

AMOS

Introduction:

The Book of Amos is the third in the Hebrew Canon known as *The Twelve Minor Prophets*. Amos is the only “layman” among those prophets. He calls himself “a shepherd” and a cultivator of sycamore-fig trees.¹ Evidently, the prophet did not want to be considered to be a prophet or a theologian.

The irony of history is that God sometimes bypasses established institutions and acknowledged offices because they have become useless as channels of His revelation. In calling Amos, God demonstrated that He chose that which the world despised. In the words of the apostle Paul: “He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”² Thus speaks Amos, a farmer, an uneducated person, in simplicity and with clarity, with a spiritual insight that makes us stand in awe. Thus the book found its way into the Canon of Scriptures as mockery of literature, but as the Word of God.

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I.	Introduction to Amos	1:1-2

¹ ch. 7:14

² I Cor. 1:28,29

1 The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa-what he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.

2 He said: "The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers."

Amos prophesied in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of King Jeroboam II, but he was a southerner from Tekoa, a place 5 miles south of Bethlehem. It seems strange that God sent Amos to Israel, where he was a foreigner. From a human point of view, Amos had everything against him. The only explanation for his prophetic authority was his obedience to the divine mandate. Amos' message must have seemed irrelevant to the people of his time. Amos faced the problem that both Israel and Judah experienced a time of the great prosperity under the reign of King Uzziah and Jeroboam II.³

The earthquake, which is mentioned to pinpoint the time of the prophecy, must have been a tremendous event in Israel's history. Two hundred years later the memory of it had not yet faded. We read in the prophecy of Zechariah: "You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him."⁴ Zechariah establishes a relationship between that natural disaster and the coming of the Lord. We have the impression that the reference to it in Amos' prophecy is more than a mere indication of time. Amos' prophecy also points to this earthquake as a shadow of the coming of the Day of the Lord. His book directs us to the coming judgment.

"The LORD roars from Zion..." What a way to begin a sermon! Amos compares God to a wild animal, a roaring lion. We tend to speak respectfully about "the wrath of the Lord," and we would think it disrespectful to compare God to a roaring and snarling animal. Yet, Amos knew God to be just that. God's speaking reminded him of the awesome sound he had learned to fear as a shepherd when a furious and famished lion would throw himself on one of the sheep. For a human being, who indulges in sin and who thinks he can play around in it, it is a wholesome shock to learn this side of God's character.

It is important to note that: "The LORD roars *from Zion*." The mention of the place is of the utmost significance. The following verses contain a judgment upon the surrounding nations to prove that God is not merely a national deity, but that He is the God of the whole world, yet, He only revealed Himself in Zion and Jerusalem. We can imagine what impression those words must have made upon the citizens of the Northern Kingdom, which Jeroboam I had detached from Jerusalem. We read that when Jeroboam I became king over the ten tribes, he "thought to himself, 'The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam.' After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there. Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites. He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made."⁵ The king pretended that the essence of the worship of YHWH had not changed but that for the Israelites the center of worship had merely shifted from Jerusalem to Bethel and Dan. The issue, however, was that Jeroboam I broke with God's revelation of Himself. The outward ceremony was maintained but the service of God became a religion manipulated by man. But Amos states that God roars and shouts from Zion. Amos' ministry, his character, and his words are directly opposed to all the golden calf in Bethel stood for.

The result of God's roaring is poetically, although not literally, depicted with the words: "the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers." It could be that Amos referred to a drought, but what the prophet wanted most of all to express was the paralyzing effect God's displeasure had upon all of nature. If nature as a whole responds like this to God's speaking, can man remain far behind?

³ See II Kings 14:23-29; 15:1-7; II Chr. 26:1-15

⁴ Zech. 14:5

⁵ I Kings 12:26-32

II. The Eight Judgments**1:3--2:16****A. Judgment on Damascus**

1:3-5

3 *This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth,*

4 *I will send fire upon the house of Hazael that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad.*

5 *I will break down the gate of Damascus; I will destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven and the one who holds the scepter in Beth Eden. The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir," says the LORD.*

Beginning with vs. 3, Amos gives a detailed description of God's judgment upon the nations surrounding Israel. The first judgment is upon the people of Aram because of their crimes committed against Israel. The tension between Israel and Damascus dated back to the days of King Ahab, when King Ben-Hadad of that day laid siege against Samaria. Ben-Hadad was defeated in battle and entered into a pact with King Ahab, the terms of which he never observed. Ramoth Gilead remained a point of contention between the two nations.⁶ Ahab died in the battle of Ramoth Gilead.

The words Amos "For three sins... even for four" serve as introduction to all the judgments announced in this chapter and the following. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: "This form of expression is repeated in each of the following strophes, and some critics have taken the terms literally, and have tried to identify that particular number of transgressions in each case; but this is trifling. The phrase and others similar to it are not uncommon, and are used to signify a great number, the last mentioned being supposed to fill up the measure and make it overflow. Thus ... Job 5:19, 'He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee' (comp. ... Job 33:29; ... Proverbs 30:15, 18, 21; ... Ecclesiastes 11:2)." It is obvious that the words "for three sins, even for four" are a matter of style and not of arithmetic. In every case, only one sin is actually mentioned. But there is a suggestion that more than one sin is involved.

God had given an interesting vision to the prophet Elisha regarding Hazael, the successor of Ben-Hadad, which must have been representative of the character of the nation of Syria. We read the moving story in the Book of Second Kings: "Elisha went to Damascus, and Ben-Hadad king of Aram was ill. When the king was told, 'The man of God has come all the way up here,' he said to Hazael, 'Take a gift with you and go to meet the man of God. Consult the LORD through him; ask him, 'Will I recover from this illness?'' Hazael went to meet Elisha, taking with him as a gift forty camel-loads of all the finest wares of Damascus. He went in and stood before him, and said, 'Your son Ben-Hadad king of Aram has sent me to ask, 'Will I recover from this illness?'' Elisha answered, 'Go and say to him, 'You will certainly recover'; but the LORD has revealed to me that he will in fact die.' He stared at him with a fixed gaze until Hazael felt ashamed. Then the man of God began to weep. 'Why is my lord weeping?' asked Hazael. 'Because I know the harm you will do to the Israelites,' he answered. 'You will set fire to their fortified places, kill their young men with the sword, dash their little children to the ground, and rip open their pregnant women.' Hazael said, 'How could your servant, a mere dog, accomplish such a feat?' 'The LORD has shown me that you will become king of Aram,' answered Elisha. Then Hazael left Elisha and returned to his master. When Ben-Hadad asked, 'What did Elisha say to you?' Hazael replied, 'He told me that you would certainly recover.' But the next day he took a thick cloth, soaked it in water and spread it over the king's face, so that he died. Then Hazael succeeded him as king."⁷

The people of Aram behaved toward Israel in a most inhuman and criminal way. The Bible only furnishes us with a few sparse hints on this subject, but enough to prove what is meant by the accusation that "she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth." In Amos' days all this was past history. The Bible states about Jeroboam II: "He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher."⁸ When Amos spoke this prophecy, the general sentiment toward Damascus may have been conciliatory. In that case, Amos' prophecy came as a bolt from the blue.

It remains true that God is interested in the international relations between nations. There are crimes against humanity that God is not willing to wipe out. But this is not, at least not in the first place, what is

⁶ See I Kings 22:3

⁷ II Kings 8:7-15

⁸ II Kings 14:25

meant here. The main reproach to Damascus is in their relationship to the people God had chosen to reveal Himself in the world. This means that the accusation of Damascus is indirectly also an indictment of Israel. Israel had darkened this revelation by a life of indifference, instead of letting its light shine brightly in the darkness of the world. In condemning Damascus, God also takes away Israel's support. Israel becomes more and more isolated as it comes itself under God's judgment. It will no longer be able to put the blame on others.

The exile Damascus is threatened with is deportation to Assyria, which would also be the place of Israel's captivity.⁹

B. Judgment on Gaza

1:6-8

6 This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom, 7 I will send fire upon the walls of Gaza that will consume her fortresses. 8 I will destroy the king of Ashdod and the one who holds the scepter in Ashkelon. I will turn my hand against Ekron, till the last of the Philistines is dead," says the Sovereign LORD.

In verses 6-8 Amos addresses the Philistines, Gaza being one of the main cities of that country. It is not clear what the "whole communities" were that Gaza took captive and sold to Edom. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests: "The event referred to may be the invasion of Judah by Philistines and Arabians in the time of Joram, mentioned in ... 2 Chronicles 21:16, etc., and in which it is possible that a compact was made that the captive Judaeans should be delivered to their bitterest enemies, the Edomites." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* believes that it may refer to slave trade.

The following lines mention "a treaty of brotherhood" with Edom, which suggests that it involved Israelites. "Whole communities" probably refers to one or more cities in Israel. This must pertain to more than one crime the Philistines committed in league with the people of Tyre and Sidon. The punishment would mean the end of Philistia as a nation.

It is often difficult for an individual to understand the meaning of survival of a people's group of which he is a part. We all have a national conscience, but we can seldom look beyond the boundaries of our personal lives. God, however, does not think in terms of years only, but in spans of human life, in generations, nations, and centuries. The more we think about this, the more we become aware of the limitations of our own life, as well as of the importance of life itself. If in Amos' days, a handful of Philistines had turned to the God of Israel and asked for His grace, there would still have been a Philistine nation in this world today.

C. Judgment on Tyre

1:9-10

9 This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, disregarding a treaty of brotherhood, 10 I will send fire upon the walls of Tyre that will consume her fortresses."

