sin of breaking a treaty. Bad enough that Tyre should join the Philistines in trading human lives to the Edomites, but those whom Tyre sold as slaves were peoples they had sworn to stand by. They had defied their covenant obligations. Tyre's treaty-partner is not named, though it might even have been Israel, if the denunciation recalls the pact between Solomon and Hiram many years earlier (cf. 1 Kg. 5:12; 9:10-14). Still, there is no evidence that Tyre captured Israelites for the slave trade with Edom. Whoever the victim, the Phoenicians had ruthlessly broken their treaty and sold their former allies into the hands of slave traders. This evil Yahweh would not overlook!

### **The Sins of Edom (1:11-12)**

Not only was Edom involved in the slave trade, for centuries the nation had antagonized Israel, his "brother".<sup>28</sup> This antagonism would later be epitomized in Edom's glee over the destruction of Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7). Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all pronounced judgment upon Edom, but it is in Amos, and later Obadiah (cf. Ob. 10-14), that this judgment is seen to be the result of the nation's unrelenting

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<sup>27</sup>Originally, the Philistine political system was a military aristocracy of five cities, the fifth being Gath. Gath, apparently, lost its former importance, for in several prophetic denunciations, only the other four cities are mentioned (cf. Je. 25:20; Zep. 2:4; Zec. 9:5-7). We know that Hazael of Aram captured Gath on a marauding expedition through Judah (2 Kg. 12:17), but no clear information is given about its further demise. Amos 6:2 presupposes that Gath had been destroyed by the time of Amos' prophecy.

<sup>28</sup>The familial relationship between Israel and Edom (Jacob and Esau) was recalled at various times in the Old Testament, so the statement here of violence against Edom's brother must surely refer to the Israelites (cf. Nu. 20:14; Dt. 2:4; 23:7; Ob. 10, 12).

antagonism toward his "brother" Israel. Family loyalty was a virtue Yahweh held high, and because of Edom's ruthless war efforts against Israel, her two chief cities, Teman in the south and Bozrah in the north, would be destroyed.

### **The Sins of Ammon (1:13-15)**

Once again, war crimes become the sentence of doom against a nation, this time the nation of Ammon. Here, the Ammonites had initiated a border conflict with Gilead to the north. In their insatiable hunger for more land, the Ammonites adopted the practice of disemboweling the pregnant women among those they captured (cf. 2 Kg. 8:12; 15:16). This atrocity toward defenseless women and their unborn children is also to be found among the Assyrians, since it is mentioned in a hymn to Tiglath-Pileser I.<sup>29</sup> So, because of its war crimes, the nation of Ammon and its capital, Rabbah, would be struck with the whirlwind of Yahweh's judgment. Ammon, too, would go into exile.

### **The Sins of Moab (2:1-3)**

The Moabites are indicted next, and as before, war crimes are probably the issue. In some unspecified conflict with Edom, Moab's southern neighbor, the Moabites had "burned to lime the bones of an Edomite king."<sup>30</sup> J. A. Motyer has suggested that this occasion is what is described in 2 Kings 3:26-27, and that the king of Moab burned to death the live son of the king of Edom. The problem with the Hebrew text in 2 Kings 3 is its ambiguity, for it is not clear whether the victim of the burning was the son of the king of Edom or the son of the king of Moab. Motyer suggests that it was the captured son of the king of Edom.<sup>31</sup> Against this is the opinion of other scholars that the Moabite king burned to death his own son.<sup>32</sup>

Whatever the precise circumstances, Yahweh fully intended to bring retribution upon Moab for her crime against Edom's king. Keriath, the site of a shrine to the god Chemosh, would be decimated.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings [AB]* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) 91.

<sup>30</sup>The assumption here is that this action was taken against an Edomite king captured in war. Another suggestion is that this was a case of tomb desecration, which would remove it from the framework of war. However, given the indictments against the previous nations, the context of war seems more likely.

<sup>31</sup>J. Motyer, *The Day of the Lion: The Message of Amos* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1974) 44-45.

<sup>32</sup>B. Margalit, "Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son," *BAR* (Nov.-Dec. 1986 Vol. XII, No. 6) 62-63. According to Margalit, King Mesha sacrificed the crown prince in order to pacify his patron god Chemosh.

<sup>33</sup>Keriath is mentioned in the Stele of Mesha, where Mesha claims to have brought the chieftain of Ataroth to Keriath, "...dragging him before Chemosh," J. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1958) 210.

### **The Sins of Judah (2:4-5)**

Now, the circle of judgment tightens considerably. Judah, the southern nation which was made up of two of the original twelve clans, is indicted next. Her sins are her many violations of the Torah. While the nations surrounding the two Israelite states were indicted because of their war crimes and slave traffic, crimes that showed wanton disregard for human life and human rights, the Canaanite nations had not been included in the covenant God made with Israel through Moses. Their indictment, similar to Paul's statement in the New Testament, is more along the lines that "by nature" some things should be recognized as irrevocably evil, even in the absence of a civil law that says so (cf. Ro. 2:12-16).

For Judah, however, it was different. The people of Judah had been given the law! They had entered into covenant with Yahweh at Mt. Sinai! Nevertheless, they had repeatedly failed to keep the law, and even worse, they had developed allegiances to the false gods of their Canaanite neighbors. They were guilty of disobedience and apostasy. Therefore, the judgment of God would fall upon Judah, even to the destruction of Jerusalem. If Aram, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon and Moab had ignored the voice of conscience, Judah had ignored the revelation of God himself (cf. He. 10:29-31)!

### **The Sins of Israel (2:6-16)**

Finally, Amos turns his attention to Israel. God had not overlooked the sins of the northern nation, either. They may have rejected the covenant of David, Jerusalem, the temple, and the Davidic dynasty. They may have tried to revert to a form of worship typical of the ancient tribal league and the patriarchs. Nevertheless, they were still bound to the Torah, and it is by the Torah that they would be judged.

In particular, their sins were the violation of the social statutes of the law. The indictment for "selling the righteous for silver" and "the needy for a pair of sandals" refers either to the condemnation of the innocent by unscrupulous judges, who received kick-backs from the prosecution, or even more likely, the selling of debtors into debt slavery for some trifling liability (2:6b).<sup>34</sup> To the modern westerner, the reference to a pair of sandals is obscure, but to the person in the ancient Near East, it is deeply significant. This phrase is probably an idiom for the legal transfer of land.<sup>35</sup> The poor man who is "sold for a pair of sandals" has been unjustly dispossessed of his property. The phrases concerning "trampling on the heads of the poor" and "denying

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<sup>34</sup>H. Fosbroke, *IB* (1956) VI.786-787.

<sup>35</sup>In the transfer of land in Nuzi, for instance, the seller would lift his foot off the ground he was selling, and place the buyer's foot on it. The sandal seems to have been a probative instrument in transfers of land (cf. Ps. 60:8//108:9). Even in Israel, land transactions were ratified by the symbolic gesture of the gift of a sandal (Ru. 4:7-8), cf. R. deVaux, *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961) I.169; J. Dearman, 19-21.

justice to the oppressed" is against the same legal background (2:7a). The use of the courts to squeeze money was rampant. When a woman was sold into debt slavery, Torah forbade that she become the concubine of both the father and his son. Such compulsion violated her rights (cf. Ex. 21:7-11; Dt. 22:30). Yet, the land grabbers were violating this statute, also. Furthermore, they were ignoring the laws concerning collateral. If the garment of the borrower was left as surety for debt, it was to be returned before sunset (cf. Ex. 22:26-27). In the case of a widow, no collateral was to be demanded at all (Dt. 24:17). Obviously, these laws were being ignored, since the garments for collateral were being used as pallets to sleep on. Wine was taken as fines (perhaps interest penalties), and the beneficiaries of this exploitation then put on the air of religiosity by participating in worship (2:8).<sup>36</sup>

So, the judgment of Yahweh was coming upon Israel, too. The Israelites ought to have learned from their own history. Because of the Amorites' evil, God had dispossessed them in ancient times when the Israelites had invaded Canaan (2:9-10; cf. Ge. 15:16; Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5; 34:11, etc.). He surely would not overlook the sins of his own people now! When the Israelites sinned, he had sent prophets to correct them, Nazarites like Samuel (1 Sa. 1:11; Nu. 6:1ff.), but they corrupted God's spokesmen and ignored their warnings (2:11-12).<sup>37</sup> Consequently, doom for Israel was on the horizon. Yahweh would crush Israel just as surely as a heavy wagon loaded with grain crushes anything it rolls over. No one would escape his divine retribution. The army would be terrified and useless to help. Jeroboam II might have had full confidence in his militia (2 Kg. 14:28), but it would be no match for Yahweh! Yahweh, once the divine "Man of War" for Israel (cf. Ex. 15:3), had now become the nation's enemy.

### **Oracles of Judgment Against Israel (3:1--6:14)**

The oracles in the second division of the book are characterized by introductory formulae, such as, 'hear this word' (3:1; 4:1; 5:1) and 'woe to those who....' (5:18; 6:1, 4).<sup>38</sup> Not every pericope contains such a formula, but there are enough of them to link the various oracles into a collection.

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<sup>36</sup>The Hebrew text is not clear whether the "altar" and the "elohim" are in reference to pagan institutions or the Bethel shrine. Translations which do not capitalize "elohim" (= God, god) obviously take the worship to be pagan, but the text is not conclusive.

<sup>37</sup>One particular example of corrupting a prophet is recorded after his oracle against the Bethel shrine in the reign of Jeroboam I (1 Kg. 13).

<sup>38</sup>Most critical scholars suggest that these oracles are more on the order of an anthology and that they were collected by a later editor rather than that Amos wrote and preached them in this order, cf. Childs, 403. This notion, based on literary criticism, may or may not be true.

### **Election and Judgment (3:1-2)**

In the New Testament, Peter writes, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the house of God" (1 Pe. 4:17). While this statement is not a direct quotation from the Old Testament, it surely embodies an idea that is to be found in several of the prophets, including Amos (cf. Eze. 9; Zec. 13:7-9; Mal. 3:1-5). God's people are accountable to him at a higher level because they are in covenant with him (3:1-3). There is both a blessing and a risk in a covenant relationship. Since Israel's covenant with Yahweh was on the order of a suzerainty treaty, it contained clauses for both blessings and cursings (Dt. 27-28).<sup>39</sup> Out of love, God had chosen<sup>40</sup> Israel as his special people and delivered them from Egypt (cf. Dt. 7:6-7; 10:15; 14:2). However, they carried a serious responsibility to obey God as their Divine Suzerain, and when they did not, they were liable to his judgment.

Salvation and judgment go together. Israel had been chosen; therefore, God would punish the nation for its sins. As James Luther Mays has said, it is necessary to understand this point of view if later one is to understand why the gospel in the New Testament is founded on the crucifixion.<sup>41</sup>

### **Yahweh, the Divine Lion (3:3-8)**

This oracle begins with a series of rhetorical questions, all of them dealing with cause and effect and all of them with an obvious answer. In the first, it is obvious that if two individuals meet and walk together, they have had an appointment (3:3).<sup>42</sup> If Yahweh and Israel walked together, they did so because of the covenant. The second question is more ominous. It is obvious that when a lion roars, whether in the brush or in his den, he does so because he has captured his prey (3:4). If Yahweh roared (cf. 3:8), he did so because Israel was in his grasp and destined for judgment. The third question relies on the imagery of the hunt. It is obvious that a snared bird has been captured because a hunter has set the trap (3:5).<sup>43</sup> If Israel was now on the verge of judgment, it was because she had fallen into Yahweh's trap. In the fourth question, it is obvious that when one hears the watchman sound a war trumpet, presumably from the city wall or a tower, the city is under attack by an enemy (3:6). So, if the prophet raised his voice to warn that disaster was coming to Samaria and Israel, would it not

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<sup>39</sup>G. Mendenhall, *IDB* (1962) I.714-715.

<sup>40</sup>Lit., "known;" the verb *yada'* (= to know) carries a relational as well as a cognitive meaning, and this is especially true since the same verb is used for sexual intercourse.

<sup>41</sup>Mays, 58.

<sup>42</sup>The niphil form of the verb *ye'ad* (= to designate, arrange a meeting) means to have an appointment.

<sup>43</sup>The most common bird snare consisted of two nets mounted on a base. The nets were sprung so that one side was drawn down and held in place by a trigger. When released, either by hand or by the bird touching the bait, the nets would spring up and envelop the bird, cf. L. Toombs, *IDB* (1962) IV.688.

also mean that God had become Israel's enemy?

These rhetorical questions set up the next statement that God reveals his future plans to the prophets (3:7; cf. Je. 23:18). Amos wished to make clear that his oracles were not private inventions; they were revelations from the Lord! His preaching was an ethical message for the present, but it was given in light of the future. The prophets' revealed knowledge about the future was not the stuff of speculation or idle curiosity. It was aimed at producing repentance and a righteous response to God in the here-and-now. So Yahweh, the Divine Lion, had roared (3:8a). Israel, his prey, was now within his grasp. His prophet, Amos, was delivering God's prophetic message to a people under judgment, for the word of the Lord was compelling, and the prophet could not restrain it (cf. Je. 20:9).

### **The Witnesses are Summoned (3:9-11)**

Now, witnesses from the surrounding nation are summoned for a visit to Samaria, the capital city, so they might see the state of the nation who called Yahweh its God (3:9a). Though the Israelites in Samaria were the people of Yahweh, their land was filled with unrest instead of peace and oppression instead of justice (3:9b). The people of Israel had become so morally warped that they no longer knew what was straightforward and honest.<sup>44</sup> Their capital was filled with tumult, oppression, violence and robbery (3:9-10). They hoarded their ill-gotten riches while they pressed for more. Because of these sins, Yahweh announced the invasion of the land by outsiders (3:11). The people of Israel had received the sentence of doom, which the Deuteronomic code had promised (cf. Dt. 28:25, 49-52).

