

INTRODUCTION AND AMOS

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INTRODUCTION

I. Political and Economic Background

A. The kingdom of Israel divided in 931/930 B.C. following the death of Solomon. Israel was the northern kingdom; Judah was the southern kingdom. This division was ordained by God as punishment for Solomon's idolatry (1 Ki. 11:1-13).

B. The eighth century B.C. ushered in prosperous times for both kingdoms.

1. 2 Kings 13:1-3 reports that when Jehoahaz was king of Israel (814-798 B.C.) the nation was oppressed by Aram/Syria because of God's displeasure with Israel. But according to 2 Ki. 13:4-5, God delivered Israel from that oppression in response to Jehoahaz's prayer. He did so through the Assyrian king Adad-nirari, who in 802 B.C. vanquished Damascus, the capital city of the kingdom of Aram, and put Aram under an oppressive tax. In the ensuing decades, Assyria itself went into a temporary decline, being led by weak kings who left Israel and Judah alone.¹ This combination of events opened the door for Israel's and Judah's resurgence.

¹ Billy K. Smith and Frank S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 25.

2. Jeroboam II ruled in Israel from 793-753 B.C., and Uzziah (Azariah) ruled in Judah from 792-740 B.C. These kings brought Israel and Judah to a prominence second only to Solomon's golden age. The kingdoms prospered financially and expanded their borders. According to 2 Ki. 14:25, at some point under Jeroboam II's reign Israel expanded as far as Lebo Hamath to the north, which is about 40 miles north of Damascus (about due east of Byblos).

3. It helps to be reminded that this is history. These are not characters in some fictional story; they were actual rulers of actual nations. We have archaeological corroboration of that fact.

a. In excavations at Megiddo in 1904, Gottlieb Schumacher uncovered a large and beautifully made jasper seal that from the style of the inscribed letters was dated to the early eighth century B.C. Above the roaring lion is the name of the seal's owner and below it his title: "(Belonging) to Shema' servant (of) Jeroboam." Shema' was evidently a high official in the administration of Jeroboam II, but since he is not mentioned in the Bible we do not know what his duties were. The seal disappeared after being sent to the Turkish Sultan in Istanbul, but before it was sent to him a bronze cast was made, which is now at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem.

b. There are two ancient seals mentioning King Uzziah (Azariah), both of which are of unknown origin and are in the Louvre Museum in Paris. One is a ring seal made of agate that measures 0.63 x 0.47 inches. It has an Egyptian motif, and the inscription reads: "(Belonging) to Abiah servant of Uzziah." The other is a two-sided seal measuring 0.87 x 0.63 inches. The side with the man carrying the staff has the name "Shebaniah." The other side says "(Belonging) to Shebaniah servant of Uzziah."

c. Uzziah also is mentioned in an inscription dating from between 130 B.C. – A.D. 70 (so centuries after Uzziah died). It is part of the antiquities collection at the Russian Convent on the Mount of Olives that was acquired in the late 1800s. It says "Here were brought the bones of Uzziah king of Judah -- do not open!" From this it appears that Uzziah's bones were moved to another place some 600-700 years after their original interment. Perhaps, since he was a leper (2 Chron. 26:21-23), some felt his remains were unclean and needed to be moved outside the City of David.

C. Unfortunately, as the kingdoms of Israel and Judah grew more economically and militarily powerful, moral decay was eating at their insides.

1. The people became increasingly indifferent to their covenant responsibilities, their obligations to God. Although they clung to certain rituals or forms of religion, they engaged in idol worship and ignored their duties to their fellow man.²

² Smith and Page, 26; Thomas E. McComiskey and Tremper Longman III, "Amos" in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 8:349-350.

2. The improved economic situation in Israel led to a greater disparity in wealth among the people, and the wealthy not only neglected the poor but abused and exploited them to increase their own wealth. (The intrusion of the non-ethical or ritualistic Canaanite religion into Israelite religion probably facilitated the abandonment of O.T. ethics.)

3. Douglas Stuart summarizes the situation this way:

Toward the midpoint of the eighth century, Israel enjoyed peace, prosperity, and a measure of international prestige. A confident nation (6:8) took comfort in its military prowess (6:13) and ignored its exploitation of the needy and the growing disparity between privilege and poverty. Religion per se was enthusiastically practiced (2:8; 5:21-23) but by a people whose fidelity to the covenant was a sham. The nation was characterized by religious hypocrisy. Israel was a people often orthodox in style of worship but disobedient in personal social behavior.³

II. The prophet

A. "The name Amos derives from a root meaning 'to carry.' . . . The name confesses that 'God has carried' or that the infant is 'carried by God.'"⁴

B. Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa, a town about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. He also tended sycamore trees (in the coastal plain or the Jordan valley) during certain seasons of the year (7:14). (Tekoa is over 2000 feet above sea level, and sycamore fig-trees are not found more than 1000 feet above sea level.)

C. Amos was called specially by God to prophesy. In other words, he was not part of the "prophetic guild," those trained and dedicated to being used by God as a prophet. That is why he says to Amaziah in 7:14-15, "*I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs.*"¹⁵ *But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'*"

III. Date

A. Amos 1:1 tells us that Amos prophesied when Uzziah was king in the south and Jeroboam II was king in the north. This sets the latest date as 753 B.C. The conditions of wealth and false security that are reflected in the book seem more consistent with the latter part of

³ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 283-284.

⁴ Richard S. Hess, *The Old Testament: A Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 618.

Jeroboam's reign. This sets the earliest date around 763 B.C. So he probably prophesied within that roughly ten-year window.

B. Amos 1:1 tells us more specifically that he prophesied two years before "the earthquake." This event obviously was known to the original readers. It is almost certainly referred to hundreds of years later in Zech. 14:5, where the prophet says, "And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah." Unfortunately, we are not sure when this earthquake occurred. The Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin found evidence at Hazor of an earthquake dating to around 760 B.C. If that is "the earthquake," it puts Amos's prophecy around 762 B.C.

TEXT

I. Introduction to the Prophecy (1:1-2)

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. ² And he said: "The LORD roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers."

A. As already noted, Amos is identified in 1:1 as a shepherd from Tekoa, and his prophesying is dated (probably) to the 760's B.C. His words were prophecy, a revelation from God, as indicated by the statement that they relate to *what he saw*. Billy Smith remarks:

The qualifying phrase "what he saw" makes clear that what follows are divinely revealed messages delivered by the prophet Amos. Everything is the "word of the Lord": sayings, vision-reports, doxologies, and even the account of conflict between the prophet and the priest (7:10-17). Thus, Amos had the credentials of a true prophet; he had the "word of the Lord" for Israel.⁵

B. Though he was from Judah, the focus of Amos's prophesying was the northern kingdom, Israel. Verse 1 refers to what he saw "concerning Israel," and he reports in 7:15 that the Lord sent him to prophesy to his people Israel.

C. Verse 2 pictures the Lord Almighty roaring like a lion or like thunder, making his terrifying voice heard from Jerusalem. The withering effect of that roar on the pastures and the top of Mt. Carmel is a sign of impending judgment on Israel. God is not pleased.

⁵ Smith and Page, 36.

II. The Prophetic Oracles (1:3 – 6:14)

A. Preface

Before turning to Israel, Amos delivers the word of the Lord against the nations surrounding it. It is like he is circling (or crisscrossing) Israel before zeroing in on it. The God of all the earth, the ruler of all mankind, holds accountable not only his people, Judah and Israel, but the pagan nations as well. Billy Smith remarks:

The God of Amos was no national deity limited in power to particular geographical boundaries or to a special nation. He ruled and rules over all nations including Judah and Israel, Aram and Philistia, Tyre and Edom, Ammon and Moab, the United States of America and the United Kingdom. The theology of Amos allowed room "only for one God supreme over life and history."⁶

B. Oracles of judgment against surrounding nations (1:3 - 2:5)

1. Damascus (representing Aram/Syria) (1:3-5)

³ Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. ⁴ So I will send a fire upon the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad. ⁵ I will break the gate-bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven, and him who holds the scepter from Beth-eden; and the people of Syria shall go into exile to Kir," says the LORD.

a. The nation of Aram/Syria, as represented by Damascus, is held accountable by God for its defiance of God's will as understood by mankind generally by virtue of being made in the image and likeness of God. It is the law of the heart to which Paul refers in Rom. 2:14-15. It refers to a violation of what all cultures would take as fundamental human decency. To maintain consistency with how "transgression" is used in the New Testament, I think the NIV's "sins" or the NET's (and CSB's and NJB's) "crimes" is preferable to "transgressions."

b. The formula "For three sins of Damascus, and for four" probably suggests a piling up of sin beyond the breaking point. The specific wrong identified is its having "threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron." Gilead was rich territory on Israel's frontier, east of the Jordan River. In 2 Ki. 13:7 a Syrian incursion into Israel during the reign of Israel's

⁶ Smith and Page, 52.

king Jehoahaz (814-798 B.C.) is described as making the army of Jehoahaz "like the dust at threshing time." The metaphor implies extreme decimation and may suggest unusually cruel or inhumane treatment.

c. God's promise of punishment on Syria and exile was fulfilled around 732 B.C. when Tiglath Pileser III, king of Assyria, took the people of Damascus captive to a place called Kir (2 Ki. 16:9). Tiglath Pileser III sometimes is referred to in Scripture as Pul (2 Ki. 15:19; 1 Chron. 5:26).

d. We have Tiglath Pileser's own account of his victory over Damascus. He boasts, "592 towns . . . of the 16 districts of Damascus I destroyed (making them look) like hills of (ruined cities over which) the flood (had swept)." ⁷ Elsewhere he speaks of the defeat he inflicted on Rezon, the king of Syria. ⁸

2. Gaza et. al. (representing Philistia) (1:6-8)

⁶ Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom. ⁷ So I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza, and it shall devour her strongholds. ⁸ I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod, and him who holds the scepter from Ashkelon; I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish," says the Lord GOD.

a. The sin of Philistia that is identified for punishment is their capturing and selling of an entire unnamed community (or communities) – men, women, and children – to Edom as slaves. The fact the location or nationality of the victims is not mentioned suggests that is not key to the wrongness of the action. Rather, kidnapping people for the slave trade is a crime against human dignity and value regardless of the victims' nationality. Stuart writes:

The Mosaic law required the death penalty for precisely this kind of kidnapping and selling into slavery (Exod 21:16), and it was surely recognized internationally as a cruelty, no matter how frequently it may have been practiced in biblical times. . . . [T]hese slaves sold to foreigners were still human beings, in God's image (cf. Exod 23:9). The technique of the transaction is unimportant in the oracle; what is unforgivable is such misuse and abuse of helpless people for the profit of the mighty. ⁹

b. The defeat and destruction of the four named cities of Philistia was fulfilled over a period of years. The omission of Gath from the list of Philistine cities is

⁷ James B. Pritchard, ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with supplement (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 283.