The sin of Tyre is the same as that of Gaza. Yet, there is no mention of a total annihilation of Tyre as a nation. It is not up to us to investigate the measure of judgment God uses. We may assume that the Judge of all the earth will do right.¹⁰ It is possible that, although both nations committed the same crime, the guilt of one is greater than the other. God takes into account the motives and the amount of light that was rejected. In the eyes of God, guilt is a growing process. The accumulation continues till the measure is full. God said to Abraham: "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."¹¹ For Tyre the final judgment was postponed, not cancelled. In Isaiah's prophecy over Tyre, which was pronounced approximately at the same time, there seems even to

⁹ See II Kings 15:19,29

¹⁰ See Gen. 18:25

¹¹ Gen. 15:16

be a ray of light. We read: "Yet her profit and her earnings will be set apart for the LORD; they will not be stored up or hoarded. Her profits will go to those who live before the LORD, for abundant food and fine clothes."¹² Ezekiel's prophecies over Tyre, in chapters 26-28 of his book, are the most significant. He demonstrates that Tyre had grown into a project in which Satan and all he stands for was reflected. He was the instigator and inspirer of Tyre decadent glitter and prosperity.

We must always remember that behind the whole complex of international tensions stands the great struggle between God and Satan for the right to the throne of the universe. As this struggle is reflected internationally, so it is on a personal level in the Book of Job. Both features are part of the same image.

D. Judgment on Edom

1:11-12

***11 This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because he pursued his brother with a sword, stifling all compassion, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked,
12 I will send fire upon Teman that will consume the fortresses of Bozrah."***

It seems that the judgment upon Edom occupies the central place in these verses. All the lines run from Gaza and Tyre to Edom. Edom had over-indulged in revenge. It had suppressed all natural feelings toward a brother nation and thrown itself with an perpetual wrath upon a defenseless people. That is why fire would descend upon Teman and consume the fortresses of Bozrah.

E. Judgment on Ammon

1:13-15

***13 This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Ammon, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders,
14 I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah that will consume her fortresses amid war cries on the day of battle, amid violent winds on a stormy day.
15 Her king will go into exile, he and his officials together," says the LORD.***

The judgment upon Ammon appears to parallel that of Damascus. Both committed violence upon Gilead. The horrible cruelties executed are mentioned in more specific detail in these verses. There can be little doubt about it but that these things happened literally. There is no limit to the satanic cruelties man can inflict upon his fellowmen. The person who has separated himself from God does not recognize the image of God in his fellowmen either.

It is not clear whether the "violent winds on a stormy day" are meant literally, or whether this is symbolic for the panic of the "war cries on the day of battle." This could very well refer to a natural disaster, as does the reference to the earthquake in vs. 1. Those singled out for judgment are the king and his officials. They carried, evidently, more responsibility for the cruelties committed than the people.

F. Judgment on Moab

2:1-3

***1 This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Moab, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because he burned, as if to lime, the bones of Edom's king,
2 I will send fire upon Moab that will consume the fortresses of Kerioth. Moab will go down in great tumult amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet.
3 I will destroy her ruler and kill all her officials with him," says the LORD.***

The last of the surrounding nations upon which judgment is pronounced is Moab. His crime is again linked to Edom. Without any knowledge of the historical background it is difficult to reconstruct what happened. The burning of the bones of Edom's king would qualify as grave robbery. There is a suggestion that Moab had taken advantage of Edom's weakened condition after the latter was defeated in battle. Moab's judgment seems to be the end of a chain of events. The judgment will mean the end of Moab's existence. In only a few words, the prophet paints for us the picture of a horrible holocaust in which a whole nation is

¹² Isa. 23:18

slaughtered. "War cries and the blast of the trumpet" are no romantic sounds for those who have lived through the horror of a war.

G. Judgment on Judah

2:4-5

**4 This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed,
5 I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem."**

Then judgment falls upon Judah. The accusation is their rejection of the law of the Lord and with it the renunciation of God Himself. The Lord says that false gods led them astray. Evidently, it all began with a forsaking of their first love, which is the first step on the way to apostasy. Such things never happen at the spur of the moment; they consist in stages. When the relationship of love ceases to exist, reverence for the revelation weakens also, and this precedes apostasy. Other things and person occupy the unique place God ought to take up in life. Once we distance ourselves from God's revelation, our moral consciousness begins to shrink. The process may stretch out over several generations, but there comes a point where certain moral prescriptions become irrelevant to the younger generation. In Amos' day, Judah was somewhere on the road of degeneration, whilst Israel had already reached the end of it. Our present generation is probably closer to Israel than to Judah on this point. That makes Amos' prophecy so relevant to us. For many people moral consciousness is gone.

There is a subtle difference between the religious history of Judah and Israel. As we mentioned before, Jeroboam I broke with God's revelation. Not the fact that Israel seceded was wrong, because that happened in accordance with the prophecy of Ahijah.¹³ God had given the Ten Tribes of Israel to Jeroboam. His sin consisted in the fact that he made a copy of the worship of the living God and substituted the worship of God with the ritual of the worship. This resembled the real worship, but it wasn't. God no longer occupied the center of Jeroboam's religion. It was like the dying of love in a marriage relation. The partners do not separate; they continue to live together and to go through the same motions, but the core of it has disappeared. The church in general is guilty of the sin of Jeroboam!

But Judah had held on to God's revelation. Her sin was more blatant. Judah's relationship with God took on the form of an immediate divorce. The intimate fellowship with God was replaced by open idolatry. This is exemplified in Hosea's heartrending prophecy. In Judah's history, however, we see a moment in which the unfaithful woman returns to the first love of her legal husband. Israel continued to maintain hypocritically that there was nothing wrong between God and her.

H. Judgment on Israel

2:6-16

6 This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals.

7 They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name.

8 They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.

9 "I destroyed the Amorite before them, though he was tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks. I destroyed his fruit above and his roots below.

10 "I brought you up out of Egypt, and I led you forty years in the desert to give you the land of the Amorites.

11 I also raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazirites from among your young men. Is this not true, people of Israel?" declares the LORD.

12 "But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.

13 "Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain.

14 The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength, and the warrior will not save his life.

¹³ See I Kings 11:29-39

15 The archer will not stand his ground, the fleet-footed soldier will not get away, and the horseman will not save his life.

16 Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day," declares the LORD.

In verses 6-8 Amos states the points of the Lord's indictment of Israel. Although the number four is filled out here and not only one crime is mentioned as in the previous accusations against the others, we should not take the expression "For three sins of Israel, even for four..." literally as a statement of arithmetic. The Lord picks a few items out of an abundance of incriminating material. The accusation gains more in intensity because of what is not said than because of what is said. It is not so that if Israel had not committed these four sins that are mentioned, she would have been acceptable to God. Only a few of the symptoms of Israel's sickness are stated here and no diagnosis is given. The root of evil is the broken relationship with God. The very fact that this is not even mentioned is an indication of how deeply Israel had fallen. The majority of Israelites were so far gone that such a message would not have called them back to reality. Most people in our day do not believe that a restoration of a right relationship with God would be the solution to their problems. Amos begins there where the people are. They would understand that the social injustice they committed was not right. They may not have understood the fact that their sin meant falling short of the glory of God, but no one who sells out a needy person for a pair of sandals will think that he does a good work. Those who commit such acts have to first lull their conscience to sleep. If the Word of God can awaken their conscience, there is hope that this would cause a chain reaction, which could lead to the awareness: "I am a sinner before God." People who think that Amos merely preached a Social Gospel do not understand the matter.

Every human being knows that the soul of man is worth more than money or a pair of shoes. One cannot treat a fellowman in such a way without violating the image of God in him and in oneself. This sin is linked to the awareness of human dignity.

The second sin mentioned is indicative of the moral decline of man. Laws of sexual restraint have disappeared. But more is at stake than sexual license. One might find excuses for extra marital affairs, but if a father and son have sex with the same girl, they have violated their own nature. No one can do such things without feeling some kind of guilt. It is only a small step from guilt feelings to consciousness of sin. And if God says: "You have profaned My holy Name" the perpetrator will have to admit: "I knew it all the time."

The third sin is a reference to social relations. The law stated: "If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate."¹⁴ It was not illegal to take a deposit from a debtor, but it was inadmissible to push people to despair and suck them dry. Lying down on garments taken in pledge was a literal transgression of the above-mentioned command. It is the combination of two factors that makes this verse so gripping: lying down on a garment taken in pledge and lying down next to an altar. Amos makes us understand that there is always a link between idolatry and social injustice. Man always bears the image of the God or god he serves. Those who serve the living God give proof of being created in His image and likeness. Those who make idols of stone, wood, or metal bear the stamp of their god in their acts. They become obtuse to the point where they become equal to the work of their own hands.

The fourth sin mentioned is probably mainly a transgression practiced by the priests: "In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines." It is difficult to trace the meaning of the words "wine taken as fines." In the Levitical law there is mention of fines under the section of guilt offerings and sin offerings, but wine is not a part of that.¹⁵ It was actually forbidden for priests to drink wine while on duty.¹⁶ Wine is initially not even mentioned in the Law of Moses. During the wilderness crossing it must have been very scarce. Only later, when Joshua is mentioned as Moses' successor, we read about wine being poured out over the altar as a drink offering.¹⁷ Whenever wine was brought as a sacrifice, it was always poured out at

¹⁴ Ex. 22:26,27

¹⁵ See Lev. 4:1-5:7

¹⁶ See Lev. 10:8-11

¹⁷ See Num. Chapters 28,29

the altar. It was never a sacrifice by itself and we do not read that priests were allowed to drink it. Amos evidently speaks against a human regulation that has replaced the law of God.