### **The Evidences of a Lion Attack (3:12)**

The Torah required a shepherd to produce evidence that a sheep had been scavenged from the flock in order to alleviate the suspicion of theft (Ex. 22:10-13). The remains of the carcass would be considered sufficient evidence. In the coming attack of the Divine Lion upon Israel, a few remnants of the carcass might be left, but it was hardly a rescue (3:12a)! Only enough would be left of Israel's carcass to prove she had met her fate from a lion attack. The rich citizens of Samaria might dawdle on their luxurious couches (cf. 6:4), but inexorable judgment was their future.

### **The Day of Punishment (3:13-15)**

Yahweh intended a day of reckoning for this sinful nation, so he called for witnesses to hear his pronouncement of judgment (3:13). The identity of the witnesses is not given. Perhaps they are the same as those mentioned earlier (cf. 3:9).

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<sup>44</sup>The word *nakoah* refers to what is straight or right, cf. Holladay, 238.

In any case, their role was not to give evidence, but rather, to hear the judgment and serve as guarantors of the court's verdict.<sup>45</sup> Amos addressed the nation as the "house of Jacob," a title which expresses well the people's corporate solidarity (3:13; 6:8; 7:2, 5; 8:7).<sup>46</sup>

The "day of punishment" will later be called the "day of Yahweh" (5:18, 20), and often it is simply referred to as "that day" (8:3, 9, 13). In this time of retribution, Yahweh would destroy the Bethel shrine Jeroboam I had erected (3:14).<sup>47</sup> He would sweep away the luxurious summer homes and winter homes, which the rich had built from their profits at the expense of the poor (3:15).

### **Rich Leisured Women (4:1-3)**

The moral problem with Israel's *nouveau riche* was not merely wealth in itself. Various individuals in Israel's history had been wealthy, not the least of which was Abraham. The degrading problem of Israel's wealthy class was that they had amassed their wealth by grinding the poor. Their callous attitude toward the less fortunate was no place more evident than in the leisured "cows" who incited their husbands<sup>48</sup> to further crush the powerless so that they might party on (4:1)!<sup>49</sup>

Yet, divine judgment was coming! These same rich women would be taken into exile in the most degrading and agonizing manner. Led through breaches in the city walls, they would be roped together as slaves for a foreign conqueror (4:2-3).<sup>50</sup>

### **Sinful Worship (4:4-5)**

This short oracle is a biting sarcasm. It turns the call for worship into a denunciation. When the Israelites rejected the Davidic covenant and the temple on Mt. Zion, they replaced the southern form of worship with the ancient sacred shrines of Bethel and Gilgal.<sup>51</sup> There they sacrificed, paid their tithes, and practiced the

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<sup>45</sup>Mays, 69.

<sup>46</sup>Corporate personality was an important concept in ancient Israel, cf. H. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (rpt. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). Later, the nation will also be addressed as "Isaac" (7:9, 16) and "Joseph" (5:15).

<sup>47</sup>It may be remembered that earlier an unnamed prophet, also from Judah, had condemned the Bethel shrine and predicted its destruction (cf. 1 Kg. 13:1-3).

<sup>48</sup>Lit., "lords"

<sup>49</sup>One finds an equally scathing attack upon leisured women in Isaiah 3:16--4:1.

<sup>50</sup>Assyrian brutality was famous in the ancient world. Prisoners of war were stripped naked, impaled, decapitated, flayed, stabbed, mutilated and tortured in a variety of other ways, as depicted in the bas-reliefs of Sennacherib's conquest of Lachish in the Eighth Century B.C., cf. *BAR* (Mar/Apr. 1984 Vol. X No. 2) 63-65; cf. J. Wevers, *IDB* (1962) IV.804-805. While the Hebrew of 4:2-3 is uncertain, the general picture of terrible retribution is clear enough. For details concerning emendations and word divisions in the text, see Anderson and Freedman, pp. 422-425; T. McComiskey, "Amos," *EBC* (1985) VII.303.

<sup>51</sup>Bethel, of course, was the primary state shrine built by Jeroboam I (cf. 1 Kings 12). Gilgal was the site of two

various rituals of Torah, boasting about their innovative spirituality (4:4-5). However, Yahweh assessed this worship as rebellion and sin, because it did not result in righteousness in their daily lives. Formal worship that did not issue in social justice was an offense to God!

### **Refusing to Repent (4:6-13)**

The next several paragraphs are tied together with the repeating indictment, *you did not return to me*. The verb *shuv* (= turn, turn back, return, repent) is a versatile one in the eighth century prophets. Amos used it extensively in the first two chapters when he pronounced judgment on the nations of the Levant. For "three sins, even for four, Yahweh would not turn back [his wrath]" (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). Now, Amos shows why God would not repeal the coming judgment. The Israelites had stubbornly refused to return to Yahweh, in spite of all his disciplinary actions, so now, he would not turn back his wrath from them.

There was no question about it. Yahweh had tried! In faithfulness to his covenant (cf. Dt. 28), he had disciplined Israel with drought and pestilence again and again (4:6-9). Since Israel's perennial sin was to follow the fertility cults of the Canaanites, it should have been obvious to them that serving the Ba'als of Canaan had brought them less fertility, not more. Furthermore, Yahweh had allowed the Canaanites to oppress them because of their waywardness (4:10), but this had not induced Israel to repent either. Finally, God even allowed some Israelite cities to be obliterated (4:11), but this, too, was a futile warning. In spite of famine, drought, crop-failure, war, contagious disease, and natural calamity, the Israelites resolutely would not turn to God. Consequently, there was nothing left for them but to prepare to meet God (4:12). The phrase, "Prepare to meet your God," is one of the most ominous in the entire book. If the nation would not turn to him whose mercy and forgiveness was freely offered, then they would meet him nevertheless, this time in judgment. The passage rings with the same theme as the personification of wisdom, who would laugh at those who scoffed at her (cf. Pro. 1:20-33).

The final verse in this section (4:13) is often considered to be a hymn because of its poetic character.<sup>52</sup> In fact, there are three such passages in the book (cf. 4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6), all of them descriptions of Yahweh. Whether or not Amos may have used portions of existing hymnic material, the three passages are striking in their description of Yahweh through the language of theophany, first as the Creator and Sustainer of the physical world, but also as the one who reveals the prophetic word

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important historical events, the original entry into Canaan under Joshua (Jos. 4:20-24; Jos. 5:9-12) and the anointing of Israel's first king (1 Sa. 11:14-15). By the eighth century, it was still being used as a site for pilgrimage and sacrifice (cf. 5:5; Ho. 12:11).

<sup>52</sup>See discussion in McComiskey, 307-308; Mays, 83-84; Anderson and Freedman, 453-455.

and then enters history in order to perform it (cf. 3:7)! These hymns, if hymns they are, proclaim the sovereignty of God in the most majestic terms!

### **Dirge for the Nation (5:1-3)**

The next oracle takes the form of a funeral dirge (5:1).<sup>53</sup> The fall of the "house of Israel" would be like the death of a virgin daughter. To his listeners, Amos' dirge would be akin to reading one's own obituary in the morning paper.<sup>54</sup>

The imagery of the "virgin Israel," cut off even before her marriage, was a potent one. The memories of Jephthah's human sacrifice of his virgin daughter were kept alive by an annual ritual of four days mourning over her tragic death (cf. Jg. 11:29-40),<sup>55</sup> and it is not unlikely that Amos' imagery intentionally recalls this event. Like the virgin daughter of Jephthah, Israel would be cut off prematurely (5:2). The armies of her cities would be decimated (5:3).

### **The Purpose of Worship (5:4-6)**

Worship is, above all, a relationship with God. When worship sinks to the level of ritual without relationship, it ceases to be valid. The ancient shrines of Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba<sup>56</sup> may have been monuments to the past relationships between Israel's ancestors and Yahweh, but simply making pilgrimages to these places was no sign of genuine spirituality. What the Lord wanted was for them to seek him and to conduct their lives out of a living relationship with him (5:4). As for the ancient shrines, they were under divine judgment and would be swept away (5:5-6). Thus, the purpose of worship was not to "visit Bethel," but rather, to "seek Yahweh!"

The appellation "house of Joseph" alludes to the fact that the northern nation's principal tribe was Ephraim, one of the sons of Joseph. In fact, Amos' contemporary, Hosea, consistently refers to the northern nation by the name Ephraim.

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<sup>53</sup>The *qina* (= dirge, lamentation), as mentioned in 5:1, has a characteristic poetic meter, each line with five stressed syllables, cf. E. Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part I with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 10-11.

<sup>54</sup>Mays, 85.

<sup>55</sup>The notion that Jephthah merely forced his daughter to remain unmarried is a later, medieval interpretation. The face value reading of the Hebrew text is that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter in death, cf. A. Cundall & L. Morris, *Judges & Ruth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1968) 147-149.

<sup>56</sup>For the shrines at Bethel and Gilgal, see comments at 4:4. Beersheba, in the south of Judah, was one of the places where Abraham prayed (Ge. 21:31-34) and where Yahweh appeared to Isaac and to Jacob (Ge. 26:23-25; 46:1). The fact that it was in Judah meant that in order to visit it, citizens of Israel had to cross the border, pass by the temple on Zion, and make their way to the very southern border of the southern nation (cf. 8:14).

### **The Sins of Social Injustice (5:7-13)**

Because the Israelites had no true relationship with Yahweh, their social behavior was not guided by the holiness of his nature. *Mishpat* (= justice, legal decision or legal claim) was turned to wormwood<sup>57</sup> and *tsedeqah* (= righteousness, blameless behavior, what conforms to ethical norms) was thrown out as something worthless (5:7).<sup>58</sup> Yet in their sinful behavior, the Israelites were spurning the Creator of the universe who made the constellations, who maintained the sequence of days and nights, who controlled the oceans, and who brings judgment on fortified cities (5:8-9).<sup>59</sup> Because they disregarded him, they also spurned anyone in court who told the truth (5:10).<sup>60</sup> Their ethics were entirely utilitarian, and the end justified the means. By overturning justice in the courts, they exploited the weak, using the wealth of their dishonest gains to construct for themselves mansions and vineyards (5:11). Yet, Yahweh's word of judgment was that these luxuries would be destroyed before they could even be used.

The social sins of Israel mounted up before God (5:12a). Through extortion and bribery, they took advantage of those lacking power and position (5:12b). Because of such threats, any who might have been inclined to argue for justice were intimidated into silence (5:13).

### **Perhaps, but Not Likely (5:14-17)**

Apparently one of the claims of the northern Israelites was that Yahweh was still with them, regardless of the social conditions of the times. In fact, the ancient shrine of Beersheba epitomized the idea of God's abiding presence, for there God had promised Isaac, "I am with you" (Ge. 26:23-24), and there he had promised Jacob, "I will go with you" (Ge. 46:4). Centuries later, the descendants of Isaac and Jacob were still making the pilgrimage to Beersheba (cf. 5:5) and saying to themselves, "Yahweh Elohe' Tsabaoth is with us" (5:14).<sup>61</sup>

In response to this arrogant confidence, Yahweh challenged them. They must

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<sup>57</sup>The noun *la'edah* refers to a Palestinian plant famous for its bitter taste.

<sup>58</sup>The words *mishpat* and *tsedeqah* appear as pairs in three different passages (5:7, 24; 6:12). They are Amos' defining terms for social justice.

<sup>59</sup>For the use of hymnic material, see comments at 4:13.

<sup>60</sup>Lit., "in the gate" (also, 5:12, 15). The city gate of the ancient Near Eastern walled city, composed of small rooms and benches, served as the civic center for the community. Here, the elders of the city convened to arrange civic affairs and magistrates passed judgment on civil cases (cf. 1 Kg. 22:10; Je. 38:7; 2 Sa. 15:2; Dt. 15:7; 22:15, 24; La. 5:14), cf. Cundall & Morris, 297; D. Cole, *Biblical Archaeology Slide Set, Captions* (Washington: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1985) 18.

<sup>61</sup>The NIV renders the name *Tsabaoth* (= hosts) as "Almighty." One of Amos' favorite names for God is Yahweh Elohe' Tsabaoth (cf. 3:13; 4:13; 5:14, 15, 16, 27; 6:8, 14; 9:5). On a couple of occasions, he even adds the title *Adonay* (= lord, master) to make a four-fold name, Yahweh Elohe' Tsabaoth Adonay (3:13; 5:16).

seek good, not evil, if they were to make the claim that God was with them! They must maintain social justice, and then perhaps<sup>62</sup>--just perhaps--Yahweh Elohe' Tsabaoth would have mercy upon them (5:15).<sup>63</sup> However, given their present bent, it was unlikely that they would change. Therefore, Yahweh's purpose of judgment would not change either. The streets and public squares, farms and vineyards would all taste the devastation of Yahweh's visit in judgment (5:16-17a). If earlier Yahweh had said, "Prepare to meet your God" (4:12), now he says, "I will pass through your midst" (5:17b). What a terrible irony: the people who claimed that God was with them would indeed have a visitation from him, but it would not be a pleasant visit!