⁸ ANET, 283.

⁹ Stuart, 312.

"probably because it was severely weakened from its conquest by Hazael (2 Kgs 12:18) and by this time was under the control of Ashdod or even Judah (cf. 2 Chr 11:8)."¹⁰

(1) Gaza – In 734 B.C. Tiglath Pileser III conquered Gaza, forcing its king (Hanno) to flee to Egypt. He placed images of his gods and his own image in the royal palace and declared them to be the gods of that country.¹¹ After Tiglath Pileser's death in 727 B.C., Hanno returned to rebel against Assyrian control. In 720 B.C. Sargon II recaptured Gaza and took Hanno captive.¹² Over a century later Gaza was captured by Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon and its king deported to Babylon.¹³

(2) Ashdod – In 720 B.C. Sargon II subjugated Ashdod and installed one of his own officers as its ruler,¹⁴ but in 711 B.C. Ashdod rebelled and deposed this ruler. Sargon severely punished the city for this revolt.¹⁵ This is referred to in Isa. 20:1. A century or so later, Jeremiah referred to "the remnant of Ashdod" (25:20). When Babylon became the ruling world power, Nebuchadnezzar captured Ashdod and deported its king.¹⁶

(3) Ashkelon – In 734 B.C. Tiglath Pileser III conquered Ashkelon.¹⁷ In 701 B.C. Sennacherib again conquered the city and deported its king and his entire family.¹⁸ It remained under Assyrian control until the decay of that empire. In later years it was overrun by Scythians, Babylonians,¹⁹ and Persians.

(4) Ekron – Although it may have come under Assyrian domination earlier, Ekron is specifically mentioned among the cities conquered by Sargon II in 711 B.C.²⁰ In 701 B.C. it rebelled against Assyrian rule and was quickly subdued by Sennacherib. The leaders of the rebellion were impaled on stakes outside the city and supporters of the rebellion were exiled.²¹ Ekron paid tribute to later Assyrian kings.²² Its fate during the Babylonian and Persian empires is not known.

3. Tyre (representing Phoenicia) (1:9-10)

¹⁰ Stuart, 312.

¹¹ ANET, 282-284.

¹² ANET, 285; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:416.

¹³ ANET, 307-308; ISBE, 2:416.

¹⁴ ANET, 284-285.

¹⁵ ANET, 286-287; ISBE, 1:314.

¹⁶ ANET, 307-308.

¹⁷ ANET, 282-283.

¹⁸ ANET, 287.

¹⁹ ANET, 308.

²⁰ ISBE, 2:47.

²¹ ANET, 288; ISBE, 2:48.

²² ANET, 291, 294.

⁹ Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they delivered up a whole people to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. ¹⁰ So I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, and it shall devour her strongholds."

a. The sin of Tyre that is identified for punishment is likewise the delivering up of an entire community (or communities) to Edom as slaves. The additional statement that they did so in contradiction of "the covenant of brotherhood" may refer to the treaty between Hiram of Tyre and Solomon (before the split; see, 1 Ki. 5:12, 9:13) or to the treaty between Israel and the Phoenicians that must have accompanied Ahab's marriage to the Sidonian Jezebel (1 Ki. 16:31), which would mean those sold into slavery were Israelites. But the fact he does not specify the referent leaves open the possibility that some other group was the victim. Shalom Paul states:

Once again the referent is left unidentified to place the emphasis upon the deplorable act itself rather than upon the specific party affected. Thus, although the prophet may have had Israel in mind, his indictment does not preclude the possibility that he was actually referring to another nation. In the long run the nation itself is inconsequential. "It is the right common to humanity at large which he [Amos] vindicates and defends."²³

b. Tiglath Pileser III collected tribute from Tyre.²⁴ During Esarhaddon's reign (681-669 B.C.), the king of Tyre managed to hold his throne by signing a treaty of vassalage (which has been discovered). Esarhaddon besieged the city in 671 B.C., and Ashurbanipal besieged it in 663 B.C. Tyre was only able to retain its autonomy by giving formal homage to these kings.²⁵ The city was greatly weakened by the 13-year siege of Nebuchadnezzar (585-572 B.C.) and entered a period of decline. In 332 it was finally destroyed by Alexander the Great.

4. Edom (1:11-12)

¹¹ Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever. ¹² So I will send a fire upon Teman, and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah."

a. The sin of Edom that is identified for punishment is its pitiless pursuit of its brother with the sword and its longstanding hostility toward him. Edomites, of course, were descendants of Esau, Jacob's/Israel's brother, and Edom and Israel are often referred to as

²³ Shalom M. Paul, *Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 61.

²⁴ ANET, 282-283; ISBE, 4:934.

²⁵ ANET, 291, 295-296; ISBE, 4:934.

brothers (e.g., Gen. 25:19ff., 27:40-41; Num. 20:14; Deut. 2:4, 23:7; Obad. 10, 12). Edom had a long history of enmity toward Israel, and Amos is here condemning an episode of Edom's gross mistreatment of them, perhaps referring to a very cruel border raid that has been lost to history.

b. God's judgment on Edom is reflected in the fact Edom paid tribute to Tiglath Pileser III (beginning in 732 B.C.)²⁶ and to a succession of Assyrian kings.²⁷ It was destroyed by the Babylonians in the 6th century B.C.²⁸ and was later overrun by the Nabateans.

5. Ammon (1:13-15)

¹³ Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border. ¹⁴ So I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour her strongholds, with shouting on the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind; ¹⁵ and their king shall go into exile, he and his princes together," says the LORD.

a. The sin of the Ammonites that is identified for punishment is ripping open pregnant women of Gilead to enlarge their borders. The fact they were pregnant magnifies the heinousness of the act because it includes the murder of the unborn child. This apparently took place during one of their attempts to enlarge their borders at Israel's expense. (Rabbah, the capital of ancient Ammon, is the modern city of Amman, Jordan).

b. As God's judgment, Ammon paid tribute to Assyrian kings from Tiglath Pileser III at least through Esarhaddon,²⁹ so fifty years or more. After the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar sacked Rabbah and took large numbers of citizens captive.³⁰

6. Moab (2:1-3)

Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom. ² So I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the strongholds of Kerioth, and Moab shall die amid uproar, amid shouting and the sound of the trumpet; ³ I will cut off the ruler from its midst, and will kill all its princes with him," says the LORD.

a. The sin of Moab that is identified for punishment is desecrating the corpse or bones of the king of Edom.

²⁶ ANET, 282.

²⁷ ISBE, 2:19-20.

²⁸ ISBE, 2:20.

²⁹ ISBE, 1:112 (Tiglath Pileser ruled 745-727 B.C.; Esarhaddon ruled 681-669 B.C.).

³⁰ McComiskey and Longman, 371.

(1) The bones were burned "to lime" in that they were "burnt so completely that the 'ashes became as fine and white as powdered chalk.'"³¹ With hostile intent, they treated his body like it was trash rather than with the respect it deserved owing to the fact it was the remains of a human being, a creature made in the image and likeness of God. Our deep sense that this is wrong is evident when we see things like the body of that American soldier that was dragged through the streets of Mogadishu in 1993. Some speculate that the incident to which Amos refers occurred when the coalition of Israel, Judah, and Edom tried to suppress a Moabite rebellion (2 Kings 3), but there is no way to be sure.

(2) Paul comments:

What is of primary significance, however, is that the atrocity recorded here was committed by one foreign nation against another and does not involve Israel or Judah at all. This is the best proof that the oracles of Amos against the foreign nations are intended to denounce the barbaric act of inhumanity itself, no matter by whom or against whom it was perpetrated. Such a crime is a direct offense against the Lord, whose moral laws operate and are binding within the international community of nations. He who flouts the will of the God of Israel will be punished directly by the Judge of all the nations.³²

b. Moab became subject to Tiglath Pileser III in 734 B.C. A later rebellion against Assyria was quelled by Sennacherib. Still later Moab was forced to pay tribute to Babylon, and when it rebelled against Babylonian rule shortly after 598 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar conquered them.³³

7. Judah (2:4-5)

⁴ Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked. ⁵ So I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem."

a. The sin of Judah that is identified for punishment is rejecting the law of the Lord as expressed in their not keeping his statutes. Judah's culpability is put on a different footing. Whereas the pagan nations were condemned for violating basic moral standards that are understood by human beings made in the image and likeness of God, Judah was in a covenant with God and as such had the blessing of the special revelation of his will. Rather than cherish it, they rejected it.

³¹ Paul, 72.

³² Paul, 72.

³³ McComiskey and Longman, 373.

b. You can imagine the Israelites taking perverse pleasure in hearing this rebuke of Judah, as the Judeans often scorned Israel (and rightly so) for having abandoned God's law. I can hear them cheering this word of the Lord, but their tone will soon change as the prophet sets his sights on Israel.

c. God here traces Judah's rejection of his law to their "lies" having led them astray. This probably refers to the lies that various idols represented actual deities that were worthy of worship, and in this sense "lies" functions as a synonym for the idols themselves. This paying homage or giving allegiance to a false, competing "god" not only was itself a violation of God's law but led them into all kinds of additional violations by seeking to please a different master.

d. These lies, these false gods, were the same false gods to which their fathers had given allegiance.

(1) 1 Kings 11:5-7 states: *For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.* ⁶ *So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done.* ⁷ *Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem.*

(2) The idolatry continued in Judah during the reigns of Solomon's son Rehoboam (1 Ki. 14:22-24; see also, 2 Chron. 12:1) and his son Abijam/Abijah (1 Ki. 15:2-3). Then after two good kings, Asa and Jehoshaphat, Jehoram *walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD* (2 Ki. 8:18; see also, 2 Chron. 21:6). Jehoram's son Ahaziah *walked in the way of the house of Ahab and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was son-in-law to the house of Ahab* (2 Ki. 8:27; see also, 2 Chron. 22:3-4).