We read little about the extermination of the Amorites in the Bible. They inhabited the northern part of Canaan, the area that was assigned to the tribe of Dan. The Book of Judges tells us that the Danites experienced difficulties in driving out the Amorites. We read: "The Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain. And the Amorites were determined also to hold out in Mount Heres, Aijalon and Shaalbim, but when the power of the house of Joseph increased, they too were pressed into forced labor. The boundary of the Amorites was from Scorpion Pass to Sela and beyond."¹⁸ According to Amos' reference, the annihilation of the Amorites occurred by an act of God. We are not told how this happened. The description of the Amorites as "tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks" concurs with what we read about them in the Book of Judges.

God wants the Israelites to reflect upon their history. There was the miracle of the exodus from Egypt and of the forty-years' desert crossing. God had been involved intensively with His people. On the other hand there was moral decline of the inhabitants of Canaan among whom the measure of their sin had filled up. Evidently, the Amorites had played the most important part in this. Now Israel had fallen away from the living God to the point where it was hard to see any difference between them and the Amorites whose place they had taken. If we don't understand what role the nation of which we are a part has played in history, we will not be able to understand the present. And if we don't know where we are, we can hardly show the way to others.

From His side, God had maintained His relationship with Israel. "I also raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazirites from among your young men." God has never been silent throughout Israel's history. He had put His hand on some of the people and had put His Word in their mouth. Thus Israel had always known that there is a living God.

It is amazing to see how God, by the Holy Spirit, works like a brooding hen to the point where He evokes in the heart of young people a desire to consecrate themselves to Him. God always reveals Himself to the younger generation as the Great Attractive One. Throughout the ages, young people have discovered that it is worthwhile to live and die for Him. A human being would never arrive at this point without God taking the initiative. This revelation has kept the people from perishing. The Book of Proverbs states: "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law."¹⁹ God never severed His relationship with His people because there always remained a small group of prophets and Nazirites. The people must have understood this, maybe more intuitively than otherwise, but the knowledge was always there. The devil understood this also and for that reason he directed his main attacks against this lifeline. To the Nazirites they gave wine to drink and the prophets received a gag order. Thus the people of God were cut off from God and they died.

Then comes the judgment as it is described in verses 13-16. First there is the creaking sound of the wagon that has been loaded beyond capacity, and then the crash. The fact that there is first a creak is, in itself, proof of God's grace; it was a warning. There still would have been an opportunity to lighten the load in order to prevent the collapse. But nothing is done and then comes the crushing down.

There is a direct link among giving wine to the Nazirites, the gag order to the prophets, and the perishing of the people. Moral disintegration usually precedes physical collapse. The conscious cutting of the lifeline to God results in a literal destruction.

Amos makes a list of qualities that constitute human security: the swift, the strong, the warrior, the archer, the fleet-footed soldier, the horseman, and the bravest warriors. The securities on which the human being leans for protection prove to be insufficient in the encounter with God. In opposition to these words stands Isaiah's prediction that "those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."²⁰

III. The Three Sermons of Judgment

3:1--6:14

A. The First Sermon: Israel's Present

ch. 3

1. Israel's Judgment Is Deserved

3:1-10

¹⁸ Judg. 1:34-36

¹⁹ Prov. 29:18

²⁰ Isa. 40:31

1 Hear this word the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel-against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt:

2 "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins."

3 Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?

4 Does a lion roar in the thicket when he has no prey? Does he growl in his den when he has caught nothing?

5 Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground where no snare has been set? Does a trap spring up from the earth when there is nothing to catch?

6 When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?

7 Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.

8 The lion has roared- who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken- who can but prophesy?

9 Proclaim to the fortresses of Ashdod and to the fortresses of Egypt: "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria; see the great unrest within her and the oppression among her people."

10 "They do not know how to do right," declares the LORD, "who hoard plunder and loot in their fortresses."

The first two verses of this section are a summary of all that preceded. God appeals to the history of salvation as a basis for judgment. That which ought to have been words of consolation, the exodus from Egypt and the intimate and personal fellowship with God, are stated here as a threat. The words: "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth" do not refer to His omniscience but to His love. We may suppose that, in ancient times, Satan also must have been in God's confidence, which made his fall so much more absolute. This kind of relationship with God does not tolerate any unrighteousness. God said to Moses: "Among those who approach me I will show myself holy."²¹ Israel's privileges became their undoing, because they had forsaken the love of the Lord. This must have broken God's heart. In a way, this prophecy is God's cry of distress. God roars ... because of pain!

The examples in verses 3-8 are an illustration of the law of cause and effect. The truth that is illustrated is found on top of the ladder; the other images are the steps that lead upward to the last question: "When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?" Evidently, the Israelites had come to the point where they considered disasters to be unrelated accidents. They did not see any link between them and their broken relationship with God.

But the rungs of the ladder that lead upwards suggest more than the law of cause and effect alone. They are seven open illustrations in which Israel could recognize herself.

"Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" Usually, truth distinguishes itself from the lie by its simplicity. It is useless to try to walk with the Lord without a common basis. It is obvious that the basis of fellowship is broken by sin.

"Does a lion roar in the thicket...?" Amos represents the Lord in his prophecy as a roaring lion.²² This picture seems to us to be incongruous with the character of God. Peter compares Satan with a lion. We read: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."²³ That we can understand. In a way, the image does not truly represent reality. God is good. James tells us: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." And: "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone."²⁴ The source of evil is not in God but outside Him. Evil carries its own built-in punishment. Disaster strikes when God withdraws. His presence keeps evil in check. God's withdrawal is the judgment. This allows the breaking loose of the evil that man unchains himself.

²¹ Lev. 10:3

²² See ch. 1:8; 3:8

²³ I Peter 5:8

²⁴ James 1:17,13

Judgment, of course, is not something that does not involve God. God keeps the judgment in His hand but it is not part of His being. In the story of Job, we see that God gives permission to Satan to attack Job. God uses the intentions of the Evil One as a weapon against himself. This is the sense in which Amos condenses the picture, making God the great avenger. He is the roaring lion and Israel is the prey. If the Israel of Amos' days could have seen herself as a prey for the lion, and in their terror they had cried to the Lord, they would have recognized in the lion the lamb. Now we can say that they became a prey for God because they had become a prey to Satan.

"Does he growl in his den...?" The image is continued here. The NIV fails to bring out the fact that two different words are used for "lion." The NKJV stays closer to the Hebrew with: "Will a young lion cry out of his den...?" The Hebrew uses two different words. *'Ariy* means "a lion." In the second part of the verse the word *kephiyr* is used, which can either mean "a village (as covered in by walls)," or "a young lion." In the repetition the picture is brought closer. The young lion is in the process of tearing apart his prey. Escape at this point has become impossible. But at the moment Amos pronounced this prophecy, the door of escape was still wide open. God's announcement of judgment is always an act of grace.

The words: "Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground...?" and the following statement portray the situation from Israel's angle. There is temptation to sin. The bait looks like good food, but those who eat it will die. Israel must understand that the life they were leading led to destruction. Behind the spirit of the age, the enlightenment, and the despair stands the "Great Fowler." Personal conversion is needed to escape the net. When the trap springs, it is too late. Those who play with sin will discover to have been wrong when it is too late. Yet hope remains for those who realize that the Lord is still there, even after they have been caught. The Psalmist says: "We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped."²⁵ The Lord can perform this miracle, even when we think it is too late.

With the words: "When a trumpet sounds in a city," judgment has come frightfully close. Amos' words are still based upon the law of cause and effect. They are a prophecy of what is about to take place. Enemies will surround the city and then will happen what is described here. In a spiritual sense it is Amos who blows the trumpet, but the city dwellers do not wake up from their sleep. Spiritual reality can be very incongruous with what we call reality.

"When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?" With this question, Amos states what he actually has to say. What will happen to Israel is no coincidence. There are no accidents in God's dealing with men. What happens constitutes, in the most literal sense of the word, "an act of God." The cause is the broken fellowship with God which results in judgment. To come back to what was said earlier regarding the roaring of the lion, death and destruction are not part of God's character. The presence of God constitutes life, peace, and love. God causes the disaster by withdrawing from the scene. As the body decomposes when the spirit is gone, so the people collapse because God is no longer there.

"Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets." This is a profound statement. It says more than merely that God shows to the prophets what will happen in the future. If God confers with human beings in what He plans to do, He delegates part of His authority to them. It means that, not only man becomes involved in God's planning, but that man is allowed to give input to it. This is illustrated in the visions recorded in chapter 7, where Amos' exclamations cause the Lord to change His plans. We read: "When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, 'Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!' So the LORD relented. 'This will not happen,' the LORD said." And: "Then I cried out, 'Sovereign LORD, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!' So the LORD relented. 'This will not happen either,' the Sovereign LORD said."²⁶ In this manner God confirms the reasonableness of His dealings.

There remains a group of people in this world who are still on the Lord's side. Those people have the task to let the Word of God be heard. Some have, what we call, "the gift of prophecy." Others take the revelation of God and apply it to the time in which they live. The question is always: "What is God saying and why is it so difficult to understand?" Some people have even come to the conclusion: "God is dead!" Amos, however, says: "God roars!" Those who do not hear Him are obviously willingly deaf. How can anyone refrain from prophesying when God speaks so clearly? Every preacher ought to put these words on the walls of his study: "The lion has roared-- who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken-- who can but prophesy?"