### **The Day of Yahweh (5:18-20)**

Earlier, Amos spoke of "that day" as the coming day of reckoning for Israel (cf. 2:16; 3:14). The fuller expression, used throughout the prophets, is the "Day of Yahweh" (cf. Jl. 1:15; 2:1-2, 11, 31; 3:14; Ob. 15; Is. 2:12-17; 13:6-13; Zp. 1:14-18; Je. 46:10; Eze. 7:19; 13:5; 30:3; Zc. 14:1; Mal. 4:5). It seems from the way that Amos alludes to the phrase that the Israelites already had in mind an anticipation for the "Day of Yahweh." They believed it would be a time of blessing, prosperity, hope and light. It may very well be that this term, which formed part of Israel's eschatological hope, had been used for some time. At least Amos uses the phrase as one that would be familiar to his listeners. It is probable that the Day of Yahweh was popularly viewed as the eschatological moment of Yahweh's self-revelation and action when his victory over all his enemies would culminate in the supremacy of Israel.<sup>64</sup> What a shock, then, to hear Amos preach that "that day," far from being what was popularly expected, would be a devastating judgment (5:18-20). It would be as shocking as escaping from a lion only to meet a bear, or as terrifying as having a viper bite someone in his own home.

### **When God Hates the Worship Service (5:21-27)**

So, Israel continued to practice Yahweh worship at the ancient shrines. They held the annual convocations and celebrations,<sup>65</sup> brought the required burnt offerings

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<sup>62</sup>The word '*ula*' (= perhaps) is emphatic in the sentence.

<sup>63</sup>The remnant of Joseph, like the house of Joseph in 5:6, refers to the Joseph tribes as the northern nation's dominant clans.

<sup>64</sup>See discussion in E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. A. Heathcote and P. Allcock (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 319ff. The theology of the Day of Yahweh is beyond the scope of this brief commentary. In short, it may be said that its usage embraces both a near and a far fulfillment, the near one in the coming historical judgments of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions, which would bring to an end the independent life of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the distant one at the end of the ages, which would include judgments on all the nations of the world, cf. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 9-11.

<sup>65</sup>The three annual pilgrim festivals of unleavened bread, weeks and booths are probably intended here (cf. Ex. 23:14-17; 34:22-23; Dt. 16:16).

and meal offerings (Lv. 1-3), and sang the hymns set to instrumental accompaniment.<sup>66</sup> All these expressions of worship Yahweh loathed (5:21-23), because they did not spring from hearts, which sought him and his righteous ways. What Yahweh wanted was not more liturgy on holy days, but a flood of justice and righteousness every day (5:24; cf. Mt. 6:33)!

It was not, of course, that the rituals of worship were simply to be traded in for a social program. Even during the forty years of desert sojourn, the Israelites had worshiped with sacrifices and offerings (5:25).<sup>67</sup> It was not that these elements were wrong, but that now they had become adulterated with all sorts of pagan intrusions (5:26).<sup>68</sup> Because of such mixed worship, the judgment of exile was on the northern horizon (5:27). The same God who had delivered them from Egyptian bondage and brought them through the desert to the promised land would now send them away from this same land into another bondage!

### **Complacent, Apathetic Men (6:1-7)**

If earlier Amos indicted the rich, leisured women (cf. 4:1), now he indicts the powerful men in the nobility class.<sup>69</sup> Though they felt confident of their future, the message of God was that they should look at other kingdoms that had felt equally secure. Calneh and Hamath, city-states to the north of Israel, had once flourished, but now they were gone.<sup>70</sup> Gath, in Philistia, was also once a powerful city, but it had fallen into ruin.<sup>71</sup> Was Samaria, the capital of Israel, more powerful than these

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<sup>66</sup>The term *si'r* could be used for any sort of song, but here, obviously, it refers to songs used in cultic worship. Generally, the term is used for a praise song as opposed, for instance, to the *qina* (= dirge), cf. J. McCann, Jr., *ISBE* (1988) IV.582.

<sup>67</sup>The rhetorical question is intended to have "yes" as an answer, cf. Motyer, 134.

<sup>68</sup>The Hebrew of 5:26 is very uncertain. Compare the NIV rendering, for instance, with the following translation: "You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images, which you made for yourselves" (RSV). Sakkuth and Kaiwan were names for the astral deity Saturn. The LXX, on the other hand, has "the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of your god Raiphan," a rendering that is quoted in the New Testament (cf. Ac. 7:43). However the text is to be read, the general thrust is clear enough, that is, that in their devotion to religious ritual, the Israelites also had fallen into the syncretistic practices of pagan religion.

<sup>69</sup>The expression *n'quvey re'shi't haggoyim* (= distinguished men of the foremost among the nations) is a sarcasm against the worldly ambitions of Israel's upper class. Whatever their self-inflated opinions, Yahweh pronounced upon them woe!

<sup>70</sup>Hamath, on the Orontes River, was an important city in the Hittite Empire. At the Battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C., the king of Hamath contributed 700 war chariots and 10,000 infantry to defend the city against Shalmaneser III of Assyria. Though it did not fall immediately, in time the city succumbed to Shalmaneser's advances, cf. H. Vos, *ISBE* (1982) II.602. The fall of Hamath must have been well known to the Israelites. Calneh is more difficult to locate. A city by that name was originally built by Nimrod in pre-Abrahamic times (cf. Ge. 10:9-10). However, no city by that name has been identified. The fact that Calneh was mentioned alongside Hamath suggests that it was to the north, cf. C. Gordon, *IDB* (1962) I.490.

<sup>71</sup>Earlier, Amos did not even mention Gath in his list of Philistine cities (cf. 1:6-8), and this same omission is found in other passages as well (cf. Footnote #27).

vanquished towns (6:2)? The nobles of Israel did not take seriously the impending threat of Yahweh's judgment, but instead, persisted in their violence toward the powerless (6:3). They lounged in luxury (6:4)<sup>72</sup>. They participated in the *marzeah* (= cultic feast), a pagan ritual taking the form of a banquet several days long, replete with excessive drinking and lounging.<sup>73</sup>

With all their time occupied in such revelry, the upper classes had no time to grieve over the reign of terror, which was happening to their nation (6:6b). In fact, they were the very cause! Because of their apathy and complacency, Amos declared that they would be the first to be exiled. The party would be over (6:7)!

### **Doomsday is Coming (6:8-11)**

Yahweh had taken oath upon his own name to surrender Samaria to the enemy (6:8)! He hated the arrogance of the Israelites, and he would not spare their capital. Masses of the population would perish in the coming invasion (6:9). People would die, not only by war, but also by disease.<sup>74</sup> So dreadful will be the calamity that people would avoid using even Yahweh's name, lest saying his name should revive the curse upon them (6:10). The divine order had been given for total destruction. Houses large and small would be decimated in the coming doomsday (6:11).

### **The Unbelievable has Happened, the Unmentionable is On the Way (6:12-14)**

The rhetorical questions, "Do horse run on cliffs?", and "Does one plough an ocean with an ox?"<sup>75</sup> are intended to suggest what is absolutely ridiculous (6:12a). Yet the unbelievable had happened in Israel. The courts, where one went for right

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<sup>72</sup>Amos' mention of ivory has independent archaeological verification. Ivory from elephant tusks was a commodity indicating wealth in the ancient world, because it was imported from Asia and Africa. It was used to inlay handles, scabbards, seals, utensils, chairs, beds and various other articles. Hoards of ivory have been unearthed from the tells of Samaria (over 500 fragments from the eighth century B.C.). These ivories are filled with Egyptian and Phoenician motifs, cf. H. Shanks, "Ancient Ivory: The Story of Wealth, Decadence and Beauty," *BAR* (Sep.--Oct. 1985) 41-53; P. King, "The Marzeah Amos Denounces," *BAR* (Jul.--Aug. 1988) 34-44.

<sup>73</sup>Amos' fivefold enumeration of luxuries sum up the revelry of the *marzeah*. It consisted of reclining on ivory beds, eating rich meats, singing party songs with musical accompaniment, drinking wine, and anointing with oil (6:4-6a). All of these elements were components of the pagan *marzeah* celebration, cf. P. King, 34-44.

<sup>74</sup>The burning of corpses implies death by contagious disease. Burial, not cremation, was the usual practice for Israelites.

<sup>75</sup>The NIV follows the vocalization of the Masoretic text, which reads, "Does one plow with oxen?" (so also KJV, ASV). Obviously, one does, indeed, plow with oxen. Better in context is the revocalization of the text (so RSV, NAB, NEB, NASBmg). The Masoretic word division and vocalization (*bbqrym* = with the oxen) does not fit the context of absurdity as well as the alternative (*bbqr ym* = sea with oxen). Furthermore, those translations following the Masoretic word division and vocalization are compelled to added the word "there" (which is not in the Hebrew text) in order to make it read that no one plows with oxen on the cliffs. Of course, the Masoretic vocalization is not original in any case. The LXX alternative is even less satisfactory, "Will they (horses) refrain from neighing at mares?"

judgments, had turned *mishpat* into poison and *tsedeqah* into wormwood (6:12b). The rich and the powerful had rejoiced when they reconquered Lo Debar, a city under tribute to Damascus, which had been won back by Jeroboam II (2 Kg. 14:25).<sup>76</sup> Likewise, they had congratulated themselves on taking Karnaim from the Arameans (6:13).<sup>77</sup> Their victories would be short-lived, however. Yahweh would bring against the Israelites a nation so great and so powerful that every bit of the land area reclaimed in Jeroboam II's resurgence would be lost altogether (6:14; cf. 2 Kg. 14:25). Their land would be ravaged from its northern border all the way to its southern extremity.

### **Parabolic Visions (7:1--9:10)**

The third division of the Book of Amos is characterized by visionary descriptions of God's coming judgment and the nation's spiritual bankruptcy as well as some biographical material. Four of the vision reports (7:1ff.; 7:4ff.; 7:7ff.; 8:1ff.) have a stereotypical structure: the introductory formula (*This is what Yahweh showed me*), the content of the vision, and a concluding dialogue between the prophet and God. The final vision breaks this pattern (9:1ff.). Inserted between the third and fourth vision is a biographical account of Amos' visit to the Bethel shrine (7:10-17), and between the fourth and fifth vision is an oracle similar to the ones in the earlier part of the book (8:4-14).

### **The Vision of the Locust Swarm (7:1-3)**

The first vision is similar to the primary vision of Joel (cf. Jl. 1:4). It depicts a terrible swarm of locusts<sup>78</sup> arising between the first and second harvests (7:1).<sup>79</sup> In the vision, Amos foresaw the locusts stripping the land bare. In distress, he interceded with Yahweh on behalf of the nation for forgiveness and mercy (7:2). Because of his prophet's intercession, Yahweh changed his mind (7:3).

The anthropomorphism that Yahweh "repents" is one of the most remarkable in

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<sup>76</sup>However, the name *Lo Debar* is also used here as a pun, for the name means "not a thing." The conquest, in the view of Yahweh, amounted to nothing.

<sup>77</sup>Karnaim was a city in the transjordan. The name means "horns" or perhaps "peaks," cf. *IDB* (1962) III.3.

<sup>78</sup>The locust plague was one of the greatest natural disasters in the ancient world. The native region of the desert locust is the Sudan, but during its gregarious phase, the insect is overwhelmed by a strong wandering instinct, causing a random procession of overflowing masses which ignores any obstruction. Trenches and pits are filled with the bodies of the vanguard, and the afterguard marches over them. Rivers and water courses are crossed by swimming. Temperature is a critical factor in their swarming, and when on the move, they consume virtually all fresh vegetation they encounter, Y. Palmoni, *IDB* (1962) III.145-148.

<sup>79</sup>The first and second crops were related to the former and latter rains, cf. *TWNT* (1980) I.483. The king's portion, more or less the equivalent of a tax, was probably taken from the first harvest, while the second harvest was critical for the survival of the farmers through the rest of the year.

the Hebrew Bible.<sup>80</sup> Several things should be said in this regard. In the first place, God's basic character and eternal purposes do not fluctuate. At the same time, God permits freedom within history. He is sovereign, but his sovereignty is such that he is able to enter history at any time to accomplish his divine purposes, though he does not so enter history at every point. God is not a prisoner of his own power; he is free to allow history to take its course when he so chooses. In many biblical passages, God threatens judgment precisely in order to induce humans to repent. If they repent, he will not carry out the threat. Punishment is not an end in itself, but rather, a means. On the other hand, God's good intentions toward his people can also be reversed if they turn away from him (cf. Je. 18:7-10; 26:3, 12-13, 17-19). In this sense, then, the prophetic word is not the same as a fatalistic pronouncement. The words of the prophets do not aim at producing an unchangeable calendar for the future, but rather, a repentant heart among God's people in the present. God maintains relationship with people, and as in all relationships, there can be an ebb and flow. Only in this way can the freedom of history be maintained. Thus, while one may say that the character of God is immutable, one may also say that his dealings with humans change as they themselves fluctuate between righteousness and sin. In summary, the repentance of God is an important part of his divine character.<sup>81</sup>

### **The Vision of Judgment by Fire (7:4-6)**

Similar to the vision of the locusts, Amos now saw God's imminent judgment depicted as a raging fire so engulfing that it not only ravaged the land, it dried up *tehom* (7:4).<sup>82</sup> Once more, like Moses interceding for Israel (cf. Ex. 32:9-14, 30-32), Amos prayed that the nation would be spared (7:5). Once again, God "repented" and postponed his judgment (7:6).<sup>83</sup>

### **The Vision of the Plumb Line (7:7-9)**

The form of the third vision departs from the first two. Previously, Amos had viewed two unusual disasters, locusts and fire, with obvious meanings. The threats implied by these visions were so apparent that Amos immediately cried out in

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<sup>80</sup>The Hebrew niphil verb *niham* (= to regret, have a change of heart, to be sorry) is used in various places in the Old Testament to describe the dynamic of Yahweh's relationship with his people. A theological problem arises in that in some passages writers emphatically state that Yahweh does not repent (cf. 1 Sa. 15:29; Ps. 110:4; Je. 4:28; 15:6; 20:16; Eze. 24:14; Zc. 8:14), while other writers, using this same verb, demonstrate that in a variety of historical situations he does indeed repent (cf. Ge. 6:6-7; Ex. 32:12, 14; Jg. 2:18; 1 Sa. 15:11, 35; 2 Sa. 24:16; 1 Ch. 21:15; Ps. 90:13; 106:45; Je. 18:8, 10; 26:3, 13, 19; 42:10; Jl. 2:14; Jon. 3:9-10). This tension raises questions about God's immutability and foreknowledge.