(3) After Ahaziah was killed, his mother Athaliah usurped the throne of Judah, killing all her potential rivals in the royal family except the baby Joash/Jehoash who was hidden from her (2 Kings 11). 2 Chronicles 24:7 says of Athaliah: *For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken into the house of God, and had also used all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD for the Baals.*

(4) During the reign of Joash/Jehoash (835-796 B.C.), the people continued making sacrifices and offerings at the high places (2 Ki. 12:3), and after Joash's mentor, Jehoiada, died, Joash consented to abandonment of the house of the Lord and serving the Asherim and the idols (2 Chron. 24:17-19).

(5) *After Amaziah [Joash's son] came from striking down the Edomites, he brought the gods of the men of Seir and set them up as his gods and worshiped*

them, making offerings to them (2 Chron. 25:14). And during the reign of Amaziah's son Uzziah/Azariah, the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places (2 Ki. 15:4)

e. In 733 B.C. Tiglath Pileser III subjugated Judah (2 Chron. 28:16-21), which remained submissive throughout Ahaz's reign.³⁴ In 701 B.C. Sennacherib quelled a rebellion by destroying forty-six of Judah's fortified cities and deporting their residents (2 Ki. 18:7, 13).³⁵ In 1830 British Colonel R. Taylor discovered a six-sided inscribed pillar in Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh, which is now known as the Taylor Prism. It is an account of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and his taking of the fortified cities, thus confirming the report in Scripture.

(1) Sennacherib refers to "Hezekiah, the Jew" and declares that he made him a prisoner in Jerusalem, "like a bird in a cage," having surrounded him with "earthworks [watchtowers] in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate." What is striking, however, is that he makes no claim actually to have laid siege to the city or to have captured it. Given the usual bragging done in royal records, you can be sure that if Sennacherib had captured Jerusalem he would have boasted about it. And you can be equally sure that if he had suffered a humiliating defeat, he would turn that sow's ear into a silk purse or not report it at all.

(2) Regarding 2 Ki. 19:35-37, Paul House writes: "No other ancient texts record [the Lord's killing of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers], which is not surprising in view of their consistently positive viewpoint. Normally only victories were recorded. Assyrian texts do refer to Sennacherib's return to Nineveh, and Herodotus [a 5th-century B.C. Greek historian] shows that there was in Egypt the memory of an Assyrian retreat following a divine intervention"³⁶ (though that memory had the event at the Egyptian-Palestinian border and attributed the deliverance to an Egyptian god). The truth is that the Lord delivered Jerusalem just as reported in 2 Ki. 19:35-36.

f. In 605, 697, and 587 Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah, the last time destroying Jerusalem. In 1935 and 1938, 21 ostraca, which are broken pieces of pottery, on which letters had been written were discovered in the ruins of Lachish. They were written during the time of Jer. 34:7, when Nebuchadnezzar's army was advancing on Jerusalem. Jeremiah 34:7 mentions that Lachish and Azekah were the only fortified cities in Judea still holding out against Nebuchadnezzar's assault. Azekah is west of Jerusalem, and Lachish is south of Azekah. Most of the Lachish letters were dispatches from a Jewish commander named Hoshaiiah who apparently was stationed at an outpost north of Lachish and was responsible for interpreting the signals from Azekah and Lachish during that time. Lachish Ostrakon IV includes: "And let my lord know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all the indications which my lord hath given, for we cannot see Azekah."

³⁴ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 276-277.

³⁵ Bright, 286.

³⁶ Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 371.

C. Oracles of judgment against Israel (2:6 - 6:14)

1. first oracle of doom (2:6-16)

a. abused and exploited the underprivileged (2:6-8)

⁶ Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals-- ⁷ those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; ⁸ they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined.

(1) The first sin identified for punishment is their denial of legal justice to the poor. Though the poor person was "righteous" or "innocent," meaning here that his legal cause was just or valid (see, e.g., Ex. 23:7 and Deut. 25:1), he was still sold into slavery for payment of an unjust debt. The judges and the wealthy, powerful creditors colluded to cheat the poor, to deprive them of their rights. As explained in v. 7, they trampled the head of the poor into the ground, thwarting (turning aside) their just claims. Amos 5:12 mentions the righteous poor being denied justice by means of bribes.

(2) God's concern for legal justice, for equal treatment of people under the law regardless of their wealth and power, is all over Scripture. For example:

(a) Ex. 23:2-3, 6 – ² You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice, ³ nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit. . . . ⁶ "You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit."

(b) Lev. 19:15 – ¹⁵ "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor."

(c) Deut. 1:16-17a – ¹⁶ And I charged your judges at that time, 'Hear the cases between your brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the alien who is with him. ¹⁷ You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's.

(d) Deut. 16:18-20 – ¹⁸ "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. ¹⁹ You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. ²⁰ Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

(e) Ps. 82:3 – ³ Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.

(f) Prov. 29:14 – ¹⁴ If a king faithfully judges the poor, his throne will be established forever.

(g) Isa. 10:1-2 – Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression, ² to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey!

(h) Jer. 22:15-16 – ¹⁵ Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. ¹⁶ He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the LORD.

(3) The statement that they sell the needy (poor) for "a pair of sandals" may refer to the small amount for which corrupt judges were willing to sell out the just cause of the poor. (The LXX of 1 Sam. 12:3 uses "a sandal" to refer to a small bribe.) McComiskey and Longman write:

The pronoun "they" applies to the oppressing classes, especially the judges and creditors who "sell the righteous." These people of power and influence are guilty of accepting bribes of money and apparel. They regard the oppressed classes so lightly that they accept such paltry bribes as a pair of sandals. Amos characterized their corruption as "selling."³⁷

(4) Note that Amos 8:4-6 speaks of merchants who trample the needy and bring the poor to an end by cheating them through corrupt business practices. This poverty that the merchants intensify leads to their *buying* the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. In other words, they drive them to poverty by cheating them and then buy them for a small price when that poverty forces them to sell themselves into debt slavery.

³⁷ McComiskey and Longman, 376.

(5) The charge in v. 7b is that a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that God's holy name is profaned. It is not clear what is going on here. Perhaps a poor family had made a contract with a man for their daughter to enter his household as a servant and a wife. That is the situation contemplated in Ex. 21:7-11. The woman was then abused by being treated as community property, by being shared sexually by both the man and his father, which among other things, violates the prohibition against incest (Lev. 20:11-12). As a result, God's holy name is profaned, meaning it is dishonored before the world. Given the section's focus on abusing the poor, perhaps they felt emboldened to mistreat the woman this way because her family lacked any social clout.

(6) The charges in v. 8 indicate a disconnect between their religion and their life.

(a) Next to the very altars they had made for the worship of God, they were lying down on garments they had taken as security for some debt and failed to return to the owner in the evening as required by the law (Ex. 22:26-27; Deut. 24:11-13). McComiskey and Longman state:

Amos also pictures members of his society as sleeping by the altars on "garments taken in pledge." Clothing was regarded as valid collateral for securing debts. Hebrew law, however, required that garments taken in pledge be restored to the owner each evening (Ex 22:26-27; Dt 24:12-12 [sic]) as a covering during sleep. But many are obviously disregarding the law by sleeping in the garments of others.

The placing of this practice in the prevailing cultus ("every altar") emphasizes the great disparity between religion and practice in Israel.³⁸

(b) Exodus 22:26-27 states: ²⁶ *If ever you take your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down,* ²⁷ *for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.* Deuteronomy 24:11-13 states: ¹¹ *You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you.* ¹² *And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge.* ¹³ *You shall restore to him the pledge as the sun sets, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you. And it shall be righteousness for you before the LORD your God.*

(c) That same disconnect is evident in the fact they drank at their shrines, locations they believed were special places of God's presence ("the house of *their* God"), wine they had gained through fines imposed on people. I suspect the fines were corruptly imposed, in keeping with their abuse of the legal system, but as Shalom Paul points out, even if that were not the case, "fines are not to be exacted in order to allow the wealthy to indulge their

³⁸ McComiskey and Longman, 377.

appetites, feasting and drinking by the shrines."³⁹ Stuart similarly remarks, "Moreover, fining was to be employed according to the law as a vehicle for guaranteeing restitution (e.g., Exod 21:19, 30-32; 22:14, 15, 17; Deut 22:19), not as a means of enriching leaders who here have taken wine as payment-in-kind and debauched themselves thereby."⁴⁰

b. rejected the God who blessed them (2:9-12)

⁹ *"Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath."*¹⁰ *Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite."*¹¹ *And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?" declares the LORD.*¹² *"But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, 'You shall not prophesy.'*

(1) Amorite is an O.T. term sometimes used for the prequest population of Canaan (Gen. 15:16). God puts their sin of mistreating the poor and powerless in bold relief by reminding them that he, the one they were disobeying, brought them out of Egyptian bondage and gave them the Promised Land by destroying the apparently invincible Amorites. What ingratitude!

(2) He also cared for Israel's spiritual welfare by providing spiritual leaders in the form of Nazirites and prophets. Nazirites served as models of dedication to God. They made a special vow of separation to God which involved abstaining from any product of the vine, abstaining from all fermented drinks, never cutting their hair, and never touching a dead body (Num. 6:1-12). Their devotion was a positive spiritual influence. Prophets, of course, provided inspired spiritual guidance to the people.

(3) But Israel's expressed its rejection of him by rejecting the Nazirites and the prophets. They forced the Nazirites to break their vows and muzzled the prophets (for an illustration of the latter, see 7:12-13). They attacked the very things that called them to faithfulness to God.

c. their punishment (2:13-16)

¹³ *"Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down."*¹⁴ *Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life;*¹⁵ *he who handles the bow shall not stand, and he who is swift of foot shall not save*

³⁹ Paul, 86-87.

⁴⁰ Stuart, 317.

himself, nor shall he who rides the horse save his life; ¹⁶ and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day," declares the LORD.

(1) As punishment, their nation will be militarily defeated. This, of course, came to pass, culminating in the capture of Samaria in 722/721 B.C. (2 Ki. 17:1-6, 18:9-10). The siege of Samaria apparently was begun by Shalmaneser IV and completed by Sargon II, who succeeded Shalmaneser as king of Assyria in the latter part of 722 B.C. or the early part of 721 B.C.

(2) Among the inscriptions discovered at Khorsabad, Sargon boasts: "At the beginning of my royal rule . . . I besieged and captured Samaria, [and] led away as booty 27,290 inhabitants of it. . . . I installed over them an officer of mine and imposed upon them the tribute of the former king." (ANET, 284-285).

d. applying the text

(1) Clearly God is concerned that the poor and powerless be given equal treatment under the law. A system in which the rich and powerful get away with cheating the poor is an immoral and corrupt system. Indeed, this truth is built into western jurisprudence, which is why Lady Justice holds her scales wearing a blindfold. She is not moved by wealth, status, or anything other than the justness of the positions that are before her.