²⁵ Ps. 124:7

²⁶ See ch. 7:2,3,5,6

Vs. 9: “Proclaim to the fortresses of Ashdod and to the fortresses of Egypt” is the counterpart of David’s statement at the death of Saul and Jonathan: “Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon.” Amos calls upon the Philistines and the Egyptians to be witnesses to the confusion of Samaria. David felt a sense of honor that would not suffer the mockery of the pagans. In Amos’ prophecy all sense of honor is gone. Israel has deviated so far from fellowship with God that there is no longer any feeling of human dignity left. The “unrest” mentioned here is not the panic that comes as a result of judgment but the existing chaos caused by a life of sin. Even pagans can learn from Israel’s lifestyle. When persons or a people who have known fellowship with God turn away knowingly and consciously from the truth in order to follow the lie of their own heart, the catastrophe is much greater than in the life of a person who has never known the truth.

It may seem strange to us that God takes the risk of exposing the decadence of religion in this way. We would hesitate to do this, because we would be afraid the pagans would say: “See, it is all hypocrisy!” Evidently, God is more afraid (if we may say so) that people will think that He is as the “believers” make Him out to be. If God exposes in this way the apostate church, we have no business to take up its defense.

2. Israel’s Judgment Is Described 3:11-15

11 Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "An enemy will overrun the land; he will pull down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses."

12 This is what the LORD says: "As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites be saved, those who sit in Samaria on the edge of their beds and in Damascus on their couches."

13 "Hear this and testify against the house of Jacob," declares the Lord, the LORD God Almighty.

14 "On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground.

15 I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished," declares the LORD.

These verses clarify the direct relationship between the sin in the city and the enemy without. The coming ruin of the city is the result of the inner mayhem people have allowed to happen by the presence of sin in their lives. If we remember the circumstances under which Amos pronounced these words, the affluence of the age in which the people lived, we can imagine how Amos’ message must have been received. The people of Samaria probably merely raised their eyebrows.

King Omri had built Samaria as a walled in citadel that was considered to be invincible. It would take the king of Assyria three years of siege before the city fell.²⁷ During the reign of Jeroboam II, Samaria experienced its greatest prosperity. To “those who sit in Samaria on the edge of their beds and in Damascus on their couches” Amos’ words must have sounded preposterous. What the shepherd can save from the lion’s mouth is not enough to bring the lost sheep back to life. When judgment is passed, nothing will be left of Israel as a nation.

Verses 13 and 14 evince the same relationship between spiritual decadence and social injustice as was mentioned in ch. 2:8. The altars of Bethel, where human institutions had replaced God’s revelation, had become the symbols of a broken relationship. It is ironical and paradoxical that an altar can become the emblem of apostasy. Yet, this is the case. We see the same in the symbol of the cross of Christ, which has, in some instances, become a relic of a dead religion, more a hindrance for fellowship with God than the place where we reckon ourselves as being crucified to the world. We are reminded of Paul’s words: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”²⁸ Thus the altars of Bethel had become signs of rebellion against God instead of places of surrender. Rebellion is an extension of egoism that is only interested in enriching itself. Israel knew unparalleled luxuries. There were winter houses and summerhouses adorned with ivory, built at the cost of the lives and happiness of fellowmen.

²⁷ See II Kings 17:5

²⁸ Gal. 6:14

B. The Second Sermon: Israel's Past 4

1. Israel's Judgment Is Deserved 4:1-5

1 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, "Bring us some drinks!"

2 The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness: "The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks.

3 You will each go straight out through breaks in the wall, and you will be cast out toward Harmon," declares the LORD.

4 "Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years.

5 Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings- boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do," declares the Sovereign LORD.

With a mixture of humor, bitter mockery, and derision Amos addresses the women of Israel with: "You cows of Bashan." Because of her broken relationship with the living God, the woman, who occupied the place of honor in creation, has fallen into a condition of animal sensuality and cruelty. Nothing is left in these women of "the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight," which Peter mentions as the "inner self" of a woman of God.²⁹ Even the charm of a slender and beautiful body has disappeared. The comparison of Amos' women with a cow must have been striking, particularly as far as physical appearance was concerned. These are the ladies which the prophet addressed earlier as: "those who sit in Samaria on the edge of their beds and in Damascus on their couches." They have wrapped their husbands around their fingers and they demonstrate that they can, at any moment of the day, order wine. How deeply a human being has fallen when God mocks a person in this way!

The language used here, more than at any other point, makes us understand the kind of person Amos was. He was, first of all, a breeder of sheep, a cattleman. His rough, direct character, full of honesty and compassion contrasts sharply with the cruel harshness of these ladies he addresses. He attacks them in a coarse and uncouth manner, using farm language. Yet, what he says is the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is in this confrontation. This show us what a complicated matter inspiration of the Scriptures can be.

The laziness of these women is only the outside of their lives. Inside is the stony cruelty that oppresses the poor and crushes the needy. The very fact that Amos directs his attack particularly to them is proof that they, more than their men, were at the core of social injustice. This doesn't mean that the men were innocent. But if the warm heart God created for motherly love denies its nature, the cruelty that appears is often worse than is the case in men.

Amos places this picture of frailty and harshness, lack of love and love of pleasure, against the background of God's holiness. This emphasizes the actual horror of it. Everything in this world will one day be put next to the holiness of God. Thus it will be measured with an absolute measure. That which falls short of His glorious perfection is called "sin."

The judgment of these women is depicted in two different ways: literally and figuratively. The first picture is of a huge catch of fish, which is drawn from the water with hooks and fishhooks. In that way, these women will be taken into captivity on the day of judgment. The picture highlights the contrast between their lazy luxury and the harsh reality of the judgment. The Taylor translation of the Book of Amos does not use the word "fishhook" but "nose ring." In view of the picture of the cows Amos used, that might be a more fitting word. Cows and bulls are often taken by the ring that pierces their nose.

The literal one is that of the way they go into captivity. There is no poetry in going straight out through breaks in the wall and being cast out toward Harmon; this is what literally happened.

In verses 4 and 5 Amos depicts the religious life of the nation. Outwardly, what happens at Bethel and Gilgal looks so good. The sacrifices, tithes, thank offering, and free will offerings make it sound as if this is the real thing. Yet, all this is fake. Bethel and Gilgal were places where the worship of God was carried out but the living God was not in it. The worship was done according to the will of man, not according to the will of God. People violated the law that says that God must be served according to His will, not according to the will of man. That is why this religion is called apostasy. The person who does not surrender to God, ultimately serves himself, whatever name he may give to this service.

²⁹

See I Pet. 3:4

2. Israel's Judgment Is Demonstrated 4:6-11

6 "I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

7 "I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up.

8 People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

9 "Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, I struck them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

10 "I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

11 "I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

Beginning with vs. 6, we read about the previous judgments God had meted out to Israel. But Israel had never paid attention to them. Five times we read: “ ‘Yet you have not returned to me,’ declares the LORD.”³⁰ There had been a famine, an unusual kind of dry spell during which one city had water and the other did not. There had been outbreaks of blight, mildew, and invasions by locusts. There had also been a plague, probably among the cattle. Great natural disaster had destroyed most of the country. But all those trials had not brought Israel to the point where they stopped to think and turn to the Lord. Nobody understood that God might have had a purpose in all those trials.

3. Israel's Judgment Is Described 4:12-13

12 "Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel."

13 He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth-- the LORD God Almighty is his name.

The words “prepare to meet your God, O Israel” are often used, out of context, in evangelism. This is not wrong, but the text has a different meaning in the threatening context in which we find it here. Israel will discover that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. “He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth-- the LORD God Almighty is his name.” He is the commander-in-chief of all the hosts of heaven. If we realize who the one is to whom we will have to give an account of our lives, all our bragging will be silenced.

C. The Third Sermon: Israel's Future 5:1--6:14**1. Israel's Judgment Is Deserved** 5:1-15

1 Hear this word, O house of Israel, this lament I take up concerning you:

2 "Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up."

3 This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "The city that marches out a thousand strong for Israel will have only a hundred left; the town that marches out a hundred strong will have only ten left."

4 This is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live;

5 do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing."

6 Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it.

7 You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground

³⁰ verses 6,8,9,10

8 (he who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns blackness into dawn and darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land-- the LORD is his name--

9 he flashes destruction on the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin),

10 you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth.

11 You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine.

12 For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

13 Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil.

14 Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.

15 Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.

It sounds as if, in the first three verses of the section, God intones some measures of the requiem that would be sung for all the people of Judah and Israel at their captivity. It reaches forward to Jeremiah's Lamentations. The purpose of this is, obviously, to shake the people and make them wake up to the present danger. If the future is depicted so realistically that man recoils in horror, there is hope that he will come to himself and turn from his evil pursuit. Most people live in an atmosphere of vague and unfounded optimism as far as the future is concerned. Very few people realize that the future is determined by the present.

We may suppose that Amos sang this dirge before the people, which must have presented a heart-rending scene. It is God's elegy, God's sorrow over His people Israel. Present and future are one before the Eternal. But this does not mean that Israel was headed to an unavoidable doom. If the people had turned around and had begun to walk on the way toward God, this funeral hymn would never have become a reality. God's announcements of judgment are always acts of grace.

It is difficult for us to imagine God as intoning a dirge. Yet, the Scripture says: "Hear this word, O house of Israel, this lament I take up concerning you." This is not Amos' sorrow but God's. It must not sound strange to us that there can be sorrow with the eternal God about the sin of men. If we, as people who were created in the image of God, can lament the consequences of sin, would God be less than we are? The ability to grieve is part of our personality and is, consequently, an image of the deep absolute sorrow of God's eternal personality. The deepest point of this sorrow is found in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

The fact that we, human beings, are the cause of this sorrow ought to make us very quiet. Sorrow in our own life helps us to understand God's attitude toward us. We would know God better if we took time to reflect on this. We know more than we think!