<sup>81</sup>For an extensive discussion, see Anderson and Freedman, 638-679.

<sup>82</sup>*Tehom* refers to the deep, the cosmic sea, and/or the subterranean oceans upon which the earth was founded.

<sup>83</sup>Once again, the verb *niham*.

intercession. Now the prophet views a rather ordinary object, but the meaning is not immediately apparent. In fact, the meaning will not become clear until Yahweh gives the explanation. The same technique will be used for the fourth vision (cf. 8:1ff.).

In this third vision, Amos saw his Lord<sup>84</sup> wielding an ordinary plumb line near a straight wall (7:7). The plumb line was a cord with a stone or metal weight attached to its end. Such an instrument was used to guarantee that a wall would be built perfectly vertical, but why was Amos shown such a common object? The explanation Yahweh gave was that the wall symbolized the nation Israel, originally built correctly, but now no longer vertical. Since it was out of plumb, God had determined to destroy it (7:8). The sacred shrines,<sup>85</sup> which the northern nation valued so highly, would be destroyed, and the dynasty of Jeroboam II would be invaded (7:9). This time, no reprieve is mentioned.

### **Amos and the Bethel Priesthood (7:10-17)**

In the Torah, the primary spiritual leadership for the nation was vested in the priesthood. A sizeable section of the Torah is devoted to describing the position and function of the priests.<sup>86</sup> In addition to their cultic duties (1 Sa. 2:28a), the priests were the primary instrument for teaching the people the laws of God (cf. Dt. 33:10). Later, of course, other spiritual leaders would emerge, especially the prophets and kings. The prophets arose in vacuums of spiritual leadership (cf. Jg. 6:7-10; 1 Sa. 3:19-20). The non-writing prophets, Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Ahijah, Elijah and Elisha, served as a spiritual balance of power by confronting the kings of Israel when they strayed from their covenantal responsibilities. The writing prophets, also, confronted their kings, but as is clear from this passage, they also confronted the priests who were spiritually deficient. When the united monarchy ruptured in the 10th century, many of the priests in the north fled to the south, because Jeroboam I had cancelled their priestly status (cf. 2 Chr. 11:13-14). New priests had been appointed for the shrines at Bethel and Dan (cf. 2 Chr. 11:15). Thus, when Amos showed up in the north to preach, it is small wonder that he received a frigid welcome from Amaziah,

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<sup>84</sup>The word in the Hebrew text of 7:7 is *Adonay* rather than *Yahweh*.

<sup>85</sup>The *bamot* (= high places) which are under judgment were the shrines built on high hills or under large trees (cf. 2 Kg. 17:9-11). One such *bamah* uncovered by archaeologists is at Tel Dan, the ancient site of the northernmost shrine built by Jeroboam I, cf. A. Biran, "Twenty Years of Digging at Tel Dan," *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1987) 18-21. The *bamah* was a raised platform built of stones where religious rituals were performed. Here, sacrifices were offered, and the Old Testament indicates that both the Israelites (cf. 1 Sa. 9:12, 14; 10:5; 1 Kg. 3:2, 4) as well as the Canaanites used them (1 Kg. 11:7-8; Is. 15:2; 16:12). Such regional sites were far more extensive than simply the two shrines at Bethel and Dan. Archaeological indications are that they were scattered throughout the entire land, cf. B. Nakhai, "What's a Bamah: How Sacred Space Function in Ancient Israel," *BAR* (May-Jun. 1994) 18-29.

<sup>86</sup>This section of Torah is known to us as the Book of Leviticus. It should be understood that the Greek name "Leviticus" in the Hellenistic Period meant "priests" (rather than Levites), cf. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16 [AB]* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 1.

the presiding priest at the Bethel shrine.<sup>87</sup>

Amos' prophetic announcement of judgment upon Israel's king and land at the Bethel shrine was promptly reported to King Jeroboam II by Amaziah (7:10-11). Amaziah indicted Amos for insurrection and demanded that he leave (7:12). Bad enough that Amos should pronounce doom upon the king and the land, but worse, he was a southerner from Judah! Given his origin and the theological differences between north and south, Amaziah contended that Amos had no right to speak at Bethel at all (7:13). Amos responded, however, that Yahweh had called him to his office. His presence at the Bethel shrine was not some personal vendetta, but a divine commission (7:14-15).<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, Yahweh had a personal word of judgment against Amaziah himself (7:16)! In the coming devastation, his wife would become a harlot,<sup>89</sup> his children killed, and his property confiscated. Amaziah himself would be exiled and would die in a polluted country far from his homeland (7:17). His personal devastation would reflect the national devastation of all Israel.

### **The Vision of the Fruit Basket (8:1-3)**

In the fourth vision, Amos viewed a basket of ripened fruit (8:1).<sup>90</sup> There is a pun in the dialogue. Yahweh asked the prophet what he saw, and Amos replied, "A basket of *qayits* (= summer fruit)." Then Yahweh said, "*Haqqets* (= the end) for my people Israel" (8:2).<sup>91</sup> The word of judgment for the nation depicts a scene of total devastation and horror. The music from the shrine at Bethel would be turned from joy to wailing, and corpses would litter the land, followed by the deadly silence of death (8:3).

While Yahweh's patience with his northern people was vast, it was not unlimited. Since the people would not repent (cf. 4:6b, 8b, 9b, 10b, 11b), time had run out on them. The phrase here, "The end has come," is the theological equivalent

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<sup>87</sup>The counterpart in the south to this confrontation between prophet and priest is to be found in Jeremiah's conflict with Pashhur (Je. 20:1-6).

<sup>88</sup>The meaning of 7:14 is debated since the series of sentences are predicate nominatives without a formal verb, i.e., "I...not a prophet, ...not the son of a prophet, but I...a shepherd, I...one dressing sycamore fig-trees." Obviously, an equative verb is required, but should it be a present tense (imperfect) or a past tense (perfect)? If the former, then Amos says he is not a prophet (so NASB, NEB, RSV). If the latter, then he says he was not a prophet until God called him to be one (so NIV, KJV, ASV, NAB, RV, JB). Usually, such supplied equative verbs gain their tense from the context, but in this case the sentence is the opening of a quotation, and no context has been established. Because elsewhere Amos seems to imply that his office was prophetic (3:7), and because he directly states that Yahweh's command to him was, "Go, prophesy...", it seems better to supply the verb in the past tense.

<sup>89</sup>This judgment probably means that she would become a harlot in order to avoid starvation, or else, she would be used as a harlot by the invading soldiers, or perhaps both.

<sup>90</sup>Given the seasonal imagery, perhaps Amos has in mind the basket of firstfruits offered to Yahweh as a symbol of bounty (cf. Dt. 26:1-11).

<sup>91</sup>The NIV captures the effect of the pun by rendering *haqqets* as "the time is ripe."

of the earlier phrase, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel" (cf. 4:12).

### **Judgment is Coming for Social Sins (8:4-14)**

Once again, Yahweh indicted the nation for their sins of social injustice. They pressed those without power or resources to the limit of existence (8:4; cf. 2:6-8; 4:1; 5:10-13; 6:4-7, 12).<sup>92</sup> They resented the times of rest, which Yahweh had ordered, because they interfered with their profit margin (8:5a).<sup>93</sup> Worse, they had resorted to cheating by measuring with a sub-standard ephah basket while using loaded scales in the transaction of silver (8:5b).<sup>94</sup> They took advantage of the poor,<sup>95</sup> mixing chaff and refuse with the good grain to give it the appearance of more bulk (8:6).

Because of this flagrant dishonesty and oppression of the weak, God had taken oath that as surely as Jacob's descendants were filled with pride and self-sufficiency (cf. 6:1),<sup>96</sup> God would not fail to bring upon them retribution for their every sin (8:7). Judgment was coming! When it did, it would be like an earthquake, creating an upheaval comparable to the flood and recession of the Nile River (8:8).

The whole universe would be affected by God's doomsday judgment.<sup>97</sup> The sun would be blackened (8:9),<sup>98</sup> and all the holy festivals would be changed to scenes of wrenching grief (8:10). The famines, which affected crops and watersheds were severe enough, but doomsday would bring a spiritual famine in which all attempts to hear a true word from God, would fail (8:11). God would abandon them to their just

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<sup>92</sup>The gracious words of Jesus, "Blessed are you poor....," is the antithesis of Israel's callous lack of pity and concern.

<sup>93</sup>The new moons, the first day of the lunar months, were set aside for celebration and worship, as can be seen from the fact that they are commonly grouped with sabbaths (cf. Is. 1:13; 66:23; Eze. 45:17; 46:1, 3). The new moon of the seventh month was especially important, for it marked the Festival of Trumpets (cf. Lv. 23:23-25; Nu. 29:1-6). Sabbaths, of course, were the weekly seventh day observances of rest when all work should cease (cf. Ex. 20:8-11; Dt. 5:12-15), J. Hartley, *ISBE* (1986) III.527-528.

<sup>94</sup>The *ephah* was the basic unit of dry measure, while the *shekel* was the basic unit of weight, especially for silver or gold. The practice of altering measurements was strictly forbidden by the Torah (cf. Lv. 19:35-36; Dt. 25:13-16; cf. Pr. 20:10).

<sup>95</sup>See comments on 2:6.

<sup>96</sup>I have taken the "pride of Jacob" to refer to the condition of the people (so NEB, NASB, NAB, RSV). It is also possible to take this appellation as referring to Yahweh himself (i.e., he who is the Pride of Jacob), and if so, then Yahweh would be taking oath upon himself, as he does earlier in the book (so NIV, cf. 4:2; 6:8).

<sup>97</sup>For the expression "that day" and the "Day of Yahweh," see comments at 5:18.

<sup>98</sup>Earlier, Amos had predicted that the Day of Yahweh would be a day of "darkness, not light" (cf. 5:18b). In other oracles concerning doomsday, the imagery of universal collapse is a common theme (cf. Is. 13:9-10; 24:21-23; Eze. 32:7-8; Jl. 2:10, 30-31; 3:14-16a; Hab. 3:11-12). Much later, in the apocalyptic preaching of Jesus, this same imagery is used to describe the end of the age (cf. t. 24:29//Mk. 13:24//Lk. 21:25). Peter implied that the darkening of the sun at the crucifixion of Jesus was a sign of the last days (Mt. 27:45//Mk. 15:33//Lk. 23:44-45a; Ac. 2:20-21). In the Apocalypse, this same imagery is used to describe final doomsday (cf. Rv. 6:12-14; 8:12; 9:2; 16:8-10). While in Amos such descriptions of universal cataclysm may be metaphors for the historical invasion by the Assyrians, they carry overtones that leap ahead to the end of the world.

deserts, and though they searched long and hard for an oracle of divine mercy, they would not find it (8:12; cf. Pr. 1:22-33). Their spiritual thirst would not be quenched (8:13). Their only answer in this spiritual vacuum would that of the pagan cults, but such an answer would not be a genuine oracle from Yahweh, the true God (8:14). The phrases, "They who swear by the shame of Samaria," or "They who say, 'Your gods, O Dan, are alive,' or 'The road of Beersheba is alive,'" are descriptions of the cult worship and shrines which the northern Israelites considered sacred (cf. 5:5).<sup>99</sup> All such oracles from these shrines would fail miserably!

### **The Vision of Execution (9:1-4)**

The fifth and final vision depicts Adonay, who earlier had stood with a plumb-line in his hand, now standing by an altar, presumably at the Bethel shrine. The presence of the Lord was ominous, for he ordered the utter destruction of the Bethel shrine as well as the execution of all who worshiped there (9:1). The theology of the Deuteronomistic History, with its repeated condemnation of the "sins of Jeroboam" (cf. 1 Kg. 12:31-33; 13:33-34; 15:26, 34; 16:19, etc.), has its prophetic counterpart here. Yahweh stood adamantly opposed to the alternative worship shrines of the northern kingdom with their syncretistic character. No one would escape his divine judgment. Wherever they might flee, be it in the place of the dead<sup>100</sup> or the sky itself or the highest mountain or the bottom of the sea, they could not elude the divine hand of judgment (9:2-3). Even in the land of exile, to which they would surely go, they would continue to be ravaged by the sword of judgment (9:4).

In this final vision, Amos clearly saw the true nature of the coming disaster. Though Assyria might be the instrument of exile, the judgment would be from the Lord himself. It was the Lord who gave the command for the execution of Israel, and it was he who would carry out the sentence.

### **The Sovereign Lord and His Sovereign Purpose (9:5-10)**

The omnipotence of Adonay Yahweh Sabaoth is powerfully evident in theophany. When he manifests himself, the earth convulses (9:5).<sup>101</sup> He is the Creator of the universe, sovereign over all. As the contemporary spiritual puts it, "He's got the whole world in his hands" (9:6)! As the sovereign Lord, he had the power to control the movements of humans and nations, even nations as distant as Ethiopia and

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<sup>99</sup>The translation and interpretation of 8:14 is difficult. By revocalizing the text, the RSV and NEB take the first phrase as, "All who take their oath by Ashimah" (so NIVmg). The other phrases are also capable of variations. However, the main import is clear enough, that is, that the answers from pagan shrines or syncretistic religion are hopeless.