(a) Of course, this ideal is not always achieved, and the rich and powerful sometimes are able to game the system so that those less powerful are denied justice. As Christians, as God's people, we oppose the unequal treatment of anyone under the law. Equal justice is fundamental and foundational to a just society.

(b) Behind the corruption of legal justice, the toleration of the unequal treatment of certain persons under the law, is not only greed but also a sense that the poor are less worthy than the rich and powerful, that they do not really deserve justice against their "betters." Even Christians are not immune to the temptation of treating someone as second class simply because they are poor and socially powerless. That is clear from texts like Jas. 2:1-4 and in 1 Cor. 11:17-22.

[1] James warns his readers against exalting the man in rich clothes over the man in shabby clothes in gatherings of the church. He says in Jas. 2:1-4: *My brothers, keep the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ without partiality. ²For if a man wearing gold rings and fine clothes comes into your meeting, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in, ³and you look at the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "You sit here in style," and to the poor man you say, "Stand there or sit under my footstool," ⁴have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

[2] At Corinth the church was stratifying along class or socioeconomic lines during the fellowship meal (or "love feast") that often accompanied the Lord's Supper in the early church. When the Corinthians gathered, the wealthier Christians, who no doubt supplied most of the food for the fellowship meal, somehow were taking a disproportionate share of it, eating their "own supper." The haves had more than enough, as indicated by the excess of wine they consumed, but the have-nots were left hungry and were humiliated in the process. Paul rebukes them for that behavior. By way of a rhetorical question in v. 22, he indicates their conduct shows contempt for the church and humiliates the poor.

(c) In relating to the poor, we are not required to be naïve and to allow hucksters and slothful people to prey on us, to have us subsidize and incentivize their sin. That is not good stewardship of what God has given us. As Paul wrote in 2 Thess. 3:10, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you that if anyone is *unwilling* to work, do not let him eat." But we *are required* to have compassion on those who are poor because they are *unable* earn a living for whatever reason, even reasons rooted in poor decisions and sinful behavior earlier in their lives.

(d) The church's mission, of course, is not the eradication of poverty; that is not its marching order. Rather, its marching order is to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded (Matt. 28:19-20). But as we go about that, as we have opportunities in our lives as disciples to reflect God's love for the poor and powerless, we are to do so. We are to be kind and (wisely) generous and charitable. And we must never treat the poor and powerless in our society as though they lack dignity or are less worthy as human beings simply because they have few possessions. As the Lord said, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Lk. 12:15). That is not the measure of a man.

(e) And as a footnote, notice that the Christian attitude toward the poor has nothing to do with using the force of government to compel *others* to give their money to people *I* want to help. Whatever the arguments for the forced redistribution of wealth in a society, Christian ethics relates to personal and voluntary expressions of charity and mercy toward the poor. Once it is compelled it is no longer an expression of one's own heart and compassion, and the recipients then view it as a right or entitlement rather than as an act of charity for which gratitude is an appropriate response.

(2) As God brought Israel out of Egyptian bondage and into the Promised Land by destroying the apparently invincible Amorites and blessed them with models of dedication (Nazirites) and the voice of prophets, he similarly has brought us out of bondage to the devil and into the glorious kingdom that Jesus inaugurated at his first coming. He also has blessed us with models of discipleship and his prophetic word in the Scriptures. So we must be doubly careful not to imitate Israel. We must not ignore God's will for our lives, we must not work against the positive spiritual examples in our midst, and we must not muzzle his message to avoid truths that we or our culture find inconvenient. As Paul charged Timothy in 2 Tim. 4:2, we are to preach the word in season and out of season, when it is received gladly and when it is not.

In the famous words of Isa. 40:8, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

2. second oracle of doom (3:1 - 4:3)

a. the responsibility of election (3:1-2)

Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: ² "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

(1) This oracle is directed at Israel, the northern kingdom, but the point goes for the whole family that God brought out of Egypt. This includes Judah, whose judgment Amos already mentioned (2:5).

(2) The point is that Israel's (and Judah's) special relationship with God did not operate to excuse their sin; rather, it made their sin more culpable! To be God's elect is a position of responsibility. They should have been the last nation to reject the Holy One.

(3) Application

(a) The church's intimate relationship with God must never be used to excuse or justify sin. By God's grace, we have a special relationship with him; we have been chosen by him in Christ to be his children. Our response is to be one of obedience and holy living, not one of indifference or rebellion (e.g., 1 Peter 1:14-16).

(b) Yet the voices that seek to pervert our intimacy with God into license have always been present (e.g., Rom. 3:8, 6:1, 15; Jude 4). This describes the Christianity of too many today; they have swallowed the notion of "cheap grace." They define faith not as "allegiance," not as a trust that includes surrender and submission, but as a mere intellectual belief. They separate their life from their religion and seek peace in the lie that God does not care how we live. They live like the world – stealing, lying, hating, slandering, hoarding, divorcing, fornicating, aborting, and getting intoxicated – and ignore or attack any who dare tell them they will be damned if they do not repent.

(c) John wrote in 1 Jn. 1:6, "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie and do not do the truth." The writer of Hebrews declares in Heb. 10:26-27, ²⁶*For if we deliberately keep on sinning after we received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins ²⁷but a certain, fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the adversaries.*

(d) You see, faith that is not allegiance or loyalty, that is mere intellectual assent to the truth of a proposition, is not biblical, saving faith. Biblical, saving faith will necessarily and inevitably produce a life that is marked by obedience to God. As has been said, "Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is never alone."

(e) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor and seminary teacher who was executed by the Nazis, wrote in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*:

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Costly grace . . . is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.⁴¹

b. defense of his prophetic mission (3:3-8)

³ "Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet? ⁴ Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from his den, if he has taken nothing? ⁵ Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing? ⁶ Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it? ⁷ "For the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. ⁸ The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?"

(1) Verses 3-6 are a chain of rhetorical questions, the understood answer to which is "No." (Note that according to some translations [e.g., NIV, NET] the understood answers to the questions in v. 6 is "Yes.")

(a) The first question is better translated, "Do two walk together *without having met*?" (NET; Paul, 109-110) or "unless they are agreed" (KJV, ASV, ERV, NKJV) or "unless they have agreed to do so" (NIV, NJB). As rendered in the ESV and some other versions, the answer is less clearly "No," which is undoubtedly the assumed answer.

(b) A lion does not roar when it is stalking its prey but only when attacking it, driving it to others in the hunting party or paralyzing it with fear (see, Isa. 5:29; Ezek. 22:25). It does not growl from its den, make guttural sounds of contentment, when it is there with nothing to eat. Note that "the lion has roared" in v. 8 and recall 1:2 ("The Lord roars from Zion"), which may suggest he has "cornered" his prey, Israel.

⁴¹ Quoted in *Christianity Today* (2/7/94), 39.

(c) A bird does not get ensnared unless someone has laid a snare for it, and snares do not trip without something triggering them. These are undeniable truths.

(d) And when a trumpet was blown in a city, which would signal the approach of an enemy, the people certainly were afraid. It meant the approach of potential disaster.

(e) This brings the audience to the climactic truism of v. 6b: Does disaster come to a city, unless it is the Lord's doing? Of course not, because God is sovereign. Because he is omniscient and omnipotent, as they all would agree, nothing happens that is not his work in the sense he either actively brings it about or passively allows it to happen (as with the attacks on Job he permits Satan to make). He always has a good purpose for doing either, but that good purpose is not always perceivable by us as limited and sinful creatures.

(2) With that point made, Amos asserts in v. 7 that the Lord does not direct or allow disaster to befall a city without revealing his intention to his prophets. And he has revealed precisely that intention to Amos regarding Samaria (v. 8): "The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?" The point is that as a prophet he is just a messenger not the author. The originator of and authority behind his word of judgment is the Lord Almighty. He is the one who determines whether the city will fall.

(3) By the same token, Scripture is from God (2 Peter 1:20), so we are not responsible for its content. Our job is to deliver God's message accurately. We must not distort the message to make it more pleasing to our hearers.

(a) Otherwise we become like the prophets and others who were rebuked by the Lord in Jer. 6:14 and 8:11: "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace."

(b) God said in Ezek. 13:9-14: ⁹ *My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and who give lying divinations. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord GOD.* ¹⁰ *Precisely because they have misled my people, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets smear it with whitewash,* ¹¹ *say to those who smear it with whitewash that it shall fall! There will be a deluge of rain, and you, O great hailstones, will fall, and a stormy wind break out.* ¹² *And when the wall falls, will it not be said to you, 'Where is the coating with which you smeared it?'* ¹³ *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I will make a stormy wind break out in my wrath, and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger, and great hailstones in wrath to make a full end.* ¹⁴ *And I will break down the wall that you have smeared with whitewash, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be laid bare. When it falls, you shall perish in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the LORD.*

(c) If our hearers do not like the message, their fight is with God, not with us. Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 4:1-4: *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

c. summon of witnesses (3:9-10)

⁹ *Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt, and say, "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see the great tumults within her, and the oppressed in her midst." ¹⁰ "They do not know how to do right," declares the LORD, "those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds."*

(1) The point is that even the world (note LXX reads Assyria instead of Ashdod), which does not possess the guidance of Scripture, the special revelation God has given to the Jewish people, knows better than to act like Samaria! They are summoned to witness the upheaval and oppression in Israel. Israel had lost its sense of what is honest, decent, just, and proper so that even pagan nations could judge it as wrong.

(2) It is, of course, an outrage for the people of God, with their high calling, to accept conduct that even the world condemns. You see the same principle in 1 Cor. 5:1-2, where Paul says, *Sexual immorality is actually reported among you, and such immorality as does not [exist] even among the Gentiles: a man has his father's wife. ²And you are puffed up! Should you not have mourned instead, so that the one who did this deed might be removed from your midst?*

d. punishment stated and elaborated upon (3:11- 4:3)

¹¹ *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "An adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you, and your strongholds shall be plundered." ¹² Thus says the LORD: "As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed. ¹³ "Hear and testify against the house of Jacob," declares the Lord GOD, the God of hosts, ¹⁴ "that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. ¹⁵ I will strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end," declares the LORD. **4:1** "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, 'Bring, that we may drink!'" ² *The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon**

you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. ³ And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead; and you shall be cast out into Harmon," declares the LORD.