The contents of the hymn is simple but full of meaning: "Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again..." The words speak of the inner cause of the fall. Physical strength has failed. She has no power to remain standing and there is no power for her to get back on her feet. Even lying down does not give the rest that restores energy. The sick body is exhausted. All this is the result of a broken fellowship with God.

"Deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up." Those words speak of the outward cause of collapse. Not only was there an inner collapse, but a force stronger than herself had thrown her down. The Hebrew word *natash* means more than being forsaken. It has the connotation of being thrown down. Besides the law-of-cause-and-effect by which sin leads to its own destruction, there is the judgment that annihilates.

Apart from God there is no one who can lift Israel up. Because sin was directed against God, divine intervention that would have lifted her up, has become impossible. Restoration is only possible if there is a renewal of fellowship. Even if, on Israel's side, there had been the slightest inclination toward restoration of fellowship, she would never have come to this point.

Vs. 3 states the opposite of God's promise to Israel given before the people entered the promised land. We read in Deuteronomy: "The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven."³¹ The judgment that is announced is the outcome of what is described in that whole chapter of Deuteronomy.

³¹ Deut. 28:7

Verses 4-6 are the most direct of the whole Book of Amos. Without mincing words, God makes clear what the issue is: “Seek me and live.” The emphasis in these words is on the person of God: “Seek Me!” What is needed is personal fellowship with Him. The person who goes to Bethel, Gilgal, or Bersheeba has lost his way and, ultimately, ends up at himself. As we saw already, the altars were symbols of rebellion instead of places of surrender. They had nothing to do with the presence of the living God.

In Hebrew, the sentence: “Seek me and live” consists of only two words: *darash chayah*, “seek, live.” It is said in one single breath. Finding the Lord means life. It is as impossible to encounter God without being alive as it is to see God without dying.³²

The form in which the word “live” is stated is a command. It is the same kind of command as in “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”³³ It is the same creative Word. If “live” is stated in the imperative, “Seek Me” is also an command. God order us to seek Him.

This part of the command actually ought to amaze us more than the other. God is omnipresent. “In him we live and move and have our being.”³⁴ Why then is it necessary and how is it possible to seek God? The fact that this comes to us as a command is proof of our blindness. As a new-born blind animal seeks his mother’s breast for milk so we must seek that which is so close to us that we can touch it, without being able to see it. Real seeking begins when we turn away from ourselves. We turn our backs to Bethel and to all the other altars. At that point we have already begun to find and experience life.

When Amos says: “For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing” he means that everything Gilgal and Bethel stand for will come to nothing. In our unwillingness to give ourselves up, with the help of our pious ego, we build altars and worship ourselves. Those altars will go into captivity and be destroyed. The fire that sweeps through the house of Joseph is the direct result of God’s withdrawal.

It sounds as if, in verses 7-9, Amos’ emotions reach a peak to the point of his becoming almost incoherent. In a way, this makes his words even more impressive. Man who rejects justice is mentioned in the same breath with the Lord of the universe. Amos does not draw a line of comparison between the one and the other, but because he places them side-by-side the comparison is unavoidable.

Man turns justice into bitterness. Other versions use the word “wormwood.” The Hebrew word is *la`anah*, which means: “to curse,” “wormwood,” or “poison.” The same word is used in Deuteronomy: “Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.”³⁵

The natural taste of justice is sweet and not bitter. For a person who knows fellowship with God, righteousness and justice provide deep satisfaction. Even a person who has strayed away from God has not completely lost the taste of it. For some people, though, awareness of justice is rather subjective. Justice is turned into wormwood if the outward appearance is maintained, if it is continued to be called “justice” but it tastes bitter. That which owes its existence to the character of God is violated and made into a caricature. For justice is part of God’s character. Justice is applied as a measuring rod that draws a comparison between God’s character and that which is out of character with God. If this measure is no longer sweet and glorious it means that God’s character is no longer the starting point. It belongs to the enemy. Justice is the practical application of righteousness. It means the right use of the measuring stick.

Casting righteousness to the ground means abandoning the habit of applying justice and knocking down those who want to maintain it. To those people, who have abandoned the absolute standard of God’s righteousness, Amos shows the character of the eternal God: “He who made the Pleiades and Orion.” Evidently, there is a connection between the way we are supposed to act and the Person of the Creator of the universe. Unrighteousness makes us lose the perspective of whom we are dealing with. A person in whose life God is not involved tends to have a wrong perception of his own life. It suffices to compare the distance in light-years between one star and another with the sixty or seventy years of a human life to come to the right conclusions about God and ourselves.

³² See Ex. 33:20

³³ Gen. 1:3

³⁴ Acts 17:28

³⁵ Deut. 29:18

As in the Book of Job, God reveals Himself here primarily as the Creator. This might raise the question why God does this, if the core of the matter is the issue of the moral question of good and evil. The answer is probably that everybody, however primitive or developed his culture may be, understands this kind of revelation. It is also true that acknowledgment of God as the Creator is the first step on the path back to fellowship with God. Our concept of holiness and sin is based on the understanding: "I am His creature; He has made me."

Yet, Amos does not give us a one-sided picture of God. He is called the Creator of the universe, which causes us to feel like puny creatures, but He is also responsible for sunrises and sunsets; He is the one "who turns blackness into dawn and darkens day into night." He is in control of the planet on which we live. He is behind the rhythm of our daily life. And the words "the LORD is his name" connects Him directly to our personal lives. The name YHWH is the one by which He bound Himself to Moses with a covenant. He is the God who loves and saves us. It sounds so paradoxical to see this Name mentioned in connection with human violation of justice and the coming judgment. But the inconsistency is on the side of man, not on God's side. In being God, the Creator, the Redeemer, the Judge, God is completely faithful to Himself. We are the ones who have denied our own character!

Amos' knowledge of the stars is impressive. As a shepherd, he must have had ample opportunity to look up into the night sky and familiarize himself with the stars and the planets. He must also have been familiar with the Book of Job in which the Orion and the Pleiades are mentioned. We read there Job's own words: "He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south," and God asks Job the question: "Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades? Can you loose the cords of Orion?"³⁶

"He flashes destruction on the stronghold." Amos mentions in the same breath, as one of God's acts of creation, the destruction of the city of Samaria, as if this is the same kind of work as the creation of the stars. In a limited sense, this is, of course, not true. Yet, both kind of acts are part of the elements that form the character of God. The word "flashes" has enormous power. The Hebrew word *balag*, literally means "to break off." In other places in Scripture it has the positive meaning of "comfort," as in: "Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me so I can have a moment's joy."³⁷

Things that seem indestructible to us can be destroyed in minutes. Thus we can see the hand of God all around us in our own century. The destruction of Hitler's "Thousand Year Reich" only took a few months. Now, more than half a century later, this event is ancient history for most people. Recent history testifies to this, as in the events of September 11, 2001 in New York City.

Amos does not say this about Samaria after the fact, he foretells it! It must have been difficult for the Israelites of that day to imagine that such a thing would be possible. It is generally hard for us to image that our certainties in life can be gone in a flash. Only those who reckon with God will count with the possibility that what is now may be gone in the twinkling of an eye. This understanding, however, is imperative for those who want to experience the leading of the Lord in their lives. Outside God there are no reliable elements on which we can build our expectations.

Amos states: "You hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth." Because of the comedy of the maintaining of the so-called justice, it is logical that people who stand up to defend real justice and unmask this travesty are being hated and persecuted. In this verse, God speaks about those who have justice on their side. Jesus shows the other side of the coin in The Sermon on the Mount, where we read: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."³⁸

"The poor," literally "the weak," or "those who are dangling" are the ones who, in reality, are on the Lord's side. God does not keep dangling those who put their trust in Him. They are socially more secure than the affluent. People are only poor in the eyes of their fellowmen. The rich may suppress the poor and push them around, but in the end, they will not benefit from their usury. Amos' conclusion is that those who have the intelligence to understand the time in which they live, keep quiet.

³⁶ Job 9:9; 38:31

³⁷ Job 10:20

³⁸ Matt. 5:10-12

It is, of course, not so that the wicked are not able to pursue their goals in life. The evil people in Amos' day did live in their stone mansions and enjoyed the wine from their vineyards. Amos speaks primarily about the coming destruction that ends all human planning. There is, however, another way in which those who build mansions and plant vineyard, and who build their lives upon that do not achieve their goals. Ultimately, only he "who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for [Jesus'] sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."³⁹ Those are the ones who reach their goals.

There is a direct link between "Seek Me!" and "Seek good, not evil," "hate evil, love good." A person can come to the point where he actively seeks evil, and spends his time and energy for it. Those who seek evil for others will find it for themselves. He who seeks to murder his fellowmen, ultimately kills himself, however little he knows this.

Amos' words: "Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, *just as you say he is*" are full of biting sarcasm. Their slogan "God with us" served to cover up the real condition of their lives. Amos clearly exposes the hypocrisy of their statement. The soldiers of Hitler's army also had "Gott mit uns"⁴⁰ on their belt buckles!

"Hate evil" is only possible if we turn ourselves against everything that opposes God and if we have completely taken our stand on the Lord's side and give Him all the love of our heart. When love becomes perfect, hatred in a sense become perfect also. David says: "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies."⁴¹

The words "Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph" sound much weaker than God's reality warrants. Amos' "perhaps" is the perhaps of faith. There ought to be no doubt about whether God would have mercy or not; the doubt consists about whether man's conversion and repentance is genuine. A person's conversion sometimes looks like it is real, whilst inwardly he hangs on to his sinful nature with all his energy. Therefore, God requires an outward demonstration of genuine inner repentance. This ought not to amaze us. Rebellion against God will always break through in our actions. Our capitulation must be a real visible testimonial. This is the way we must understand Amos' call to repentance in verses 16 and 17.