<sup>100</sup>Lit., "sheol"

<sup>101</sup>Here, the language of theophany and the resulting cataclysm are similar to what is found in other descriptions (cf. Hab. 3:3ff.; Mic. 1:3ff.; Na. 1:5).

Nubia (9:7a).<sup>102</sup> Whether it was the exodus of Israel from Egypt, the migration of the Sea Peoples from the Aegean,<sup>103</sup> or the movements of the Arameans from Mesopotamia to Syria,<sup>104</sup> Yahweh was the sovereign lord of history (9:7b). He was not a provincial deity of the Israelites, but Lord over all nations! His judgments on the other nations of the world should have forewarned the Israelites that he would not neglect them, either (9:8a). He would not fail to hold Israel accountable for her sins!

However, there is an important note of hope! Even though he fully intended to destroy the nation, there was a remnant that would survive (9:8b)! This concept of a surviving remnant is a distinctive theme in many prophetic oracles (cf. Is. 4:2; 7:3; 10:20-22; 11:10-16; 28:5; Zep. 2:3; 3:13). In one sense, the coming destruction of the northern nation would be total. Israel was a kingdom under judgment, and it would not survive as a political entity, nor would it ever rise from the ashes of exile. However, to use the Pauline vocabulary, there was still a "remnant of grace," a spiritual remnant whose claim to survival was not ethnicity nor tradition but genuine faith in the living God (cf. Ro. 9:27-33; 11:1-6). The sovereign Lord had a sovereign purpose in the earth, and this purpose concerned those who put their trust in him! Israel would be shaken in a sieve along with the rest of the nations,<sup>105</sup> and all, which was not grain, would be sieved out and destroyed. The rich, powerful citizens of Samaria might claim security, but God's sword of judgment would surely catch them (9:9-10).

### **The Restoration (9:11-15)**

As is true for virtually all the prophets, Amos' message of judgment is mitigated by a vision of hope. Judgment is almost never Yahweh's final word. Rather, the purposes of God are for blessing, even though that blessing be pushed into an unknown future. The opening phrase "in that day" matches the previous uses where Amos spoke of the Day of Yahweh as a period of judgment.<sup>106</sup> Here, however,

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<sup>102</sup>The biblical Cushites, from the upper Nile region, had Ethiopia and/or Nubia as their habitat, cf. F. Yurco, "Were the Ancient Egyptians Black or White?" *BAR* (Sep.-Oct. 1989) 26-29.

<sup>103</sup>It is generally agreed that the Philistines were among the Sea Peoples who unsuccessfully invaded Egypt in the mid-13th century B.C. and later settled on the south coast of Palestine, giving to Palestine its name, cf. T. Dothan, "What We Know About the Philistines," *BAR* (Jul.-Aug. 1982) 20-44.

<sup>104</sup>The general assumption is that Kir is in Mesopotamia, since the usage earlier in the Book of Amos implies as much (cf. 1:5b). However, no clear identification has been made other than that Tiglath-Pileser III exiled the Arameans back to Kir (cf. 2 Kg. 16:9), cf. W. LaSor, *ISBE* (1986) III.40.

<sup>105</sup>The metaphor comes from the harvest. The wheat was first beaten on the threshing floor to separate the grains from the husks and stalks. Then it was winnowed in order to allow the wind to blow away the light chaff. The remaining grain was then shaken through a mesh sieve to separate out the small rocks and trash which remained, cf. Mays, 161. Similarly, when God shook the nations, including Israel, every sinner, without exception, would be expelled from the good grain. Only the good would be kept.

<sup>106</sup>See comments at 3:14, 5:18 and 8:9.

Amos makes clear that the events of "that day" include not only judgment, but also blessing. While the various prophets envisioned the blessing of the future in more than one way,<sup>107</sup> Amos' vision for the restoration and blessing of the nation is given in terms of the prosperity of David's kingdom when it was at its full glory.

The precise meaning of the metaphor concerning "David's fallen booth" is not immediately clear (9:11). If it is a political-historical reference, it could refer to the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam and the shattering of the United Kingdom, which David had worked, so hard to secure (cf. 1 Kg. 12). If it is a liturgical reference, based on the word "booth" as related to the feast of booths,<sup>108</sup> then it refers to the religious rupture of the nation when Jeroboam I instituted alternatives to the pilgrim feasts at Mt. Zion (cf. 1 Kg. 12:32). If it is a prophetic reference, it could anticipate the eventual fall of Jerusalem, the city of David, more than a century and a half later--a disaster that, in the eschatological future, would be remedied by God's divine grace (cf. 25). Along the same prophetic lines, it could refer to the dynasty of David, which met its end with the exile of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah (cf. Je. 22, 34, 39), only to be revived in a future "son of David." For Christians, the restoration of David's fallen tent is in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (Mt. 1:1; Lk. 1:32-33; Ro. 1:3; 2 Ti. 2:8; Re. 22:16). The one place this passage is quoted in the New Testament is in the speech of James at the first church council (Ac. 15:13-18).<sup>109</sup> Here, it is obvious that James understands the restoration of David's fallen booth to have occurred in the messiahship of Jesus, for it was precisely due to this restoration that the first Christians felt free to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.<sup>110</sup>

In the restoration, the people of Israel<sup>111</sup> would claim the territory of the Edomites, the very ones who had demonstrated such prolonged antagonism toward them (9:12; cf. 1:11). The blessings of abundant harvest would fill the land (9:13), and the exiled people of Israel would be reclaimed (9:14a). A time of unparalleled prosperity would follow (9:14b). The people of Israel would live perpetually in their

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<sup>107</sup>Hosea, Amos' contemporary in the north, envisioned the blessing of the future to be like the marriage of God and Israel in the desert of Sinai (cf. 2:14-16). Ezekiel, much later, envisioned the restoration in priestly terms (cf. 40-48). Amos, like Isaiah (cf. 9:7; 11:1-2; 16:4b-5; 22:20-24; 55:3-5) and Jeremiah (33:14-26), appealed to the Davidic ideal.

<sup>108</sup>The word *sukkath* (= thicket, hut, booth) used here is not the same as the more familiar *'ohel* (= tent), in spite of the NIV rendering.

<sup>109</sup>The idea that the restoration of David's fallen booth is a revival of the innovative forms of worship which David established when he moved the ark to Jerusalem and which now have been restored in Christian charismatic worship is a fascinating notion, but hardly compatible with the interpretation of James.

<sup>110</sup>James quotes from the LXX, not the Masoretic Text, and this accounts for the differences between the phrase "that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name" (LXX) and the phrase "so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name" (MT), cf. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 310.

<sup>111</sup>The antecedent to "they" in 9:12 must be the "house of Israel" in 9:9.

own land and without threat (9:15).

In the New Testament, this imagery of military expansion is replaced by the commission for missionary outreach (cf. Jn. 18:36; Ac. 15:15-18). The exiles scattered from God and their land have their counterpart in the nations who are estranged from God and who, by his grace, are reclaimed as trophies of his mercy (cf. Ro. 9:24-30; Ja. 1:1; 1 Pe. 1:1-2; 2:9-10). The ancient northern nation was never reclaimed from exile. Today, it is doubtful whether descendants of the ancient northern nation are even traceable. At the same time, the promises to "Israel" have come to fulfillment in the new Son of David and the New Israel--the new people of God who have been reclaimed by grace.

## FOR I DESIRE STEADFAST LOVE -The Message of Hosea

The heart of the message of Hosea was singled out by Jesus when he quoted Hosea 6:6 to the Pharisees (Mt. 9:13; 12:7):

*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings. (RSV)*

This message about steadfast love in Hosea rests squarely on the idea of Yahweh's covenant with Israel. The Hebrew word *hesed* (= love, mercy, faithfulness), which occurs some six times in Hosea, especially denotes loyalty to God in the covenantal relationship, so much so, that some scholars prefer to render it by the hyphenated expression "covenant-love."<sup>112</sup> Not all scholars agree that the use of this word necessarily presupposes a fixed covenant,<sup>113</sup> but all agree that the word is relational, active, social and enduring. It is more than an attitude; it is action that emerges from one's attitude. What God was looking for from Israel was not merely a token gesture of religion. He called for a deep relationship that expressed itself in concrete acts of faithfulness to his covenant. When Israel sinned, her sin was not merely a broken rule. Rather, it was a broken relationship. Israel's sin was not just against the commandment; it was against God himself.

### Hosea, the Prophet

Hosea<sup>114</sup> was one of a quartet of powerful prophets who appeared in the eighth century B.C. to preach to the nations of Judah and Israel. Micah and Isaiah preached to the southern nation, and Amos and Hosea preached to the northern nation. Hosea's name, like that of Joshua and Jesus, is derived from the Hebrew verb *hoshiy'a* (= to save). Hosea's ministry spanned the long reign of Jeroboam II over Israel, a reign that was contemporary with Uzziah, Ahaz, Jotham and Hezekiah in the south (1:1). This period was a time of growing affluence and political freedom for both Judah and Israel. The Mesopotamian empire-builders were largely preoccupied at home, and Egypt, likewise, was relatively quiet. Thus, both Judah and Israel were in a position to strengthen them politically and economically. However, with increased wealth came moral decadence (cf. Am. 6:1-8; Is. 3:18-24).

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<sup>112</sup>N. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946) 118-166.

<sup>113</sup>H.-J. Zobel, *TDOT* (1986) V.52-53.

<sup>114</sup>Hosea is also called Osee, from the Latin and Greek Bibles, and in the KJV, one passage gives Osee as the preface to a quotation (cf. Ro. 9:25).

## The Politics of Israel Immediately Prior to Hosea

The national history of Israel in Canaan is a long story of failure. After Joshua's initial successful invasion, the clans failed to drive out the enclaves of Canaanites (Jg. 1:19--2:5). The perennial threat, of course, was religious syncretism and the acceptance of coexistence with the Canaanite nations, since many Canaanites still lived in the land (Jg. 3:5-6). In the time of David, the Canaanites were finally subdued and the clans united for a whole generation, but at the death of Solomon the nation ruptured into two smaller kingdoms, never to be united again (1 Kg. 12). While the southern nation of Judah remained faithful to the dynasty of David, the temple on Zion, and Yahweh's covenant with David's family, the northern nation did not. Her kings rejected the Zion temple. They did not accept the notion that David's family was favored by Yahweh or the idea that the future of the nation rested in a Davidic covenant. Instead, the northern nation reverted backward to a pre-Davidic state. For worship, they returned to the ancient sacred places, such as, Bethel (cf. Ge. 12:8; 13:3-4; 28:16-22; 31:11-13; 35:1-7, 9-15; Jg. 20:18, 26-28; 21:2; 1 Sa. 10:3; 1 Kg. 12:26-29, 32-33) and Dan (Jg. 18:29-31; 1 Kg. 12:29-30). Politically, they vacillated between dynastic leadership (there were some eight different dynasties) and charismatic leadership (with *coup d'etats* overthrowing the current regimes).

The most serious religious threat for the north began about a half-century before the ministry of Hosea during the reign of Ahab, the second king in the Omri dynasty (1 Kg. 16:29-33; 21:25-26). Ahab and Jezebel imported wholesale into Israel Ba'al worship and its attendant fertility cult.<sup>115</sup> Both Elijah and Elisha arose as powerful prophets to oppose this cult. In the end, the Omri dynasty ended in revolution. Elisha precipitated a *coup d'etat* by the warrior Jehu (2 Kg. 9:1-13), and Jehu wiped out the family of Ahab, riding down Jezebel with his chariot, butchering the prophets of Ba'al, and razing the Ba'al shrine (2 Kg. 9:14--10:27). Nevertheless,

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<sup>115</sup>The Canaanites worshiped a pantheon of gods and goddesses. Sacred prostitution was a common feature of the Canaanite fertility religions. The local deities or Ba'als (= lords) were believed to be owners of the soil, which was the sphere of divine power. The Ba'al, whose personal name was Hadad, had a female consort, a Ba'alith (= lady), sometimes called by her personal name Astarte or Ashtaroah. The fertility of the soil was dependent upon the mating of this divine pair, for Hadad was the storm god responsible for the germination and growth of crops as well as fertility in humans and livestock. The Canaanite mythology was that Mot, the god of summer drought, killed Ba'al and carried him to the underworld. Astarte, the warrior goddess of sexual passion and sadistic brutality, engaged Mot in a ferocious struggle, finally killing him. As a result, Ba'al and Astarte were reunited as lovers. The same cycle of divine death, rising and sexual union was repeated each year in the seasonal cycles. By imitative magic, the ancient Canaanites believed that the mating of Ba'al and Astarte could be assisted. Males, playing the part of Ba'al, and females, playing the part of Astarte, would dramatize the divine mating myth in sacred prostitution and so help bring the divine pair together. Devotees would bring wine, oil, first-fruits and yearlings to the "high places," the sacred mountain tops in the central hill-lands. Here, before the sacred pillars (phallic symbols representing the male element) and the asherahs (sacred trees representing the female element) they would mate. They believed that the whole natural sphere was governed by the vitalities of sex. Thus, when the Old Testament says that Israel went "whoring after idols," it was far more than a figure of speech, cf. H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, trans. J. Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973).

the aftermath of this bloody purge left Israel crippled. There was a vacuum of leadership. The alliance between Israel, Judah and Phoenicia broke down with the murders of Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jezebel, the queen-mother in Israel, and her son Joram, king of Israel. Jehu's excessive blood-bath left a bitterness which would last for years. Unable to defend his borders properly, Jehu lost the transjordan to Hazael of Damascus (2 Kg. 10:32-33). Eventually, Jehoahaz, Jehu's son, was reduced to the status of a vassal under Hazael (2 Kg. 13:1-3).