(1) God tells them again in v. 11 that their nation will be defeated militarily. As noted previously, this refers to the Assyrian conquest that culminated in the capture of Samaria in 722/721 B.C. (2 Ki. 17:1-6, 18:9-10). The siege of Samaria apparently was begun by Shalmaneser IV and completed by Sargon II, who succeeded Shalmaneser as king of Assyria in the latter part of 722 B.C. or the early part of 721 B.C.

(2) He says in v. 12 that only a remnant, just bits and pieces, will be left in Samaria. Only fragments of their former luxurious lifestyle – a corner of a couch and part of a bed – will be found after the land is overrun by the Assyrians.

(3) God says in vv. 13-15 that the altars and luxurious homes in Israel will be destroyed. The things on which they base their security, the things in which they place their hope, i.e., heartless religious ritual and wealth, will not save them. They will prove to be a vicious deception. I will talk about the implications of this for us when we get to 5:18-6:7.

(4) In 4:1-3 he addresses the fate of the pampered women who are behind some of the oppression. Their insatiable desire for luxury drove their husbands to exploitation and oppression, to squeeze from people everything they could however they could. Those who thus inspire and motivate others to sin will not escape God's judgment. These pampered women will not be insulated from the coming terror by the fact their work was behind the scenes, a driving force of the evil. The imagery is their being dragged out like meat through breaches in the walls that were so numerous there was one straight ahead of each person. If "Harmon" is a place, as it seems to be, its location is unknown.

(5) This same point is present in the New Testament. Those who encourage Christians to sin, whether by redefining what sin is, by pressuring them to do wrong, or by accepting their sin, are guilty for doing so. It is a serious thing to be a stumbling block to God's people. Jesus said in Mat. 18:6-7, *whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!*

3. explanation of doom; refusal to repent under discipline (4:4-13)

a. a disconnect between their religion and their lives (4:4-5)

⁴ "Come to Bethel, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days; ⁵ offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them; for so you love to do, O people of Israel!" declares the Lord GOD.

(1) Bethel and Gilgal were two major sanctuaries or worship centers in Israel. Here God, through Amos, sarcastically calls the people of Israel to enter those exalted shrines as a priest would call them to enter for their worship activity. But instead of calling them to enter for what they thought they were doing – to present reconciling and God-pleasing sacrifices and offerings – he calls them to come and sin against him! Though they were all about these rituals, they loved doing them and would announce loudly their freewill offerings, their offerings were an offense to God, acts of rebellion, however much they multiplied them.

(2) Their offerings had nothing to do with God because they were not reflective of a heart that loved him, that was surrendered to him (Deut. 6:5). This was evident not only in the fact Bethel and Gilgal were not Jerusalem and the priests at those sanctuaries were not authorized (1 Ki. 12:28-32), but most importantly in the context of Amos because they substituted this worship for righteous behavior, especially for their love of neighbor that was part of their covenant obligation (Lev. 19:18). He has already rebuked them for their mistreatment of the poor and powerless and in 5:12 does so again, declaring, *For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins-- you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate.* In 5:21-24 he ties their denial of justice to his loathing of their sacrificial offerings.

(3) We have an amazing capacity to deceive ourselves into thinking we have a relationship with God while living in rebellion. We so easily fool ourselves into believing God is not concerned with how we live, that all he really cares about is our going through the motions of worship – gathering on the Lord's Day, singing, praying, sharing in the Lord's Supper, hearing a sermon, and contributing. If we do those things, no matter how we live outside the assembly, we think we're right with God.

(4) The truth, of course, is that we cannot divorce religion and life. If faith is not reflected in life, it is not genuine, biblical faith. Indeed, thinking God can be satisfied with mere tokens of devotion is disgusting to him, something about which I will say more when we look at chapter 5.

b. repeatedly refused to heed God's discipline (4:6-11)

⁶ "I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD. ⁷ "I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest; I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city; one field would have rain, and the field on which it did not rain would wither; ⁸ so two or three cities

would wander to another city to drink water, and would not be satisfied; yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD. ⁹ "I struck you with blight and mildew; your many gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees the locust devoured; yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD. ¹⁰ "I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt; I killed your young men with the sword, and carried away your horses, and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils; yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD. ¹¹ "I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD.

(1) God had repeatedly disciplined them to call them to repentance, but they would not heed it and return to him. He sent upon them various hardships (famine, drought [widespread and localized], agricultural disasters [diseases and locusts], human diseases, military losses, and disasters analogous to Sodom and Gomorrah [perhaps fires]) to wake them up, but they refused to take the warning.

(2) God in his love still disciplines his people.

(a) The writer says in Heb. 12:4-11: ⁴*In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of blood.* ⁵*And have you forgotten the exhortation which he addresses to you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose heart when rebuked by him; ⁶for [the] Lord disciplines whom he loves, and he chastises every son whom he accepts."* ⁷*Endure trials for [the sake of] discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son [is there] whom a father does not discipline?* ⁸*But if you are without discipline, of which all have become sharers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.* ⁹*Moreover, we had the fathers of our flesh [as] correctors, and we respected [them]. Should we not much more subject ourselves to the Father of the spirits so that we will live?* ¹⁰*For they indeed disciplined [us] for a few days according to what seemed good to them, but he [disciplines us] for [our] benefit in order [for us] to share in his holiness.* ¹¹*But all discipline for the moment does not seem to be pleasant but painful, but later it yields [the] peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

(b) A specific example is given in 1 Cor. 11:27-32: ²⁷*So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.* ²⁸*But let a man test himself and in that way eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* ²⁹*For the one who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.* ³⁰*For this reason, many among you are weak and sick and enough are sleeping.* ³¹*But if we were discerning ourselves, we would not be coming under judgment.* ³²*But in being judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined, that we may not be condemned with the world.* Because some in Corinth were participating in the Supper without appreciating the body, discriminating against and humiliating the poorer brothers and sisters, and had not been examining themselves in that regard, God had permitted sickness and death to come upon the community. But he had done so as a form of discipline. He was trying to bring them to repentance for their sin to avoid condemnation.

(c) We know from Job and elsewhere that not all suffering or hardship is divine discipline. It does not always mean God is trying to move us to repentance. He has other reasons for allowing it, and oftentimes we, like Job, are not privy to those reasons.

(d) But if we are *living in sin*, accepting conduct we know deep down is wrong and suppressing that conviction to continue in the sin, we need to treat suffering and hardship that comes into our lives as discipline, as God calling us to repentance. In other words, if it is discipline, we will know the sin involved with minimal introspection. It will be something we have harbored and excused rather than renounced and struggled against. If you are not aware of any such area of rebellion, do not turn every hardship into discipline and torture yourself trying to guess what it could be. Accept in that case that your suffering was not discipline but something God called you to endure for some other reason.

c. must now meet God in judgment (4:12-13)

¹² *"Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"* ¹³ *For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth-- the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name!*

(1) Because Israel refused to return to God despite all his efforts to get them to turn back, he tells them he is going to bring further suffering and misery on them, the implication being that it will be far worse. The limits of the purpose of discipline will be removed, and they will experience the suffering and misery of divine judgment. Stuart writes, "Now they were headed for a hostile encounter with the One with all power, whose punishments would constitute more – much more, horribly more – of the same."⁴²

(2) The description of God in v. 13 portrays his glory. There is none like him and meeting him in judgment as a rebel is the most terrifying thing imaginable. Israel will be judged by God through Assyria and ultimately in the great final judgment.

4. lament over Israel (5:1-3)

Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel: ² "Fallen, no more to rise, is the virgin Israel; forsaken on her land, with none to raise her up." ³ For thus says the Lord GOD: "The city that went out a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went out a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel."

⁴² Stuart, 340.

a. Amos here mourns the fall of Israel. McComiskey and Longman state: "It is as though Amos is so certain what he says will happen that he treats it as an accomplished fact. He sees Israel as a virgin whose life has been ended in the bloom of youth."⁴³ It is a tragedy brought on by their stubborn disobedience.

b. The northern kingdom will never be reestablished as a nation, but as implied in 5:3 (see also 3:12) and made clear in 9:8-9, God will preserve a remnant, descendants of the tribes destined for exile. The line of Israel, the northern kingdom, will not be obliterated.

5. explanation of doom; refusal to repent at direct invitation (5:4-17)

a. God's invitation and their practice (5:4-15)

⁴ For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live; ⁵ but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing." ⁶ Seek the LORD and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel, ⁷ O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth! ⁸ He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD is his name; ⁹ who makes destruction flash forth against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress. ¹⁰ They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth. ¹¹ Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. ¹² For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins-- you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate. ¹³ Therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time, for it is an evil time. ¹⁴ Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. ¹⁵ Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

(1) God explains the doom that Amos has just lamented. God not only had called them to repentance by repeatedly disciplining them with suffering and hardship but through his prophets urged them expressly to "seek him," to turn back to him in repentance for forgiveness and blessing, but they refused. Indeed, they hate those who reprove them and who speak the truth to them.

(2) The rituals performed at Bethel and Gilgal will not save them. Those who rejected the Almighty creator by spurning the justice and righteousness he demands, trampling on the poor and squeezing them with taxes, will not enjoy the wealth they had gained

⁴³ McComiskey and Longman, 394.

from their abuse of the poor, the nice houses they built and vineyards they planted. For God knows their sin, that they accept bribes to deny legal justice to the righteous poor.

(3) I think the translation of v. 13 offered by Hebrew scholar Gary Smith is probably correct: "Therefore, the prosperous will be silent at that time for it will be a disastrous time."⁴⁴ The wealthy who had oppressed the innocent will be driven to silence by their grief over the disaster that is coming (silence of grief as in Lam. 2:10, 3:28). Gary Smith states: "God will reverse the plight of the wealthy who silence the poor through bribery and injustice. Although the wicked have prospered and become quite successful through their prudent influence on the important people at the proper time, they themselves will soon be silenced when God's disastrous day comes upon them (3:14; 4:2; 6:3)."⁴⁵

(4) If there is any hope for them yet to avoid this judgment, it lies in their seeking the Lord in the form of seeking good and not evil, being committed to God's ethical calling. That is their only hope for God being with them, as they now falsely claim that he is. If they will hate evil, love good, and repent of the denial of justice at the city gate, the ancient courtroom, *perhaps* God will be gracious to the remnant, the penitent subset, and spare Israel for their sake. (Note that Amos refers to Israel as the "house of Joseph" [5:6, 6:6] because its largest tribe, Ephraim, descended from Joseph.)