2. Israel's Judgment Is Described **5:16--6:14**
a. The First Woe of Judgment 5:16-27

16 Therefore this is what the Lord, the LORD God Almighty, says: "There will be wailing in all the streets and cries of anguish in every public square. The farmers will be summoned to weep and the mourners to wail.

17 There will be wailing in all the vineyards, for I will pass through your midst," says the LORD.

18 Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light.

19 It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him.

20 Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light-- pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

21 "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies.

22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them.

23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

24 But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

25 "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?

26 You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god-- which you made for yourselves.

³⁹ Matt. 19:29

⁴⁰ "God with us"

⁴¹ Ps. 139:21,22

27 Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is God Almighty.

"Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD!" Why would one long for the day of the Lord? The Bible calls this day "hope." One of the last verses of Scripture pleads: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."⁴² This means that there is a legitimate and necessary longing for the coming of the Lord for those who live in fellowship with God. The people Amos addresses, however, deceived themselves by saying they longed for the day of the Lord. They had no inner bond of fellowship with God and they had the notion that, in one way or another, they would be able to escape judgment.

It should be noted that Amos speaks of the day of the Lord in connection with the siege and fall of Samaria. The shadow of Christ's coming at the end of times falls over every century of world history. Every event of conquest, revolution, and defeat is thus placed in an apocalyptic light. This emphasizes the link between all political events and man's relationship with God.

As was stated before, the whole religious ritual of Bethel was a monument of rebellion against God. The outward appearance of service to God was maintained but God was not at the center of it. No one asked what God thought about it. The question is rarely asked in connection with religious affairs. Here the question is answered. We might have thought that God could at least have appreciated the good intentions of the people; but that is evidently not the case. He sees through their good intentions and sees a complex of acts and motives that are self-centered. Nothing these people did was aimed at God. There is even now little place for God in the church and none in the world. This was the ultimate cause for Jesus' crucifixion.

We find here, on a large scale, a repetition of Cain's sacrifice. The parallel is clear over the whole width of the picture. God refuses to accept their sacrifices because they are brought outside the context of His revelation by people who are inspired by the same spirit of fratricide as Cain. All this is done with the accompaniment of songs and harp music. Against such a background even a Bach Cantata would sound out of tune. In sharp contrast to these dissonances is the music of the river of justice and of the never-failing stream of righteousness. Being in harmony with the heart of God and applying in a practical way the elements of God's character upon our acts is the basis of all real harmony.

The most serious accusation is found in vs. 25: "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?" This proves the falseness of their present motives. Besides the worship of YHWH, they worshipped the images of Sikkuth, and Chiun. The NIV omits these names, but we find them in most of the other version. The KJV uses "Moloch" for "Sikkuth." The word "Moloch" can in fact be translated "king." Stephen quotes Amos' indictment in his defense before the Sanhedrin.⁴³ It is not clear whether we must read into this that the Israelites actually openly worshipped these idols during their desert crossing. We find no trace of this in Moses' account. Amos probably refers to Israel's wanderings in the wilderness to contrast this extraordinary period in Israel's history, in which God revealed Himself in such a dramatic way to His people, with the days of his prophecy, previous to the captivity, in which worship had become fossilized and hypocritical. Sometimes, when we abandon fellowship with God, thinking back to times when we lived with the Lord can have a beneficiary effect. It can shock us back to reality.

There is nothing vague about Amos' announcement of the judgment to come; the people will go into captivity "beyond Damascus." Although the name "Assur" is not mentioned, it must have been clear to the people of that day what was meant. When it did occur, no one could say that they had not known.

b. The Second Woe of Judgment 6:1-14

1 Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come!

2 Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath, and then go down to Gath in Philistia. Are they better off than your two kingdoms? Is their land larger than yours?

3 You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror.

4 You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves.

⁴² Rev. 22:20

⁴³ See Acts 7:42,43

- 5 You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments.*
- 6 You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.*
- 7 Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.*
- 8 The Sovereign LORD has sworn by himself-- the LORD God Almighty declares: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and everything in it."*
- 9 If ten men are left in one house, they too will die.*
- 10 And if a relative who is to burn the bodies comes to carry them out of the house and asks anyone still hiding there, "Is anyone with you?" and he says, "No," then he will say, "Hush! We must not mention the name of the LORD."*
- 11 For the LORD has given the command, and he will smash the great house into pieces and the small house into bits.*
- 12 Do horses run on the rocky crags? Does one plow there with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness--*
- 13 you who rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar and say, "Did we not take Karnaim by our own strength?"*
- 14 For the LORD God Almighty declares, "I will stir up a nation against you, O house of Israel, that will oppress you all the way from Lebo Hamath to the valley of the Arabah."*

Amos describes people who are not concerned about what awaits them. They are the counterpart of those described in the previous chapter who had a mistaken longing for the day of the Lord. As far as these careless people is concerned, they don't think about what might happen. They are found both in Zion and Samaria. Amos does not limit himself to the Northern Kingdom alone but, in one sweeping motion, he includes the whole country. There is a sharp contrast between these people's lifestyle and what they ought to have been in their position of power. In God's plan, they were the most exclusive human beings in the world. People come to them for advice and council. But instead of being men who reflect the glory of God and make known His wisdom they have become stupid, arrogant creatures, who imagine themselves to be important but are totally insignificant. The land of the Philistines, which had probably already been occupied by the Assyrians at that time, serves as an example. This is the fate that awaits them also. We are always surrounded by examples of what will happen to us when we turn to the Lord and of what happens if we don't.

There is a strange contradiction in the attitude of these people. On the one hand they acted as if the day of reckoning would never come, but on the other hand they demand an account of everybody else's actions. We push the judgment seat that will evaluate our life so far away that it is invisible beyond the horizon but the seat of authority that allows us to judge other is right beside us. As if we are in charge of arranging God's furniture! The fact of Christ's return is seldom taken seriously, even among Christians. We may talk about it but the Second Coming has little bearing on our day-to-day life. Whether we put the evil day or the joyful day in the distant future makes little difference. It boils down to the fact that we arrange our lives as we please. It is important that we keep on reminding ourselves to live as the Lord wants us to and where the Lord wants us to.

The luxury of life in Samaria (beds inlaid with ivory and copious meals with musical accompaniment) forms a terrible contrast with "the ruin of Joseph." Affluence and ease are not bad in themselves as long as we do not isolate ourselves by them from the reality of the sufferings of others. This is the reason riches condemns a person. God is concerned about "the ruin of Joseph," but we are not. The question presents itself constantly to us what is important in life? What do we devote ourselves to? Making good music is not a mean achievement, but if people around us perish and we are only interested in arts and pleasure, we have lost the right perspective. David complimented his value as a human being by inventing musical instruments. He did this to the glory of God. What happened in Samaria was a parody of God's plan that wanted man to be a creator himself. What these people did was completely outside the will of God. By isolating themselves from their fellowmen, their creativity turned into a dead-end street.

With merciless blows of a hammer, and yet full of mercy, judgment falls upon the head of Jacob. It may sound strange to us to read: "The Sovereign LORD has sworn by himself-- the LORD God Almighty declares: 'I abhor the pride of Jacob...'" It sounds as if God is facing an inner conflict between His eternal love for Jacob and His faithfulness to Himself, which makes Him reject what rejects Him. The problem cries out for the solution of the cross of Golgotha. Now God needed an oath to force Himself to abhor and hate.

As we saw earlier, the actual catastrophe consists in God's withdrawing Himself. This would result in captivity and destruction. God's act of destroying consists in His "delivering up the city." Ultimately, man destroys himself unless God is with him and keeps him from destruction.

Verses 9 and 10 are among some of the most difficult in Scripture as far as interpretation is concerned. Some of the details are difficult to grasp if we don't know the complete picture. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* quotes Dr. Newcome who says: "This obscure verse seems to describe the effects of famine and pestilence during the siege of Samaria. The carcass shall be burnt; and the bones removed with no ceremony of funeral rites, and without the assistance of the nearest kinsman. Solitude shall reign in the house; and if one is left, he must be silent, (see Amos 8:3,) and retired, lest he be plundered of his scanty provision! Burning the body, and then collecting the ashes, and putting them into an urn, was deemed the most honorable mode of burial." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, however, suggests that there is here no reference to cremation but to the custom of honoring the dead by the burning of spices." Cremation was no customary in Israel. The picture points to an emergency. There were so many dead that burial was out of the question, or contagion by the plague made it a necessity. Amos paints in a few words a picture of total chaos.

We can understand that someone who burns hundreds of bodies suffers from a numbing of emotions. The question "Are there any more with you?" (NKJV) was a purely "technical" one. There was no expression of respect for life or time for mourning because of the death of an individual. The expected answer to the question would be: "No one else left. Thank God!" And the reaction was: "Better leave those last words out." No place for God under such circumstances. In a sense the uncle was right. God was not in this situation. It is under such conditions that modern theologians have come to the conclusion that God is dead. For the believer who looks to God instead of to the circumstances these verses provide some deep insights in the problem of god-forsakenness. The very fact that God foresees and foretells these things proves that He is greater than our circumstances. Not only that: He depicts this horrible scene before our eyes because of His compassion and mercy so that we would turn away from sin and corruption and face Him.