During the first half of the eighth century, Israel was not compelled to face any external threats, so she was relatively free to rebuild herself. Her resurgence to power began with Jehoash, Jehu's grandson. He regained the transjordan and reduced Judah to helplessness (2 Kg. 14:8-14). He probably could have annexed Judah had he desired to do so. Jeroboam II, his son, continued the resurgence of Israel's political fortunes until he had extended the nation's borders to approximately those of the Solomonic era (2 Kg. 14:23-29). The reign of Jeroboam II brought back to Israel a political stability and material prosperity she had not seen since the days of Solomon. Luxury in the royal courts has been well attested by Scripture (especially Amos) as well as by the archaeologist's spade.<sup>116</sup> The population of the land reached its greatest density, and it was a time of great optimism.

In spite of what appeared to be great gains politically and economically, the peace and prosperity were superficial. Internally, Israel was decadent. The moral fabric of the nation was characterized by the rottenness of social disintegration and religious decay. There was a severe economic imbalance between the upper and lower classes. Those in power lorded their advantage over those less fortunate (Am. 2:6-8; 4:1; 5:10-12; 6:4-6; 8:4-6). The lot of the poor became unbearable, especially those farmers who were at the mercy of the moneylenders. The wealthy were greedy and the poor had no redress, for the courts were equally corrupt. With the absorption of numerous Canaanites into Israelite society, a class of citizens emerged to which covenant law and practice meant little. A vast syncretism threatened to dilute the worship of Yahweh to an unrecognizable state. Religion itself did not disappear, but it was superficial and mixed with Canaanite paganism. What memory still remained of Yahweh's covenants was largely a naive optimism consisting of the notion that Israel had some sort of unconditional divine favor. Religious ritual continued, but there was little heart response to Yahweh and certainly not any covenant faithfulness. Earlier, at the time the nation had divided upon Solomon's death, masses of levites and priests had fled to the south (2 Chr. 11:13-14). This, in turn, left a vacuum of spiritual leadership for succeeding generations. Within this milieu, the prophet Hosea arose to preach.

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<sup>116</sup>J. Thompson, *The Bible and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 131-132; A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) 409-415.

### **An Ominous Beginning (1:1-9)**

The Book of Hosea begins with a prose narrative. After dating the ministry of the prophet during the long reign of Jeroboam II (and the corresponding kings of Judah), the story line begins with Yahweh's instruction to Hosea to marry a prostitute (1:2).

*Go marry a whore, and get children with a whore, for the country itself has become nothing but a whore by abandoning Yahweh. (JB)*

In an effort to soften the moral nuance of the command, some have suggested that the woman would only become a prostitute after she had married Hosea, but the Hebrew language, while not absolutely precise, favors that she was a prostitute before the marriage. Either way, it is abundantly clear that this was to be a shattering relationship. Hosea consequently married Gomer. The first child, clearly a legitimate son of Hosea, was named Jezreel (1:3).

In the narrative, the names are deeply significant. Hosea's name, based on the root of the Hebrew verb "to save," points toward God's ultimate ability to save his people from their sins. Jezreel (= "God plants"), on the other hand, was a place name of great historical importance (1:4). It was here, in the Plain of Esdraelon, that Jehu executed King Joram, the son of Ahab and Jezebel, according to the instructions of Elisha so that the dire predictions of Elijah were fulfilled (2 Kg. 8:28-29; 9:1-10, 14-26; 1 Kg. 21:17-24). This execution was one of the most famous events in Israelite history, and when Hosea named his son after this place, it served as a portent that God would not only judge Jehu for his butchery, but he would also bring about the death of the nation Israel just as surely as Jehu had destroyed Ahab's royal family (1:5). The metaphor for breaking the battle bow is usually used to refer to the enemies of Israel (cf. Ps. 46:9; Je. 49:35; Zec. 9:10). Here, however, it is the bow of Israel herself that would be broken.

The second child, a daughter, Hosea named Lo-Ruhamah (= "not loved" or "not pitied"). Since the text does not indicate that Hosea was the father, it is likely that the child was illegitimate (1:6). The clouding of the relationship between Hosea and Gomer paralleled the fractured relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Israel had forced God to withdraw his mercy from her. The Deuteronomic blessings and cursings (Dt. 28) associated with the covenant were inviolable. God could not retract them without compromising his own integrity. That Israel was to be punished was not due to God's harshness, but to Israel's aggressive rebellion. Judah, for her part, was experiencing some measure of spiritual reform under Uzziah, Jotham, and particularly, Hezekiah (2 Chr. 26-27, 29-32), and thus, she would be spared the Deuteronomic curse (1:7). In Israel, no such repentance was to be found.

The third child, a son and also apparently illegitimate, was named Lo-Ammi (= "not my people"). This name sharply suggests that Israel, in her stubborn waywardness, was quickly removing herself from God's family (1:8-9).

### **Hope Beyond Despair (1:10--2:1)**

The living parable in Hosea's life and the oracles, which follow often attribute human characteristics to God. God's response to Israel's rebellion fluctuated between judgment and hope, and it mirrors the emotional struggles, which arise out of marital and parental relationships. In the early narratives of Genesis, when the human family had turned to violence and evil (Ge. 6:5, 11-12), God's heart was filled with pain (Ge. 6:6). Now, in a relationship, which was even deeper, the same anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms are used in the Book of Hosea. These figures of speech are not intended to convey the idea that God is changeable or subject to human passion. Rather, they serve as figures of speech, which convey the personal involvement of God with his people. The judgments that Hosea predicted were not irrevocable, but they were shouts of alarm and warning. God's nature does not change, but God's manner of relating to his people changes as they respond to or reject him (cf. Je. 18:7-10).

Thus, immediately after the warning of impending judgment, one finds also the hope and future promise of redemption (1:10--2:1). God would not cast away his people unconditionally (cf. Ro. 11:1-6). There would be a remnant of faith that he would preserve. God had promised Abraham that his descendents would be like the dust of the earth and the sand of the seashore (Ge. 13:16; 22:17). This promise, however, would be fulfilled by a remnant of faith (Is. 10:20-23; cf. He. 11:12-13), and as Christians know, this remnant of faith consists of those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Ro. 9:23-30; 1 Pe. 2:9-10; cf. Ex. 19:5-6). It is no accident, then, that John describes Jesus' death as an act, which brought together "the scattered children of God" (Jn. 11:49-52). Furthermore, it is entirely appropriate for James to refer to the church as the "Twelve Tribes scattered abroad" (Ja. 1:1) and for Peter to refer to the church as the Diaspora (1 Pe. 1:1). The conclusion of this promise was to be realized in a new Israel, that is, in the members of the community who would put their faith in Jesus Christ. By a sovereign act of grace, God changes the name of Lo-Ammi (= not my people) and Lo-Ruhamah (= "not loved") to "Sons of the Living God," "My People," and "My Loved One." In the church, God has brought together the divided nation of Israel and Judah, not to mention the divided peoples of the Jews and the nations. A single leader, Jesus Christ, is their head. The disaster of Jezreel has been turned to celebration!

### **God, the Husband Lover (2:2-23)**

The form of the writing now turns to poetry. The oracle is an outpouring of

God's thoughts and words as though he were a husband and a lover. He speaks as though to the child Lo-Ammi and calls upon the son to argue the case with his wayward mother (2:2). Though legally Gomer is Hosea's wife, the relationship is dead because of her adulterous unfaithfulness. Of course, in the case of Yahweh and Israel, the husband is God, who is also Israel's judge (2:3). As the sovereign Lord, he held the power to punish her for her promiscuity, stripping her of all advantages in accord with the Deuteronomic curses, which would destroy the land (cf. Dt. 28:15-68).

To Lo-Ruhamah, God says that pity can no longer be shown to her mother, since she remained unyielding in her wanton promiscuity. The children are illegitimate, and the mother seems determined to pursue lovers other than her husband (2:4-5). Israel's love affair with the Canaanite fertility cult was in reality her love for prosperity. In the effort to thwart this illicit passion, God determined to deprive Israel of fertility in the land in the hopes that she would come to her senses and seek after him (2:6-13). The ruin of her farms would hopefully shock her into returning home (2:7b).

In yet a bolder metaphor, God determined to court Israel again in order to bring her back, just as once he had courted her in the great and terrible desert of Sinai (2:14). Though she had failed in ancient times, as in the sin of Achan, still, her relationship could be restored. After Achan's sin at Jericho, he was executed in the Valley of Achor (= "Valley of Disaster," cf. Jos. 7:26). Now, this same Valley of Disaster would become a door of hope for a new relationship and a new exodus (2:15). In this new relationship, Israel would recognize Yahweh has her true husband, and she would no longer confuse him with Ba'al (2:16-17). Apparently, the confusion created by the Bethel cult of Jeroboam had so clouded the distinctions between Ba'al worship and Yahweh worship that the people were not even sure which was which. The Hebrew *Adonay* (= lord, husband) approximates the same meaning as the Canaanite *Ba'al* (= lord, husband). Apparently, some of the people were even calling Yahweh by the name Ba'al. The day would come, however, when the Israelites would call Yahweh "my *'ish*" (= my man, husband). Elijah issued the same kind of challenge a century earlier, when he said, "If *Ba'al* is God, then follow him, but if *Yahweh* is God, then follow him" (1 Kg. 18:21).

In this future redemptive action, God would cut a covenant with all the creatures of the earth for the benefit of his people. War would cease, and violence would come no more (2:18). This idea of universal peace also is found in both Isaiah and Micah (cf. Is. 2:4; 11:6-9; Mic. 4:3). In the restoration, Israel would be engaged to Yahweh again, this time in eternal faithfulness (2:19-20). It would be a union filled with righteousness, justice, love, compassion and loyalty. The whole heaven and earth would respond joyfully to Jezreel (= "God plants"), and God's people would be planted in the land (2:21-22). Lo-Ruhamah, who was not loved, would become

loved. Lo-Ammi, who was not God's people, would become God's people, responding to him in faithful worship (2:23). The imagery of Israel being God's people and of them recognizing God as their God is taken up in the Apocalypse of John to describe the relationship of all the redeemed with their Creator-Redeemer (cf. Rv. 21:3).

### **Hosea Redeems His Faithless Wife (3:1-5)**

The literary form briefly changes back into prose in order to describe the second stage of Hosea's relationship with Gomer. Apparently, Gomer had by this time abandoned Hosea and her children. She had found another lover who, in the process of time, had used her and offered her for sale as a slave. At Yahweh's word, Hosea went to the slave market and purchased her for about 170 grams of silver and ten bushels of barley (3:2). Now, she had gone from being a free wife to being a slave to being a slave wife. When the purchase had been made, Hosea was able to begin the process of rebuilding the relationship. This is what he required:

*Many a long day you shall live in my house  
and not play the wanton,  
and have no intercourse with a man, nor I with you. (3:3, NEB)*

It was absolutely essential that the relationship between Hosea and Gomer progress beyond the physical level, and to that end, Hosea suspended conjugal relations altogether for an extended period of time (3:3). Gomer's old habits had to be broken, and forced abstinence seemed the best way.

The most important phrase in this entire passage is the command of Yahweh, "Go, show your love to your wife again....love her as Yahweh loves the Israelites" (3:1). Yahweh's faithful love for Israel was to be mirrored in Hosea's sacrificial and self-effacing love for Gomer. Even though Israel had abandoned Yahweh, her husband, so that she could eat the raisin cakes of the Canaanite fertility cult,<sup>117</sup> Yahweh's love was still reaching. So also, Hosea must show this same kind of love toward Gomer, even though she was an adulteress and had given herself to another man.

That Gomer was to practice sexual abstinence after Hosea purchased her symbolized Israel's forced abstinence of the religious cult during the coming exile

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<sup>117</sup>The raisin cakes mentioned here were quite possibly made in the form of the female consort of Ba'al and served as an aphrodisiac. Molds for making such cakes in the form of Ishtar, the love-goddess Queen of heaven, have been found in the palace kitchen at Mari, cf. M. Pope, *Song of Songs [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977) 378-380, Plate I following p. 360.

(3:4). As Kidner has said, "A clean break was needed, deep enough and long enough to make a new beginning possible."<sup>118</sup> After this forced abstinence, Israel would again be able to seek Yahweh and his ways, and this included recognizing the covenant of David, which the northern nation had rejected. Hosea, here, looks far into the future to "the latter days." Of course, ultimately, the reference to David finds its highest fulfillment in Christ, the Son of David (Lk. 1:32-33; Am. 9:11-12//Ac. 15:16-18; Ro. 1:1-4; 2 Ti. 2:8; Rv. 22:16).

### **Israel in Court (4:1--5:15)**

The next literary unit depicts a court scene. Yahweh, the prosecutor, brings a charge against Israel, the defendant. The technical term in the Hebrew text is *ri'v* (= charge, accusation, prosecution), and it appears in 4:1:<sup>119</sup>

*...Yahweh has a charge to bring against you who live in the land.*

This type of metaphor appears in other of the prophets as well (cf. Is. 1:2-20; Je. 2:5-13; Mic. 6:1-16). After the subpoena (4:1a), the trial proceeds in two stages, the first being the case against the whole nation and the second being the case against the nation's leaders.

The accusation against the nation concerns both what the people have neglected (4:1b) as well as what they have done (4:2). They are indicted because they have not shown *'emeth* (= dependability, faithfulness), *hesed* (= steadfast love, devotion) or *da'ath Elohi'm* (= knowledge of God). In the first place, they demonstrated a lack of common honesty, reliability and fidelity. They simply could not be trusted. In the second, they were not loyal to Yahweh in their covenant relationship. They did not show the concern and responsiveness, which their relationship with Yahweh required. In the third, they simply did not know God. They neither recognized his past redemptive acts of election and salvation, nor did they acknowledge his authority in the present.<sup>120</sup> Instead, the land was filled with continual covenant breaking--cursing, lying, murder, theft and adultery. Hosea's phrase. "...they break all bounds," is similar to Paul's, "...they invent ways of doing evil" (Ro. 1:30). Israel had sunk into a chaotic quagmire, and though the nation maintained itself as a political entity, it did not have any moral underpinnings for its laws. One bloody deed followed another. Yahweh's case against the nation could

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<sup>118</sup>D. Kidner, *Love to the Loveless: The Message of Hosea* [BST] (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981) 43.