(5) In a somewhat similar way, God through the Scripture issues warnings to rebellious Christians to repent, to wholeheartedly return to him. God's grace toward the penitent Christian is limitless, but we cannot live in rebellion. For example:

(a) Gal. 5:19-21 – ¹⁹*Now the works of the flesh are obvious, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, ²¹outbreaks of envy, instances of drunkenness, acts of revelry, and such things as these. I tell you these things beforehand, even as I previously told you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

(b) 1 Cor. 6:9-10 – ⁹*Or do you not know that unrighteous men will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor passive male participants in homosexual intercourse nor active male participants in homosexual intercourse ¹⁰nor thieves nor greedy persons nor drunkards nor revilers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

(c) Eph. 5:3-5 – *But do not let sexual immorality and any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is fitting for saints, ⁴nor obscene speech, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are not proper, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵For this you must know for*

⁴⁴ Gary V. Smith, *Amos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 156, 169-170; see also, Smith and Page, 105 (who labels Gary Smith's argument on the translation as "cogent") and NET note.

⁴⁵ Gary Smith, 170.

sure: No sexually immoral or impure or greedy person (who is an idolater) has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

(d) Heb. 10:26-31 – ²⁶*For if we deliberately keep on sinning after we received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins ²⁷but a certain, fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸Anyone who has rejected the law of Moses dies without mercy on [the testimony of] two or three witnesses. ²⁹How much severer punishment do you think the one who trampled on the Son of God and considered a common thing the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and insulted the Spirit of grace will deserve? ³⁰For we know the one who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "[The] Lord will judge his people." ³¹[It is] a fearful thing to fall into [the] hands of [the] living God.*

b. the result of their refusal (5:16-17)

¹⁶ *Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord: "In all the squares there shall be wailing, and in all the streets they shall say, 'Alas! Alas!' They shall call the farmers to mourning and to wailing those who are skilled in lamentation, ¹⁷ and in all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through your midst," says the LORD.*

(1) Because of their trust in a ritualistic form of religion that is divorced from God's will for their daily lives, seeking Bethel and Gilgal instead of seeking the Lord, they will suffer judgment. There will be extensive mourning over the dead throughout Israel when God, through the instrument of the Assyrian army, passes through the land.

(2) When divine judgment falls, it is the gravest, most serious of all events. As the writer said in Heb. 10:31, "[It is] a fearful thing to fall into [the] hands of [the] living God." That is why the punishment meted out at the final judgment is spoken of repeatedly as that place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

6. woe to the rebellious who trust in religious rituals (5:18-27)

a. fact of false security (5:18-20)

¹⁸ *Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light, ¹⁹ as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. ²⁰ Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?*

(1) These Israelites lived in rebellion to God and yet so deceived themselves about the matter that they actually longed for his coming in judgment. Despite practicing idolatry, abusing the poor and underprivileged, muzzling the prophets, and ignoring God's attempts to bring them to repentance, they had deceived themselves into thinking they were at peace with him and wanted him to come in judgment! They thought it would be a good thing for them, a time of vindication and reward.

(2) God tells them in no uncertain terms that they have no business hoping for that day. His coming in judgment will be a disaster for them. Their expectation that it will be a time of safety and even blessing will be shattered. It will be like the person who thinks he is safe after having fled from a lion only to be mauled by a bear; it will be like the person who thinks he is safe after entering his own home only to be struck by a deadly snake. The judgment they long for will be their destruction not their vindication or rescue.

(3) Many religious people today are in the same boat. They are living in rebellion to God, being oblivious and/or apathetic to his commands, and still think the Second Coming is going to be a time of rejoicing and celebration for them.

(a) Jesus made clear in Mat. 7:21-23 that lip service from a rebel will not cut it on the day of judgment: ²¹ *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*

(b) Jesus declared in Lk. 6:46-49: ⁴⁶ *"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? ⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great."*

(c) In numerous texts, Jesus and the Spirit stress that obedience to commands is an inherent part of loving Jesus and God the Father (Jn. 14:15, 21a, 23a, 24a, Jn. 15:14, 1 Jn. 2:3, 5:3).

b. basis of false security (5:21-24)

²¹ *"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. ²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; to*

the melody of your harps I will not listen. ²⁴ *But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

(1) Now you might be asking yourself, how can people who are living in rebellion deceive themselves into thinking they are right with God? How could they possibly have a false sense of security? At least part of the answer is here in vv. 21-24.

(2) A source of their false security with God was their religious ritual. They thought they could be justified before God by performing acts of worship without surrendering control of their lives to him. They offered God religious festivals, solemn assemblies, songs, and sacrifices, all proclaiming that he was worthy of being honored and obeyed, but then they ignored his will for their lives. They lived as *they* wanted, as *they* saw fit, rather than as God wanted.

(3) God says he despises this type of hypocritical worship. He wants genuine worship, a worship that emanates from a faith that finds expression in one's life, a faith that produces a life of justice and righteousness. You see precisely the same sentiment expressed in Prov. 15:8, Isa. 1:10-17, Jer. 7:9-11, and no doubt elsewhere.

(4) Our ability to deceive ourselves in this way is greater than we imagine. I'll never forget one Christmas Eve about eight years before brother John and I became Christians. We were out drinking with a mutual friend named Dominic and were working hard to achieve the desired state of inebriation. All of a sudden, Dominic got up and started to leave the bar. John and I said, "Where are you going?" and he said, "To midnight mass."

(5) Now it should strike you as absurd that someone could think God would be pleased with acts of devotion offered by one who was defying his commands against drunkenness, but:

(a) What about the person who is devoted to pornography or is carrying on an immoral sexual relationship – having sex with someone to whom he or she is not married – but who sings praises to God on Sunday morning?

(b) What about the person who persists in lying, hating, slandering, or refusing to forgive but who would not think of missing the Lord's Supper?

(c) What about the person who is cheating his customers or employees, stealing from his employer, or cheating his way through school but who praises God in prayer and asks for his blessings?

(d) What about the person who has accepted, made peace with, his obscene or profane speech but who gives money every time the collection plate comes by?

(6) I am not, of course, talking about the penitent who struggle with sins the way we all struggle with sins. I am talking about those who refuse to surrender their sins, who refuse to confess them, to renounce them, and to commit themselves to no longer practicing them. I am talking about the person who has made an idol of his sin; I am talking about the rebel who thinks he has convinced God to be happy with trinkets, to be satisfied with mere tokens of devotion.

(7) The truth is that God hates any worship that is offered to him by a hypocrite, by one who has not surrendered control of his life. That is treating him as though he can be played, as though his favor can be bought with mere rituals, as in the case of pagan gods. The predicate for all acceptable worship in the new covenant is a genuine saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which includes surrender of one's will, a broken spirit and contrite heart. It is only then that the worship God prescribes is acceptable.

c. coming judgment (5:25-27)

²⁵ *"Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? ²⁶ You [have taken]⁴⁶ up Sikkuth your king, and Kiyyun your star-god-- your images that you made for yourselves, ²⁷ and I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.*

(1) It is debatable whether verse 26 refers to the specific pagan astral deities (star gods) Sikkuth and Kiyyun or says, as rendered in the NIV, "You have lifted up the *shrine* of your king, the *pedestal* of your idols, the star of your god." Most English versions are like the ESV, but either way, the verse clearly is speaking of Israel's involvement in idolatry,

(2) As Stephen indicates in his rehearsal of Israel's history in Acts 7, citing in vv. 42-43 the LXX of this Amos text, Israel was worshiping idols in the wilderness (in addition to the golden calf) (see, e.g., Ezek. 20:10-26; Hos. 9:10; Ps. 106:28). In suggesting through the rhetorical question of v. 25 that Israel did *not* bring him sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness, I think God is saying that their divided heart, their lack of singular devotion to him, vitiated or nullified whatever sacrificial worship they may have offered him, just as their presently divided heart ruined their current worship.

(3) God declares that their current disobedience and disloyalty is going to be judged. He is going to send them into exile in Assyria, the land beyond Damascus.

7. woe to rebellious who trust in own strength and wealth (6:1-7)

⁴⁶ I changed ESV's "shall take" to "have taken" as in HCSB (see also, KJV, ERV, ASV, and NIV).

"Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes! ² 'Pass over to Calneh, and see, and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are [they] better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory[?]' ³ O you who put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence[.] ⁴ Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, ⁵ who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, ⁶ who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! ⁷ Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away."

a. In this oracle of judgment, Amos includes a word against Judah, warning those who are "at ease" in Zion (Jerusalem). They were spiritually complacent, and as he already indicated in 2:4-5, judgment was coming for them. Regarding Israel, the woe is addressed to the leaders who felt safe and secure in Samaria, a city that was difficult to conquer militarily because it was on a mountain, and who were sought out and depended on by the people.

b. The leaders of Israel were giving false assurances to the people by pointing out Israel's and Judah's greatness in comparison to some of its neighbors. Verse 2 is best understood as instruction and rhetorical questions by Israel's leaders to its people that included a reference to Judah as a nation of fellow Jews: Are *they* (Calneh, Hamath, Gath)⁴⁷ better than these kingdoms (i.e., Israel and Judah)? Is their territory greater than your (Israel's) territory? The understood answer to both is no. At that time, Calneh and Hamath were under the control of Israel and Gath was under the control of Judah.

c. In their self-confidence and misplaced trust in empty religious ritual, they dismissed, "put far away," any claims about a coming day of disaster. All the while they "bring near a reign of terror" (NIV) or a "reign of violence" (NRS, HCSB, NET) on their own people by injustice and oppression, taking "seat" as reference to a throne from which terror or violence reigns (see NET note).

d. He pronounces a woe on those wallowing in luxury, who are living the high life with all kinds of leisure time, but who do not care about the moral rot of the nation. God's people have turned their backs on him, and they carry on like nothing was wrong. They were living large, so who cares about how God was being mocked and disrespected.

e. They will not be saved by their wealth. Their livestock, land holdings, and bank accounts will not exempt them from God's judgment. On the contrary, they will be the first to

⁴⁷ I modified 6:2 in the ESV by adding quotation marks to reflect the understanding that they are words from the notable men (as in NET), by opting for "they" instead of "you" (as in KJV, ERV, ASV, RSV, NAS, REB, NASU, NET, and NIV), and by putting a question mark at the end of v. 2 (as in KJV, ERV, ASV, NAS, NEB, REB, NKJV, NASU, HCSB, NET, and NIV). I modified 6:3 by substituting a period at the end for the question mark.

go. Not because of their wealth, but because of their callousness toward God. Donald Gowen remarks:

Neither the book of Amos nor the rest of the OT, however, advocates asceticism, the claim that giving up pleasure will in itself make one better. Israel saw pleasure as one of the good gifts for which God is to be thanked, and that includes plenty to eat and drink and comfort and security (see Lev 26:3-10; Ps 72:3, 16; Eccl 2:24-26; 3:12-13; Jer 31:12-14). The attitudes of some Christians that discomfort is protection from temptation and that wealth in itself is something to feel guilty about do not correspond with the OT outlook.