Vs. 11 reads: "For the LORD has given the command..." We must not think that God's role in this process of annihilation is a passive one. It is true that death and corruption do not originate with the source of all life. On the basis of His character, God cannot create chaos. Yet, what happens is God's doing. Even His withdrawal is not a defeat; it is His judgment, not Satan's judgment over this world. The lion roars, God causes the disaster. As Amos said earlier: "When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?"⁴⁴

The "great house and the small house" refers to what is called in ch. 3 "the winter house and the summer house." What is being destroyed are the symbols of a godless life. God evaluates our palaces differently than we do. He looks beyond the beauty of the buildings to the motives for building them. In similar fashion Jesus looked at the temple built by King Herod. We read: "Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'"⁴⁵ While the disciples were blinded by the beauty of architecture, Jesus said: "Don't you see it?" What do our monuments stand for?

In vs. 12, Amos uses two examples to illustrate how irrational it is when justice is being crushed under foot. The reference is to what was said in the previous chapter: "You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground."⁴⁶ The same immutable physical laws that govern the universe also govern man's relationship to justice. One cannot break those laws without punishment. Even as God would cease to be God if He would change His relationship with justice, so man ceases to be human when he turns justice into bitterness.

Some versions present Lo Debar and Karnaim, in vs. 13, as names of places, conquered by the Israelites. The KJV translates the names and gives the following reading: "Ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?" TLB paraphrases the verse: "And just as stupid is your rejoicing in how great you are when you are less than nothing-and priding yourselves on your own tiny power!" "Lo-Debar" means in fact: "pastureless." But it is also a place in Palestine. "Karnaim" literally means "a horn," which can be taken as a symbol of power. Whether there were actually

⁴⁴ ch. 3:6

⁴⁵ Matt. 24:1,2

⁴⁶ ch. 5:7

two places by that name that the Israelites conquered, we do not know. That which happened with those who were conquered will now happen to the conquerors; they will be led away in captivity to Assyria.

This ends this section of the book.

IV. The Five Visions of Judgment 7:1--9:10
A. Vision of the Locusts 7:1-3

1 This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: He was preparing swarms of locusts after the king's share had been harvested and just as the second crop was coming up.

2 When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!"

3 So the LORD relented. "This will not happen," the LORD said.

This section describes five visions Amos received. The account is interrupted after the third vision by an episode in which Amos is threatened with expulsion.

The first vision is about locusts. It is difficult to ascertain whether this must be taken literally or symbolically. The vision, evidently, affected Amos deeply. As a shepherd, he took the damage to the grass very seriously. The Lord, obviously, knew that this vision would not fail to impress the prophet psychologically, which may have been the reason why it was shown to him first. God wanted Amos to be personally involved in the message he brought to the people. He was not allowed to speak as a bystander. The NIV does not render it, but the Hebrew has inserted the word *hinneh*, meaning: "lo!" or "see!" The text should actually read: "This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: See! He was preparing swarms of locusts..."

Every insect is a miracle of God's creation. The fact that God creates locusts that eat grass is, in itself, not a negative phenomenon; it is a revelation of the character of God, the Creator. Albert Schweitzer, with his "respect for life," has entered a territory where most people never set a foot. The rift of life is demonstrated in the fact that the locusts' eating of grass means the perishing of man. It is the craziness of the mystery of evil that that which is good can spoil and that creation can turn against itself for its own destruction. This shows us what the break with God has brought about. God gives the locusts the liberty to eat grass, a liberty which becomes, in every respect, a curse. We must understand, as in the Book of Joel, that this is about more than insects and grass; there are other values at stake. It is a question of life and death, of blessing and curse.

The plague would have been the undoing, particularly, of "the little man." Thus far, Amos' threats had been primarily directed toward the rich of the land. But here it pertains to the meadows, "after the king's share had been harvested and just as the second crop was coming up." Evidently, the little people, who had been the object of oppression by the rich, were not free of guilt themselves.

Amos' intercessory prayer is heard instantly. This vision brought him to the point where he threw himself completely into a ministry of intercession. This was not Amos' personal meadow that was at stake. It was not even his own people. Yet, this prayer comes straight out of his heart as a cry of despair. He learned instantly to see his fellowmen as God saw them. The love of Christ drove him to this prayer.

As we said, it is difficult to ascertain where in this vision the grass ends and the people begin. It seems that the vision pertains to the remnant of Israel. The vision speaks about the grass "after the king's share had been harvested." The continued existence of the people of Israel is what is at stake. Amos appeals to the fact that Jacob is so small. Why does he use the name "Jacob" here instead of "Israel?" Amos reaches back to a pre-existing condition. He refers to the little man, the deceiver, who tried to defend his identity before God. This is not the prince who wrestled with God and gained the victory because he begged His favor. In that sense, Jacob is small. This in spite of the fact that, during the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel achieved the highest level of affluence. The man who puts himself up against God is small and insignificant.

This verse clearly presents God's dilemma. Man's resistance must be broken, but God has great pity for "the little man." It seems as if God is very easily swayed by Amos. The NIV reads: "So the LORD relented," but the Hebrew word *nacham* actually means: "to be sorry," or "to repent." The KJV translates it that way. God's "repentance" is the struggle between His love and His righteousness. In some instances, as in Noah's flood, and in the rejection of King Saul, this means the annihilation of man. But, ultimately, the fruit of it is the great victory of the cross of Jesus Christ.

In this case, God said to Amos: "This will not happen." This is the same kind of promise God gave to Noah under the sign of the rainbow.⁴⁷ This promise, however, does not mean a cancellation of judgment. God only promised Amos that the country would not be destroyed by locusts. Peter interprets God's promise to Noah as: "By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."⁴⁸ God's suspension of judgment is not meant to allow us to lapse into a false security, but to stimulate us to utilize to the most the few days that are given to us. Pardon and suspension of execution are meant to bring about renewal. To those who repent, Jesus says: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."⁴⁹

B. Vision of the Fire

7:4-6

4 This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: The Sovereign LORD was calling for judgment by fire; it dried up the great deep and devoured the land.

5 Then I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!"

6 So the LORD relented. "This will not happen either," the Sovereign LORD said.

We are not told how this second vision, the judgment by fire, would be put into effect. It seems that Amos himself did not understand this either. He gives no sign of amazement or fear. Yet, this fire was terrible enough to dry up "the great deep." This may be a name for the Mediterranean Sea, which would not be a mean feat to have that dried up. The vision could pertain to a disastrous extended drought. It would take years for the water of the Mediterranean, though, to dry up. This would, indeed, mean the end of all agriculture in Israel. The vision could even refer to burning gases or subterranean oil reservoirs. Maybe the Lord even pointed to a nuclear devise. If indeed the vision points to such a catastrophe, it amazes us that Amos' reaction is so subdued.

"The Sovereign LORD was calling for judgment by fire." The setting is different from the previous one, in which God created the locusts. Fire had already been created and it was called upon to perform its service. It seems that the restrictions God had put on the fire were lifted and that it was given unlimited freedom to do its destructive work.

C. Vision of the Plumb Line

7:7-9

7 This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand.

8 And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied.

Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

9 "The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam."

The third vision of the plumb line is quite different from the preceding ones. Judgment does not come in the form of a natural disaster, but it consist in the measuring of that what man has built in Israel. The essence of judgment is expressed nowhere better than in this vision. Judgment means a comparison between God's character and ours. God's measure is God Himself. God is like a straight wall and His plumb line is His righteousness and His glory. This vision is particularly meaningful against the background of the summer houses, the winter houses, and the ivory palaces. In a physical sense, these buildings were probably quite straight, but spiritually they were not. When God applies His heavenly plumb line to our constructions, it will be evident what is crooked. We are all lost because we do not measure up to God's glory. What we build will crumble because we do not keep the straight wall of God's character in view while we build.

⁴⁷ See Gen. 9:8-17

⁴⁸ II Peter 3:7

⁴⁹ John 5:24

In this vision, God draws Amos' attention to what He is doing. This in itself is particularly meaningful. God involves man in His judgment. Although Amos, as a human being, was of the same flesh and blood as all the other Israelites and did not measure up either to God's glory, God calls him to be involved in His judgment. He becomes a witness of the fact that the wall is not straight and that the plumb line is correct. Man becomes a witness to the righteousness of God's dealings.

At the same time, we get the impression that Amos is not implicated in this judgment. That is true also. Those who agree with God's judgment will not be judged themselves. In Jesus' words: "They have crossed over from death to life."⁵⁰ Thus, by involving Amos in His judgment, God justifies Himself and proves that He does not judge arbitrarily. Millions of people will agree with God's judgment on the day of judgment. And not only that, human beings will become judges themselves. This pertains, first of all, to the first person of the human race, Jesus Christ. The Bible states: "The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son."⁵¹ What is true for Jesus is true for all who are "in Jesus Christ." The apostle Paul asks: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? ... Do you not know that we will judge angels?"⁵² This faculty is consistent with the fact that we are created in God's image and likeness. We, who have lived under the tyranny of the devil and have been the victim of sin, will have the right to judge the devil and those who have furthered the cause of evil in this world. Amos was more than a prophet who repeated the Word of God; he was a human being created to reflect God's glory and demonstrate His righteousness.

God says: "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel." The moment of measurement has arrived. The fact that God speaks of "My people" is significant. That which is His will either be sanctified or it will perish. This reminds us of John's words in the Prologue of his gospel; speaking of Jesus Christ's coming into this world, he writes: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."⁵³ The Word that became flesh is God's great plumb line. The incarnation means not only a comparison between what man ought to have been and no longer is, but in Christ, God placed our sins next to His holiness. The fact that, in doing this, He did not spare Himself means our salvation!