<sup>119</sup>There is some discussion among scholars as to whether this term should have the narrow force of a lawsuit or the more general sense of a legal dispute, but the fact remains that the language used is juridical, cf. *TWOT* (1980) II.845.

<sup>120</sup>J. Mays, *Hosea* [OTL] (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 62-64.

have but one outcome, the curse of the Deuteronomic code (4:3; cf. Dt. 28).

The charge against the leaders, especially the priests, is longer than the one against the people. The priests were to have been the spiritual educators of the people (Lv. 10:8-11; Dt. 16:18-20; 17:8-20; 33:8-10; cf. 2 Chr. 17:7-9; 19:4-11), but they terribly failed (4:4).<sup>121</sup> The prophets were no better. They were spiritual stumblers as much as the priests (4:5a). Neither priests nor prophets had been true to their teaching office, and because of their failure, the people were being destroyed for lack of knowledge (4:6a). The leaders were like the illegitimate children of Gomer. Their mother, the nation, would be destroyed for giving birth to these children of spiritual whoredom (4:5b).

Therefore, since the priests rejected godly knowledge, God had rejected them and their children (4:6b). Though the priestly caste had grown numerically, it had equally grown in sinfulness, exchanging the reverence of the office for disgrace (4:7). Add another priest, add another sinner! The religious system had been reduced to a way for priests to make money instead of a way to help the nation find her God (4:8). Both priest and people were guilty, and both would be judged (4:9). Their prostitution would not increase fertility, contrary to the Ba'al mythology, and their over-indulgence in wine muddled their minds (4:10a). The land was filled with idolatry, cult prostitution and pagan ritual (4:10b-13). Yet, the fault of this debauchery was that of the men who led their women into it. Though daughters and daughters-in-law would be swept into these pagan orgies, God's punishment would be withheld from them, because they were only following the lead of their male family heads (4:14a). The nation was completely without moral or spiritual foundation, and it was quickly coming to ruin (4:14b).

Now Yahweh switches from being prosecutor to being judge. He offers stern warning to Judah, Israel's smaller neighbor to the south, so that she will not follow in Israel's ways. Gilgal and the Bethel shrine<sup>122</sup> must be avoided (cf. Am. 5:5)! The traditional oath, "As Yahweh lives....," must also be avoided, possibly because it resembled the cry of the Ba'al cult, "Alive is the powerful Ba'al," and certainly because it was blasphemous to use Yahweh's name when worshipping at such cult centers which were so thoroughly pagan (4:15).<sup>123</sup> Though Yahweh should have been Israel's shepherd and the people should have been the sheep of his pasture, Israel was

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<sup>121</sup>The translation of this verse is a vexing problem. The NIV follows the Masoretic text (so also, RV, KJV, NASB), but the meaning is unclear. Some versions emend the text slightly to read, "But it is not for any man to bring a charge, it is not for him to prove a case; the quarrel with you, false priest, is mine" (NEB, so also, NAB, RSV).

<sup>122</sup>Beth Aven (= "house of wickedness") is an alternative epithet for Bethel (= "house of God"). The play on the meaning of the names is obvious. Bethel, named by Jacob after his dream of a ladder reaching into heaven, has become Beth Aven, since it has capitulated to the Canaanite cult.

<sup>123</sup>Mays, 78.

more like a stubborn heifer than a lamb (4:16). Therefore, Judah must leave her alone (4:17)! Her wantonness would ultimately result in dire judgment (4:18-19).

Now the Divine Judge summarizes the case against the leaders and the people (5:1a). The charges are true, and the verdict is, "Guilty as charged!" Israel has indeed used the high places of Mizpah and Tabor, sinking to the depths of depravity<sup>124</sup> in cultic ritual (5:1b-2a). The nation deserves the punishment it is about to receive, for the Great Judge is fully aware of Israel's perversity (5:2b-3). Her citizens are hopelessly given over to their pagan love affair, and their sins have them in a stranglehold. They sin arrogantly, leading Judah along with them (5:4-5). When they do finally attempt to approach Yahweh, he withdraws from them (5:6), because they are fickle (5:7a). This spiritual fickleness gives birth to illegitimate children, both spiritually and physically (5:7b). The New Moon festivals, which were to have been times for joyful fellowship with Yahweh (Nu. 10:10; 28:11-15), would now end in disaster instead of fertility (5:7c).

The sentence against Israel was that she would be torn to pieces and carried into captivity (5:14). The battle trumpet would sound its blast in all the sacred places,<sup>125</sup> for judgment was coming to both Ephraim and Judah (5:8-11). Several metaphors describe the wasting of the northern nation and the dire consequences to come upon the south, such as, moths, dry rot, sicknesses and sores (5:12-13).<sup>126</sup> Finally, Yahweh would come upon the people like a ravenous lion (5:14; cf. Am. 3:8, 12). They would be exiled, and God would abandon them until they repented (5:15).

### **Israel, the Fickle Lover (6:1--7:16)**

The next two chapters describe the antithesis of what God really wanted from Israel. God wanted steadfast love, but instead, he received only fickle overtures and platitudes. In a series of metaphors, God vividly portrayed the bondage of Israel's will. She was incapable of following a steady course.

The first scene is a dialogue between Israel and Yahweh. Hosea puts into the mouth of the nation an expression of the repentance, which ought to come after judgment. After Yahweh, the Divine Lion, had torn Israel to pieces, he would also

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<sup>124</sup>The NIV (also, KJV, NASB, NAB) follows the Masoretic Text in the rendering "rebels are deep in slaughter," but other translators do not accept the Masoretic pointing and follow the rendering "made deep the pit of Shittim" (so RSV). The latter makes sense as describing another cultic center (various scholars support this emendation in commentaries).

<sup>125</sup>All these place names (three cities and a tribe) are at the extreme southern border of Israel. In other words, the Assyrian enemy who would come from the north would waste Israel to her farthest boundary and even come within a hairsbreadth of crushing Judah as well.

<sup>126</sup>That Ephraim had turned to Assyria for help probably occurred when Menahem levied a tax on every landholder in Israel in order to pay heavy tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III, who had helped him secure the kingdom (cf. 2 Kg. 15:14-22).

heal her (6:1).<sup>127</sup> His gracious nature was such that though she would be under judgment for two days, on the third day he would revive her (6:2).<sup>128</sup> Thus, it was the order of the day to seek after God, for he would surely appear for the benefit of the nation (6:3). His faithfulness was incontrovertible.

Israel, however, was incapable of this kind of repentance. She might even desire to come to such humility, but she could not match her desire with action. Her love was as fickle as that of her southern sister, Judah (6:4). Therefore, because of her persistent faithlessness, God would announce his coming judgment through his prophets and fulfill his portentous predictions (6:5). What God desired was not more religion and superficial gestures of penitence. He wanted from Israel steadfast love and genuine relationship (6:6). It should be noted, of course, that God is not here rescinding the sacrificial system so much as he is calling attention to the greater importance of relationship (cf. Am. 5:21-24; Mic. 6:6-8; Is. 1:11-20). In spite of what God wished from Israel, she could only produce crime. Just what these crimes were specifically, we do not know, but probably the listing of the place-names would recall to the citizens' minds some very particular instances (6:7-9).<sup>129</sup> So, both Israel and Judah were defiled, and both kingdoms were appointed for judgment (6:10-11a).

It was not that God was unwilling to heal Israel's wounds, but rather, that in spite of anything he would do, Israel could not seem to produce anything other than more crime (6:11b--7:1). Israel's memory of her own sins was weak, but God's memory was not! The sins of the nation were continually in his view (7:2). The royal court was completely corrupt, continually cooking up evil like a self-perpetuating fire. It was like a cooking oven, which the baker had fired in the evening to leave burning all night while the dough was leavening. In the morning, the smoldering fire burst into flames. So, also, did Israel's smoldering passion and lust burst forth into the hot flames of intrigue and murder (7:3-4). Even those who celebrated the king's birthday<sup>130</sup> were planning his overthrow all the while (7:5-7).<sup>131</sup>

So, the moral condition of the nation was hopeless. Hosea launches into a

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<sup>127</sup>Of course, the matching words "torn" and "heal" and also "injured" and "bind" parallel the metaphors for judgment in 5:13-14.

<sup>128</sup>The words "revive" and "live" may simply mean "heal" and "recover" (as a parallelism with 6:1), but they may also imply resurrection from the nation's dead state (cf. Eze. 37:1-14; cf. Ep. 2:1). It is unclear whether or not this passage has overtones toward the resurrection of Christ. Many think so, but if the context is one of superficial repentance, it would fit awkwardly with the New Testament's theology of Christ's passion and triumph. On the other hand, if the repentance described is taken as a genuine model, not one which Israel actually produced, but rather, one which she ought to have produced, then it may very well fit into a messianic theme.

<sup>129</sup>It is unclear whether "Adam" is a place-name (so NEB, RSV) or refers to the sin of the original Adam (so NIV, ASV, NASB).

<sup>130</sup>Or, coronation.

<sup>131</sup>Hosea doubtless has in mind the series of assassinations of Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah and Pekah (2 Kg. 15:10, 14, 25, 30).

condemnation of the utter corruption of society in the north, with a flurry of added metaphors. She was like "a cake not turned," that is, a cake of flatbread cooked on only one side (7:8b). In the words of one commentator, "How better to describe a half-fed people, a half-cultured society, a half-lived religion, a half-hearted policy, than by a half-baked scone!"<sup>132</sup> She could not decide whether she was Israelite or pagan, so mixed up with the nations was she (7:8a). Like "an old man in a dry month,"<sup>133</sup> she did not even realize that she had lost the prime and strength of her youth (7:9-10). She was like a silly dove, now turning to Egypt for help, now to Assyria, when in fact, she could not hold faith with either Egypt or Assyria (cf. 2 Kg. 17:3-4). In the end, she was caught anyway. God would have redeemed her, but she spoke lies to him, too (7:11-13). What repentance the people offered was half-hearted (7:14). When God tried to help, they plotted against him (7:15). Israel was like a faulty bow, which simply could not shoot straight at the mark (7:16a). She was doomed, and Egypt, the ally she sought after, would only laugh when she fell (7:16b).

### **The Horrible Internal Sickness of the Nation (8:1-14)**

The impact of Israel's inner rottenness can only be fully appreciated against the background of her external prosperity. Hosea's audience still was enamored with the golden age of Jeroboam II. The nation would fall nevertheless, God declared, never to rise again. Her disease was fatal.

Hosea's sermon describes two ominous symbols to produce a shuddering premonition, the warning trumpet<sup>134</sup> and the vulture (8:1).<sup>135</sup> Israel had broken her covenant with Yahweh, and now she must pay the consequences (Ex. 19:4-8; Dt. 28:58-68). She had given lip service to Yahweh (8:2), believing that in the rituals of her religion she knew God. This, however, was a false assumption. The people trusted in their birth and breeding, but they did not cultivate an ongoing relationship with God by choosing a lifestyle that matched their confession of faith. Years later, the nation would come under the same judgment from Jesus (Jn. 8:33; 9:28; Mt. 3:9). In rejecting the dynasty of David, the people had chosen kings without divine approval through intrigue and assassination (8:4), and they compounded this error by

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<sup>132</sup>G. Smith, *The Book of Twelve Prophets* [Expositor's Bible] as quoted in Kidner, 72.

<sup>133</sup>The phrase is from T. S. Eliot's *Gerontion*.

<sup>134</sup>The Hebrew in this phrase is particularly difficult, both in terms of spelling, grammar and concepts. It literally reads, "Like a horn to the palate," and scholars have offered several emendations, none very conclusively, cf. D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 127-128; A. Andersen and D. Freedman, *Hosea [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985) 484-486. If we retain the idea of horn or trumpet, the NIV probably captures the intent of the phrase.

<sup>135</sup>The word *neshet* can be translated as either "eagle" (NIV, ASV) or "vulture" (RSV, NEB). If the former, then Yahweh (and the enemy from the north) is like an eagle of prey ready to attack the nation. If the latter, then the death of the nation is imminent, and scavengers await to pick at the carcass.

falling into the syncretism of the Bethel shrine with its calf-idol (8:5-6; cf. 1 Kg. 12:26-30). Their gods, like their kings, were their own creation.

Now, with a graphic metaphor, Hosea announced that the nation, which had sown to the winds, would reap the tornado in return. She had followed the Canaanite fertility cult, yet her crops would remain infertile (8:7). In international politics, she would become a nonentity. Her desperate efforts at diplomacy with Egypt and Assyria, and her constant vacillation between them, had made her like a pot that no one wanted (lit., "useless vessel," 8:8; cf. 2 Kg. 15:19-20; 17:3). In her political vacillation, she was like a wild donkey alone in the desert, or like a prostitute who was so desperate that she gave away her favors (8:9). Her judgment had already begun in the terrible price of vassal payments to the oppressive rulers of Assyria (8:10).

So, again comes the accusation that Israel has much religion but no relationship. She has the trappings of faith, but not real faith (8:11-13). The God who had delivered her from Egypt in the exodus would now send her back into bondage (8:13b; cf. Dt. 28:68).<sup>136</sup> Israel and Judah both were kingdoms under judgment.