Luxury is a problem when it is gained at the expense of others' misery (4:1-3; 5:11-12; 8:4-6) and when it deadens the mind and the senses to responsibility. . . . As long as I am comfortable, why disturb that comfort by worrying about my behavior or about others who are not doing so well?⁴⁸

8. destruction promised with an oath (6:8-14)

⁸ *The Lord GOD has sworn by himself, declares the LORD, the God of hosts: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it."* ⁹ *And if ten men remain in one house, they shall die.* ¹⁰ *And when one's relative, the one who anoints him for burial, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the house, and shall say to him who is in the innermost parts of the house, "Is there still anyone with you?" he shall say, "No"; and he shall say, "Silence! We must not mention the name of the LORD."* ¹¹ *For behold, the LORD commands, and the great house shall be struck down into fragments, and the little house into bits.* ¹² *Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood--* ¹³ *you who rejoice in Lo-debar, who say, "Have we not by our own strength captured Karnaim for ourselves?"* ¹⁴ *"For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel," declares the LORD, the God of hosts; "and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of the Arabah."*

a. God's judgment against rebellious Israel is sure. He hates their pride and the military strongholds in which they trust, and he swears by himself that he will deliver up Samaria. The judgment on the impenitent at the return of Christ is no less sure (see, e.g., 2 Thess. 1:5-10; Mat. 25:31-46).

b. He illustrates the coming judgment as something so grave that occupants who survive the first wave of judgment will end up dying in their own homes, perhaps by starvation or an ensuing plague. A family member who comes to retrieve the body of one who has died in the house (if it refers to one who "burns" him [NRSV, NET] perhaps it is because of a plague or lack of people to dig graves) finds a lone individual in the innermost part of the house, either the last

⁴⁸ Donald E. Gowan, "Amos" in Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 7:400.

survivor or someone who had entered the house after the death in the hope of hiding from God's judgment. The family member asks if there is anyone else with him, and after answering "No" the man urges him not to mention the Lord's name in a prayer or lamentation of grief. The point seems to be that the punishment was so severe that he fears calling on the Lord's name will bring another wave of wrath.

c. They have done the unthinkable, turning justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood, and they boast in their victories as though they were by their own strength. But God's judgment is coming. He is going to bring the Assyrians against them, a nation that will conquer them.

d. The judgment at the return of Christ is described in even more frightening terms.

(1) Jesus said in Mat. 13:49-50: ⁴⁹ *So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous* ⁵⁰ *and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

(2) He said in Mat. 25:31-34, 41, 46: ³¹ *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.* ³² *Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.* ³³ *And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.* ³⁴ *Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . . .'* ⁴¹ *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. . . .'* ⁴⁶ *And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

(3) The suffering in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, the fire of eternal punishment into which the unsaved will be cast, is portrayed in Rev. 14:9-11 with reference to the unfaithful at the end time, the time of the Antichrist. It states: ⁹ *And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand,* ¹⁰ *he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.* ¹¹ *And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."*

(4) The eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, the fire into which Jesus says in Mat. 25:41 that the unsaved will be cast, is described in Rev. 20:10 as a lake of fire in which the devil, the beast, and the false prophet are *tormented* (βασανίζω) day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:15 confirms that the unsaved, those whose names were not found in the book of life, also are thrown into the lake of fire.

II. Prophetic Visions (7:1 - 9:15)

A. Locusts, Fire, and Plumb Line (7:1-9)

1. locusts and fire (7:1-6)

This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout, and behold, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. ² When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said, "O Lord GOD, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" ³ The LORD relented concerning this: "It shall not be," said the LORD. ⁴ This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, the Lord GOD was calling for a judgment by fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. ⁵ Then I said, "O Lord GOD, please cease! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" ⁶ The LORD relented concerning this: "This also shall not be," said the Lord GOD.

a. God reveals to Amos the judgment he is bringing on Israel, symbolized first as a locust plague at the worst possible time (right at the end of the rainy season)⁴⁹ and then as a fire, and both times Amos appeals to God's compassion in urging him to spare Israel. He begs him because Israel is "too small," not strong enough, to survive such devastation. God relents and withholds the judgment.

b. As 7:8 suggests ("I will never again pass by them"; NIV: "I will spare them no longer"), this sparing of Israel from the revealed judgments demonstrates the Lord's great patience. As Peter says in 2 Pet. 3:9, the Lord is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance. When he brings judgment, it is never hasty; it is only after perfect forbearance.

2. plumb line (7:7-9)

⁷ This is what he showed me: behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸ And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them; ⁹ the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

⁴⁹ Smith and Page, 128.

a. Amos sees the Lord standing by a wall (representing Israel) that had been constructed with a plumb line, meaning it was intended to be a straight vertical wall. The Lord has a plumb line in his hand by which he is checking whether the wall is as intended. That plumb line is the focus of the vision, as it is all Amos mentions when he is asked what he sees.

b. God tells Amos he is setting a plumb line among his people Israel and "will never again pass by them," meaning he will no longer ignore or spare them. God is amazingly patient, but there is a day of judgment. Israel is going to be judged for their willful and persistent deviation from the truth, from God's purpose and calling for them. They rejected God, as reflected in their disobedience to his will, most notably in their mistreatment and exploitation of their brothers.

c. In speaking of the coming judgment, God singles out Israel's religious sites, which fueled their false sense of security, and the nation's ruling dynasty represented by Jeroboam II. The words of Amaziah the priest in the following section pick up on that message.

d. We need to remember that, while the Lord is patient, judgment day is coming (see, e.g., 2 Pet. 3:3-13). On that day when Jesus returns, all who have not genuinely accepted the truth of God's work in Christ will be excluded from God's mercy and therefore will receive the punishment their sin deserves. As Jesus said in Jn. 12:48, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him in the last day." The gospel, the truth of Jesus' person and work, will be God's plumb line.

B. Historical interlude (7:10-17)

¹⁰ Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. ¹¹ For thus Amos has said, "'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'" ¹² And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, ¹³ but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom." ¹⁴ Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. ¹⁵ But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' ¹⁶ Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. "You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.' ¹⁷ Therefore thus says the LORD: "'Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.'"

1. Amaziah was probably the high priest of Bethel. The fact he sent word to King Jeroboam suggests he was in charge of the sanctuary there, able to dispatch messengers. He probably had been appointed to that position by Jeroboam and thus felt a special loyalty to him.

2. Amaziah reports to Jeroboam that Amos was raising a conspiracy against his rulership in the midst of the house of Israel. He in essence charged Amos with treason, casting his words as mere human political propaganda designed to foment opposition and disloyalty. Gary Smith writes:

Although Amos was not part of a personal conspiracy to depose the king, Amaziah was unaware of his connections or intentions; thus an announcement of death to Jeroboam II is dealt with seriously. If Amos would continue to make such radical statements, surely some dissidents who disliked the king's policies would sooner or later join forces with Amos to enact the sentiments of the prophet. The attack on Amos was probably in some sense a tactic of fear to quiet the king's opposition. It misrepresents Amos' words that "Yahweh will rise up" against Jeroboam II and imputes negative motives and personal plans to Amos himself. Because Amos speaks these words in Israel where Jeroboam II rules, and because Amos spoke against the temple, Amaziah concludes that their country is not able to bear or endure (*kul*) such attacks.⁵⁰

3. In keeping with his perverted sense of the danger, Amaziah commands Amos to cease his preaching, to quickly take his act back to Judah and never again to prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom. By referring to the "king's sanctuary" and the "temple of the kingdom," Amaziah is raising the threat of political or military force being used against Amos. This was an attempt to intimidate Amos, to silence the word of the Lord that he had been charged to deliver.

4. Facing this not-so-veiled death threat, Amos, this shepherd and tender of fig trees, tells the high priest of Bethel that he preaches to Israel by the command of God. He will not be intimidated. Rather, he proclaims to Amaziah, this man who purports to represent God while comforting Israel in her sin, that in addition to Israel going into exile Amaziah's wife was going to become a prostitute, his children were going to be killed, his land was going to be taken, and he himself was going to die!

5. The church needs to recover some of this holy boldness. We have allowed the culture and wayward believers to dictate to us what we can preach, to determine for us what is acceptable to proclaim in the name of God. They have muffled our preaching about sin by claiming that doing so is unkind, counterproductive, or makes them feel "unsafe." A measure of their success is the high percentages of churchgoers who deny the sinfulness of abortion, homosexual conduct, and pretending to be a member of the opposite sex. The last church you want to be in is one that makes people feel safe in their sin. As the wise man said, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy" (Prov. 27:6).

⁵⁰ Gary Smith, 237.

C. Basket of Ripe Fruit (8:1-14)

1. vision and meaning (8:1-3)

This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit. ² And he said, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the LORD said to me, "The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them. ³ The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day," declares the Lord GOD. "So many dead bodies! They are thrown everywhere! Silence!"

a. Amos is shown a basket of ripe fruit which means the people of Israel are ripe for judgment. The end has come upon them; God will spare them no longer.

b. The catastrophic destruction is depicted by the joyful and optimistic songs of the temple becoming wailings. The bodies that will be strewn everywhere in the coming attack will result in stunned, mournful silence. It is indeed a terrible thing to come under the judgment of the living God.

2. elaboration on the coming judgment (8:4-14)

⁴ Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, ⁵ saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, ⁶ that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?" ⁷ The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. ⁸ Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who dwells in it, ^b and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?" ⁹ "And on that day," declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. ¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day." ¹¹ "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "when I will send a famine on the land--not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. ¹² They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it. ¹³ In that day the lovely virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst. ¹⁴ Those who swear by the Guilt of Samaria, and say, 'As your god lives, O Dan,' and, 'As the Way of Beersheba lives,' they shall fall, and never rise again."

a. God calls out the rebellion of his people that is responsible for the coming judgment. The greedy merchants are "trampling" the needy, treating them harshly and unjustly, and bringing the poor to an end, driving them to sell themselves into slavery and possibly in some cases driving them to starvation. They did not have an ounce of God's compassion for the poor and needy.

b. You see again their heartless adherence to the form of religion. They abstained from selling grain during new moon observances and on Sabbath days, the monthly and weekly worship days, but cared only about when they could get back to making money by cheating the people in their transactions. They would give them less than they paid for (make the ephah small), pay them less than their grain was worth (make the shekel great), tamper with the balance scale itself so that it favored them, and throw in useless fillers in the bottom of the sack of grain. They ultimately drove the poor to such desperation that they sold themselves into slavery, and the merchants were able to buy them for a cheap price.

c. The Lord has sworn by himself (the Pride of Jacob) that he is going to bring a terrible judgment on Israel. He depicts his intervening specially in history in the form of judgment as nature behaving in an abnormal and frightening manner – the land trembles and heavens and darkness occurs at noon. The result of that judgment will be broad and bitter mourning, as in the mourning of the death of an only son.

d. He says in that day he is going to bring a famine of his word. This withholding of his prophetic word, the word they had despised, would signify his having abandoned Israel to her troubles. Shalom Paul remarks, "The inaccessibility of God, that is, the absence of prophecy depriving man of the divine word, is regarded throughout the Bible as a dire portent of God's wrath (compare 1 Sam 14:37; 28:6, 15-16)."⁵¹ As they wandered throughout the land desperately seeking his word of consolation and reassurance, they would meet only silence. It would be a famine so severe that even the young women (virgins) and men, those with the greatest physical vigor and endurance, would faint. James Mays writes:

They ignore the word of the Lord in their prosperity and security, but when they suffer under the wrath of God they will learn anew that what they spurned was the only source of life and they will seek it with the desperation of men with empty stomachs and parched tongues. Then they will learn that man does not live by bread alone (Deut. 8.3; Matt. 4.4). Their knowledge of Yahweh will be the anguish of his absence, the void that mocks their clutching for help.⁵²

e. In this day of judgment, the idolaters, those who take oaths in the name of false gods, will be destroyed. It certainly is possible that the cheating merchants were among those swearing by false gods as they sought to assure their victims of their honesty.

D. Lord by the altar (9:1-15)

⁵¹ Paul, 265.

⁵² James Luther Mays, *Amos*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 149.

1. judgment (9:1-10)

a. ferocity of the judgment (9:1-4)

I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said: "Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people; and those who are left of them I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall flee away; not one of them shall escape. ² If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; if they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. ³ If they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search them out and take them; and if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them. ⁴ And if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them; and I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good."

(1) God's judgment on Israel is portrayed first in terms of his destroying its religious cult represented by destruction of the altar and associated sanctuary. The ferocity of the judgment is expressed in terms of completeness. There will be absolutely nowhere to hide, no "safe place," from the coming judgment. No one will be beyond God's reach.

(2) Though God here says he will kill those who are left and will kill those who go into captivity, in 9:8 he reveals, as he had indicated earlier, that there will be exceptions. Stuart writes:

He controls all and has total power; none can escape from his judgment.

But not all will die. Like Zephaniah's prophecy, which begins by predicting total destruction (1:1-3, 18) and goes on to describe the role of a remnant that will not be destroyed (2:3, 9), this prophecy portrays broadly the coming wrath and then more narrowly the escape of a remnant. There is no true contradiction here any more than there is a true contradiction in an English sentence containing the word except. Exceptions are usually stated after, rather than prior to, the general case.⁵³

b. the Lord of the judgment (9:5-6)

⁵ *The Lord GOD of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile, and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt; ⁶ who builds his upper chambers in the heavens and founds his vault upon the earth; who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the surface of the earth-- the LORD is his name.*

⁵³ Stuart, 395.

(1) This hymn describes God, the Lord of the heavenly armies, in terms of his control of and power over the earth. He most certainly has the power to carry out any judgment he announces.

(2) It is also possible, some would say very likely, that these verses were part of an existing hymn, a set expression of praise, that extolled Yahweh's power over nature. Stuart remarks, "It appears that Amos was inspired to employ parts of this hymn in order to teach that Yahweh could use his power *against* Israel as well as for it."⁵⁴

c. certainty of the judgment and promise to preserve a remnant

(9:7-10)

⁷ *"Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel?" declares the LORD. "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?"* ⁸ *Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground, except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob," declares the LORD.* ⁹ *"For behold, I will command, and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble shall fall to the earth.* ¹⁰ *All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, 'Disaster shall not overtake or meet us.'"*

(1) God informs Israel that their relationship with him did not distinguish them from other nations in terms of their accountability. As his bringing the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir did not immunize them from judgment (1:3-8), neither does his bringing Israel from the land of Egypt immunize them from judgment.

(2) God reiterates his intention to judge the sinful *kingdom* of Israel and to remove it as a nation, but he specifies that he will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, meaning he will leave a remnant of survivors. God is going to shake Israel in such a way that the "sinners," meaning the defiant and rebellious who deny they will face judgment, will be isolated for death as a grain sieve screens out undesirable items like pebbles.

2. restoration (9:11-15)

¹¹ *"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old,* ¹² *that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the LORD who does this.* ¹³ *"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.* ¹⁴ *I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and*

⁵⁴ Stuart, 392.

inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. ¹⁵ *I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them," says the LORD your God.*

a. After repeated oracles and visions of doom, expressions of God's ferocious judgment that is coming on his people, the book ends on a note of hope and restoration. God says that he has planned a future for his people beyond the coming destruction.

b. As Gary Smith notes, "In that day' immediately moves the historical reference to a future time when God will miraculously intervene in the affairs of the world."⁵⁵ The time of this intervention is some time after the "booth of David" has fallen because the nature of the intervention will be to raise up that booth and rebuild it as in the former days.

c. A booth (or tent) was a crude form of shelter that most interpreters agree is here used as a metaphor for Davidic rule of the kingdom.⁵⁶ God, of course, promised David that his seed would have eternal reign (2 Sam. 7:12-16), which became the prime focus of messianic expectation in the OT (e.g., Isa. 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5-6, 30:9, 33:14-18; Ezek. 34:23-24, 37:24-25) and in Judaism (e.g., Jn. 7:42; Mat. 9:27).

(1) God declares to David in 2 Sam. 7:12-16, *When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.* ¹³ *He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.* ¹⁴ *I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men,* ¹⁵ *but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.* ¹⁶ *And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."*

(2) God stresses his commitment to that promise in Psalm 89:3-4, 30-37: ³ *You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: "* ⁴ *"I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations."* . . . ²⁹ *I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens.* ³⁰ *If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules,* ³¹ *if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments,* ³² *then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes,* ³³ *but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.* ³⁴ *I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips.* ³⁵ *Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David.* ³⁶ *His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.* ³⁷ *Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies."*

d. The rule of David's line is perhaps referred to in Amos 9:11 as "the booth of David" rather than the "house of David" because the Davidic dynasty had by that time already

⁵⁵ Gary Smith, 280.

⁵⁶ Smith and Page, 165.

been diminished by the division of Israel and Judah after Solomon's death. But at the time of Amos that booth was still standing, meaning a descendant of David was ruling on the throne in Jerusalem (Uzziah/Azariah). The prophecy refers to a time when that booth has *fallen*, when a descendant of David was not ruling in Jerusalem. So it is speaking of a time after the Babylonian exile that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C. and the removal of a Davidic ruler.

e. Note that the temporary absence of a Davidic ruler is in keeping with God's promise to discipline David's descendants should they sin. But he will never remove from David's line the *right of rulership*, the dynasty, as he had done with Saul. The kingship belongs to David's line in perpetuity even if there will be times their sinfulness results in gaps.

f. The raising up of this fallen booth looks back to the security Israel once enjoyed under David's rule. It is a promise that peace and security will again be established by the revival of the Davidic kingdom, by a descendant of David returning to the throne.

g. God describes this restored Davidic kingdom in glorious terms. It will include other nations; other nations will bear God's name under the rule of this descendant of David (v.12). And it will be a kingdom of unimaginable divine blessing.

(1) This blessedness of that kingdom is depicted or symbolized by the land's tremendous productivity (v.13). The wheat and barley will be so abundant that, though they ripen in April-May, harvesting will not be finished by the time of plowing in October-November. The grapes will grow so fast that the one planting them cannot stay ahead of the one gathering and pressing them! Grapes will be so abundant that new wine drips from the mountains and flows from all the hills.

(2) This blessedness is depicted or symbolized by being allowed to enjoy the fruit of one's labor (v.14). This represents divine protection and security (see, Zeph. 1:13; Isa. 65:21-22; and the futility curses in Dt. 28:30-40).

(3) It will be a permanent kingdom (v.15).

h. This promise was not fulfilled when Israel returned from Babylonian captivity in 538 B.C. (Zerubbabel), 458 B.C. (Ezra), and 444 B.C. (Nehemiah). They had no Davidic king; rather, they were under the control of the Persians, then the Greeks, and then the Romans. And the condition of the Jews in post-exilic Palestine does not square with the glorious prosperity and blessing pictured by Amos and other prophets.

i. That Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise is all over the NT. He is the descendant of David who was placed by God on David's throne (e.g., Mk. 1:10; Lk. 1:26-33, 67-69; Acts 2:29-32, 13:32-34; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 22:16). That what is meant by the title "Son of David."

j. According to James in Acts 15:13-19, Amos was referring to Jesus. James there argues his case for the inclusion of Gentiles this way: Jesus is the Davidic king promised by

Amos; the restored Davidic kingdom to which Amos referred included Gentiles; therefore, they must permit Gentiles to become Christians, to become participants in that kingdom.

k. Jesus *now* is ruling on David's throne (Mat. 28:18; Phil. 2:9; Heb. 1:3-4; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 1:5, 3:21). When the kingdom Jesus inaugurated is consummated or finalized at his second coming, the Amos text will be fully realized (Acts 3:19-21). Resurrected Christians, both the Jewish root and grafted in Gentiles, will live forever in a land (a radically rejuvenated and transformed earth) that is unimaginably blessed. It will be the divine utopia in which there is no death, mourning, crying, or pain (e.g., Rev. 21:1-4).