### **The Shock of God's Future (9:1--10:15)**

The golden age was now gone forever. Israel's mad fling with Ba'al would come to a disastrous end. One of the fatal mistakes of the nation all along had been a naive optimism. Her citizens felt that because they were God's people, they could not fall. They even looked forward to the Day of Yahweh as a moment of national triumph, but God declared that the nation was in for the shock of its life (cf. Am. 4:12; 5:18-19). There was now no occasion for joy (9:1a)! The fertility rituals at the threshing floors were evidence of the nation's covenant unfaithfulness (9:1b). Because of her broken covenant, the Deuteronomic curses of infertility would fall upon the land (9:2; cf. Dt. 28:15ff.). The land would be lost (cf. Dt. 28:64-68), and the citizens would return to the bondage they had left in Egypt, being forced to eat ceremonially unclean food in Assyria (9:3; cf. 8:13b). In captivity, Israel would no longer have any shrines for the worship of Yahweh or be able to celebrate the annual festivals (9:4-5). Eating unclean food in an unclean land would make them unclean like those in the house of the dead (cf. Nu. 19:11-22; Dt. 26:14). All the holidays would be cancelled. Those who escaped the Assyrian invasion would become refugees in Egypt (9:6). The nation had scorned the warnings of her prophets as though they were lunatics (9:7b). The prophets were to have been spiritual

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<sup>136</sup>The word Egypt symbolizes bondage, though of course, the literal nation which would take Israel into exile would be Assyria. There may also be a literal meaning, however, for after the fall of the southern nation, some refugees, including Jeremiah, fled to Egypt (Je. 41:16--43:7).

watchmen, but like a city that attacked its own sentries and lookouts, Israel had abused the very voices that sought to warn her (9:8). Now, the day of reckoning had arrived (9:7a). The people had sunk to the corruption of sodomy, rape and murder, such as was perpetrated in Gibeah in the era of the Tribal League (9:9; cf. Jg. 19:12-30), and God would not overlook her sins.

Now, Hosea's oracle recalls the exodus from Egypt, when Yahweh experienced the serendipity of finding Israel like grapes in the desert (9:10a). His joy was short-lived, however, for the nation soon fell into the Canaanite fertility cult at Ba'al-Peor (9:10b; cf. Nu. 25). Because of her sins, Israel's glory would fly away like a bird, as it did once before in the time of Eli (9:11a; cf. 1 Sa. 4:12-22). She would be cursed with infertility (cf. Dt. 28:18), the very thing she was seeking to avoid by following the Ba'al cult (9:11b, 14, 16a). Her children would be killed (9:12-13, 16b). Gilgal, one of the places of ancient pride (cf. Jos. 4:19-24; 1 Sa. 11:14-15), now had become a shrine for the Ba'al cult (cf. 4:15; 12:11; cf. Am. 4:4; 5:5). Because of her sins, God would drive the nation from her home, consigning her to wandering among the nations, just as Gomer became a wanderer and a slave when she abandoned the home of Hosea (9:16-17).

Hosea now uses the same metaphor as is found in Isaiah, the metaphor of Israel as a vine (cf. Is. 5:1-7). The nation, which Yahweh found like desert grapes, was a vine, which spread and bore fruit (cf. 9:10). However, the more God blessed Israel, the more she produced sin (10:1). Her deceitful heart, which led her into covenant unfaithfulness, had become the cause for judgment. The proliferation of the Ba'al cult paraphernalia, the pillars and the altars, would be destroyed (10:2). The people had not accepted the kingship of Yahweh, and their earthly king would be gone, too (10:3), along with the shrines they had built (10:5-6, 8).<sup>137</sup> All this would be the result of the inner moral rotteness, which led to the nation's fall, a rotteness epitomized by rampant dishonesty (10:4). In exile, Israel would float away like a twig or a "chip on the face of the waters" (10:7, RSV). From the time of the terrible sin at Gibeah, which resulted in a civil war that almost exterminated the tribe of Benjamin (cf. Jg. 20), until the present time, Israel had not improved. Therefore, just as the other tribes converged upon Benjamin, so foreign nations would converge upon Israel (10:9-10; cf. 9:9).

Shifting to a farming metaphor, Hosea depicts the nation as a trained draft animal who would be taken from the pleasant work of threshing, where she could eat at will (Dt. 25:4), and transferred to the hard work of plowing (10:11). God's righteous demand was for the cultivation of moral integrity (10:12), but Israel's

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<sup>137</sup>The poignant cry, "Cover us," is used twice in the New Testament, once by Jesus in anticipation of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D. and once in the Apocalypse of John to refer to the great judgments at the end of the age (Lk. 23:30; Rv. 6:16).

response was only to raise a crop of moral failure (10:13a). As the old saw says, "If you sow wild oats, don't be surprised when you harvest a crop of misery!" Instead of depending upon Yahweh, her true warrior-king (Ex. 15:1-3), she had depended upon her own militia (10:13b; cf. Am. 6:13; Is. 31:1; Ps. 20:6-7). Therefore, she would be devastated by war (10:14a) just as Shalman had devastated Beth-arbel (10:14b-15).<sup>138</sup> Israel and her king would be completely destroyed, too!

### **The Restoration (11:1--14:9)**

As we have already seen, the severe discipline of exile, which God promised to his people, was not God's final act. Rather, just as Hosea bought back his wife, so God would restore the fortunes of his people. Those who were not his people would become his people, those not loved would be loved, and those uprooted would be planted (1:10-11; 2:14-23; 3:1-5; 5:15). The last section of the Book of Hosea is one of the most beautiful in the Hebrew Bible. The great faithfulness of Yahweh is exemplified in that after he had punished Israel according to the Deuteronomic blessings and cursings, which he was bound to do to be faithful to himself, he would restore her in covenant loyalty. His anger is momentary, but his love is eternal (cf. Ps. 30:5).

The first scene depicts God as the broken-hearted father of a wayward child. The period of the exodus represented the time of Israel's infancy, and it is here that God chose the nation in love (11:1). Yet Israel was a headstrong child, which abandoned the father's love in order to flirt with the Canaanite religions (11:2). Even though God was the one who protected and nurtured Israel, the people took for granted his parental care (11:3-4). Surely, this passage is the Old Testament version of the Prodigal Son (cf. Lk. 15:11ff.). God was not the indulgent Father who lavished toys upon his child at every whim, but neither was he the selfish Father who became a domestic tyrant. He was a Father who was personally involved with his child, who knew both the cost and anguish of parenting.<sup>139</sup> Still, in spite of the Father's entreaty, Israel was determined to be a prodigal (11:7a). Punishment was the only alternative (11:5-6). What times the people called for help, their pleas were motivated by selfishness, not devotion (11:7b). God's parental anguish at such rebellion was heart-wrenching (11:8). He determined not to carry out against Israel the finality of judgment, which was visited upon the sister-cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Dt. 29:23; Ge. 10:19; 19:24-28). Total rejection was the way of humans, but God's ways

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<sup>138</sup>While this reference to Shalman and Beth-arbel must have been well known to the citizens of Israel, today we know nothing of the incident. Some take Shalman to be a corruption of Shalmaneser's name and the reference to be about one of Assyria's conquests. Other suggestions, also, have been offered, but without any certainty, cf. Andersen and Freedman, 570-571.

<sup>139</sup>Kidner, 100.

were higher (11:9)! Finally, after this severe discipline, the Israelites would return to Yahweh. The one who was like a lion to destroy them (5:14) would now be like a lion to lead, protect and restore them (11:10-11). It is John, in the Apocalypse, who seems to understand the true nature of this strange simile, for when he turned to see the Lion of Judah, he saw a Lamb (Rv. 5:5-6).

The final three chapters move back and forth between descriptions of Israel's present wickedness and her future salvation. Both Israel and Judah were filled with dishonesty and futility (11:12--12:1a; cf. Ecc. 1:14). Israel's double-dealing with Egypt and Assyria (cf. 7:11) was about to catch up with her (12:1b). Though she was named after Israel, the one who struggled with God (cf. Ge. 32:28), she was acting more like Jacob, the deceiver (12:2). Of course, both deception and faith were part of the life of their great ancestor (12:3-5; cf. Ge. 25:26; 27; 32). He deceived his father into giving him the blessing of primogeniture, but he also wrestled with God until he was blessed. However, Israel had to realize that she could not deceive God into blessing her! If she was to be blessed, she must return to him in love, justice and patience (12:6). Unfortunately, Israel seemed only bent on dishonest business practices and fraudulence (12:7). She made the popular assumption that because she was rich, she was also righteous (12:8). However, the experience of the exodus should have alerted her to the fact that she did not live by bread alone (Dt. 8:3)! Quoting the preface to the Ten Commandments (12:9a; cf. Dt. 5:6), God confirmed his intention to send Israel back to her desert wandering (cf. 2:14), the ancient event which she now celebrated annually in the Feast of Booths (12:9b).<sup>140</sup>

Israel had ignored her prophets, those whom God had sent to call her back to her covenant faith (12:10; cf. 6:5; 9:7-8). She continued in apathy toward the wickedness of Gilead (cf. 6:8), and she relentlessly followed the rituals at the shrine of Gilgal (cf. 4:15), places that would be destroyed (12:11). Though the nation looked to its ancestor Jacob as a hero, his career was considerably less than noble. He fled for his life to northwest Mesopotamia because of Esau's wrath (12:12a; cf. Ge. 27:41-45). Instead of being honored with a wife in a marriage arranged by his father, he worked like a common laborer to earn one (12:12b; cf. Ge. 29). In Jacob's old age, his family was finally relocated in Egypt (cf. Ge. 46), where the Pharaohs eventually enslaved them. Had it not been for a prophet, Moses, they would never have been set free (12:13), and yet, it was the voice of the prophets that the northern nation was now ignoring. There was no other alternative but to punish the nation (12:14).

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<sup>140</sup>The Feast of Booths (also called Ingathering and Tabernacles) was probably the most significant annual celebration. The Israelites celebrated it by living in booths to commemorate the forty years of sojourn. When Jeroboam I built the alternative worship shrine at Bethel, he also instituted a competitive ingathering celebration for northern Israel so as to avoid the necessity for citizens of the north to go to Judah for the feast (1 Kg. 12:32-33), Mays, 127.

There had been a time when the nation of Ephraim was a force to be reckoned with (13:1a). Like Adam, however, the nation had spiritually died, even though it kept up the appearance of life (13:1b). Past strength was gone, and in the present, there was only escalating sin, idolatry, pagan sacrifice and Ba'al worship.<sup>141</sup> Worse, the future would bring holy judgment to sweep the nation away as surely as vapor, dew, chaff and smoke dissipated in the air (13:3). Though God had called for covenant faithfulness and worship for himself alone (cf. Dt. 5:6-10; 6:4, 14, etc.), and though he had sustained Israel in the great and terrible desert, the nation had credited itself with its success (13:4-6). Therefore, God would attack her like a wild beast (13:7-8). Since God alone, who was sovereign over the events of history, had been rejected by Israel, she would be destroyed with no one to defend her (13:9). Centuries earlier, when Israel's national life had been threatened (cf. 1 Sa. 8:20; 12:12), she had asked for a king and received one, but where was he now (13:10-11)? Royal leadership had certainly not kept Israel from moral failure (13:12). Her high hopes were destroyed even as a fetus, which had turned wrong in the womb and could not be born (13:13)!

Yet, doom was not God's final word! He would yet "buy her back" from death, even as Hosea bought back his wayward wife (13:14a; cf. 3:1-5).<sup>142</sup> Still, this redemption would be ultimate, not immediate. The immediate future would bring catastrophe like a desert storm from the east (13:14b-16).<sup>143</sup> Israel and Samaria would suffer terribly, men, children and women.<sup>144</sup>

The book closes with a call for repentance and a promise of restoration. Israel must return to Yahweh, her God, so that she can offer him true repentance and praise, not merely the ritual of animal sacrifice (14:1-2).<sup>145</sup> Neither Assyria nor the Israelite militia nor the pagan gods of the Canaanites would be of any help (14:3a). Only the God who has compassion on orphans was to be trusted (14:3b). He was the one who would forgive and heal (14:4). He would be like life-giving dew to Israel, causing her to flourish like a healthy plant (14:5-7). Finally, with one more anguished parental cry of love, "O Ephraim," God called upon his people to give up their fascination with

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<sup>141</sup>Kissing the image of Ba'al was part of Canaanite ritual (cf. 1 Kg. 19:18).

<sup>142</sup>Of course, in the New Testament Paul, by combining this passage with Is. 25:8, makes the analogy concerning the resurrection of the dead who die in Christ (cf. 1 Co. 15:54-57). Hosea's words, "Where, O death, are your plagues, where, O grave, is your destruction," are taunts against the seeming finality of the coming exile. Paul uses the same taunts against death in light of the resurrection of Christ.

<sup>143</sup>The "brothers" of 13:15 either refer to the clan of Ephraim as the principle tribe among the other tribes of the north (so NIV, KJV, NAB, following the Masoretic Text) or else, if the text is slightly emended, the phrase should read, "Even though he thrives as a reed plant..." (so NASB, NEB, RSV).

<sup>144</sup>The vicious practices of war are described in other similar passages (i.e., Am. 1:13; 2 Kg. 15:16).

<sup>145</sup>The phrase "fruit of our lips" (NIV, NASB, RSV) can also be read "offer our lips as sacrificial bullocks" (so KJV, NEB, NAB, ASV). The New Testament quotation of the phrase prefers the former (cf. He. 13:15).

the pagan cult (cf. 6:4; 11:8). Only Yahweh could be trusted to nurture the nation and cause her to be fruitful (14:8). The one who was wise would listen to the oracles of the prophets (14:9a). He would understand well the difference between the way of Yahweh and the way of rebels (14:9b)!