God's wrath is directed against the high places, against the sanctuaries, and against the house of Jeroboam. The high places symbolize idolatry. The symbols are measured in comparison with God's holiness. We find the result of the comparison described in Isaiah's prophecy. Isaiah states: "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. 'To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?' says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ John 5:24

⁵¹ John 5:22

⁵² I Cor. 6:2,3

⁵³ John 1:11

⁵⁴ Isa. 40:12-26

The sanctuaries were not places God had chosen to reveal Himself, they were chosen by man. Judgment here is against religion that retains the outward form of service to God but that has broken with God's revelation of Himself.

Thirdly, there is judgment over the house of Jeroboam. From the very beginning, Israel had been a theocracy. It had been the fall of King Saul that he refused to recognize God as the Ruler of Israel. David demonstrated clearly that he considered himself to be a king under God. Solomon, however, began to lose this vision. Evidently, he had it in his younger years, but later in life power and affluence blinded him. After Solomon, we find no longer any trace of a theocratic vision in the northern kingdom.

D. Opposition of Amaziah (Historical Parenthesis)

7:10-17

10 Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words.

11 For this is what Amos is saying: "Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land."

12 Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there.

13 Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom."

14 Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees.

15 But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

16 Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say, "Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the house of Isaac.'

17 "Therefore this is what the LORD says: "Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a pagan country. And Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land."

The priest of Bethel felt threatened by Amos' prophecy and he reacts to it in two ways. First he sends a message to King Jeroboam (verses 10 and 11), secondly, he confronts Amos personally (verses 12 and 13). Amos answers him in verses 14-17.

In his message to the king, Amaziah represents Amos' ministry as a conspiracy against the king. This is, of course, nonsense. Amos prophesied in public. A conspirator conspires in secret and acts only openly when it is too late for countermeasures. That "the land cannot bear all his words," as Amaziah stated, was probably truer than he knew himself. The people could not bear to hear the Word of God and the land would eventually not be able to bear the people and vomit out its population.⁵⁵

We can hardly assume that Amaziah would have taken Amos' words seriously. He was, after all, priest of Bethel; this meant that he did not take God's revelation of Himself seriously. He cannot have feared that Amos' prediction would be fulfilled, but he was rather afraid that the people would react to the message with a sense of defeat and renege on their allegiance to Jeroboam, their king. Amaziah wanted to be, above all, politically correct, to use a modern term. His reaction was completely horizontal. Amaziah's attitude is proof of the fact that "the sinful mind is hostile to God." He who reacts "in the flesh" stands in God's way.

Amaziah's words to Amos constitute the gravest insult a human being can fling in the face of God. "Get out!" or "Flee" is a threat, thinly veiled in the form of a friendly advice. Amaziah acts diplomatically, as if others were after Amos' life, instead of his being the instigator of the threat. He must have believed that the power of King Jeroboam over the northern kingdom was greater than the power of God. He further downgraded God to a territorial deity. The god of Bethel is not the same person who revealed Himself in Jerusalem. Amaziah, evidently, had completely lost his vision of God, the living Creator of heaven and earth. Jeroboam's break with God's revelation had effectively darkened this man's mind and had caused his spiritual death.

"Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there," insinuates that Amos had come to Bethel, primarily, for the food. Amaziah seems to have had enough respect though for the office of a "seer" to advise Amos to prophesy. Many people do not respect the office at all. Amaziah had no objection to

⁵⁵ See Lev. 18:25; 20:22

prophecy as such, but it ought to be, in his opinion, the right word at the right place. Guided prophecy with a certain measure of censorship would be the safest procedure. Thus the Word of the Lord is made powerless. God is no longer allowed to speak when He wants to and to say what He wants to.

The words: "This is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom" are the most ridiculous words found in the Bible. They would have been funny, had they not been an insult to the holiness of God and had they not led to the annihilation of the land and its people. David would say: "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them."⁵⁶ Nothing was actually farther away from being "the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom" than the altar of Bethel. A king who reigns by the grace of God bows before God's revelation. Then the place God chooses for His revelation becomes the temple of the kingdom. Bethel met none of the requirements. The temple of the kingdom was the place where the kingdom was served, not God.

Hearing Amos' reply, we would say: "Amos, Amos be careful what you say!" Amaziah had at least shown some respect for the office of prophet. Amos takes away this last thread of respect by saying: "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son." Amos shows more respect for the Lord than for the office. Now there is not much left! Except when the office receives respect from God, it is the most hollow and meaningless office a person can fill. Amos boasts in his weakness, his lack of education, and of tradition. This brings out the glory of God who called him from tending the flock. God mocks the clerical office and the temple of the kingdom by calling this shepherd and cultivator of figs and by sending him to Bethel. Thus the Word of the Lord became more powerful. "The LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" These words are identical to those God had spoken to King David. The prophet Nathan was ordered: "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock, to be ruler over my people Israel.'" Heaven chooses that which is small and seemingly insignificant. In a society where God is dead, such as in Israel, those words sound ludicrous. Yet, it is God who sends Amos the message: "Go, prophesy to my people Israel." God had not yet withdrawn His hand from His people. When we understand that God leaves man the liberty to choose between good or bad, and we see how God eventually does pull back His hand and lets Israel go into captivity, because that was the people's choice, we realize that Amos' statement here is the dramatic climax of his prophecy. From this point on, things go downhill.

In the message for Amaziah, this man is stripped of everything that makes human life honorable and valuable. His marriage becomes an expression of the reality of his fellowship with God. Marriage always expresses the quality of our spiritual life. Amaziah's fellowship with God had broken up, long before his marriage fell apart. Amaziah's spiritual adultery finds expression in his wife's behavior. One of the most beautiful experiences in human life (living together in harmony, loving one another, being faithful to one another) is broken to pieces in Amaziah's life. His children are murdered, probably before his very eyes. His possessions are divided up like a heritage, as if he were already dead. He is still alive but he does no longer count for anything. Finally, Amaziah will discover that men reject him and that he does no longer count for God either. Everything that had ever given spiritual meaning to his life falls away. When he dies, he dies in a godforsaken country. The worst of it all must have been that, in all of this, Amos' prophecy must have been constantly before Amaziah's eyes. He knew why all this happened to him. God's judgment left Amaziah without any questions about God. As long as a person can ask: "Why?" he sees an incongruence, which means hope. There are no questions in hell.

Yet, as always, announcement of judgment constitutes an act of grace. The very fact that Amaziah saw the fulfillment of Amos' prophecy in everything that happened to him, and that, consequently, Amos had spoken the Word of God, could have brought this man back to the revelation he had rejected. As long as God speaks, there is hope. When God is silent, it is too late. We do not know how Amaziah reacted. We can only wish he found the way home.

E. Vision of the Summer Fruit

8:1-14

1 This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: a basket of ripe fruit.

2 "What do you see, Amos?" he asked. "A basket of ripe fruit," I answered. Then the LORD said to me, "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

⁵⁶ Ps. 2:4

3 "In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD, "the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies-flung everywhere! Silence!"

4 Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land,

5 saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?"- skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales,

6 buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.

7 The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: "I will never forget anything they have done.

8 "Will not the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn? The whole land will rise like the Nile; it will be stirred up and then sink like the river of Egypt.

9 "In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

10 I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.

11 "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.

12 Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.

13 "In that day "the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst.

14 They who swear by the shame of Samaria, or say, 'As surely as your god lives, O Dan,' or, 'As surely as the god of Beersheba lives'- they will fall, never to rise again."

Amos sees judgment in the form of a basket with ripe fruit: Harvest time has come, the measure of iniquity is full. The Bible uses the image of a harvest, both for good fruit as well as for bad. The apostle Paul states in his Epistle to the Galatians: "A man reaps what he sows."⁵⁷ This explains the double meaning of the harvest. Amos' vision clearly refers to judgment over that which is evil. Evil, like good is a fruit that grows from a seed. Harvest, in this context, is an indication of God's patience. God waits with His judgment till the harvest is ripe. No one can reproach God for punishing men suddenly for some little misstep. God always waits till the measure is full. God revealed to Abraham: "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."⁵⁸ And, in Revelation, John states: "I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, 'Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.' So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, 'Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe.' The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia."⁵⁹ Now it has come to the point where this full basket can no longer be undone. If God would wait any longer, He would compromise His holiness.

Again, it is presented as if God is the author of evil, as if He is the One who flings bodies everywhere. The same principle is applied here as in ch. 3:4,6.

The songs in the temple had, in a way, already turned to wailing several centuries earlier. When it is all over, only silence remains, the silence of death.

The section of verses 4-8 is parallel to ch. 2:6,7. The difference is in the colorful way Amos depicts the passion of those who sin. We are shown not only that the people become rich at the expense of others,

⁵⁷ Gal. 6:7^b

⁵⁸ Gen. 15:16

⁵⁹ Rev. 14:14-20

but also the fiery zeal with which the others are destroyed. That which started with egoism ends into a thirst for murder. It is not a matter of cutting throats but of denying the rights of fellowmen and of simply letting him rot away.

New Moon feasts and Sabbaths, which were meant to call people together for fellowship with God, had become bothersome hindrances to plan for self-enrichment. People either kept the law or bypassed the law in order to reach their evil goals. The Sabbath was kept meticulously and current measures and weights were being used, but they had been tempered with. Man's worth is not considered more than the price of a pair of shoes. As we said before, when one does not recognize the image of God in one's fellowman, it is lost in oneself. Because the image of God is involved, God reacts in such uncompromising fashion. Whenever the image is lost it must be restored. There is no in-between stage. God can never forget what is done to Him and His image.

Vs. 8 uniquely highlights God's character. It shows what would happen if God's holiness were really compromised. If the perfect and holy God would really tolerate sin and, consequently, would no longer be perfect, if He who sustains all things by His powerful Word would become weak, everything in all of creation would collapse. Every molecule would disintegrate and all constellations would fall apart. The human body would return to the "nothing" from which it was created and no voice would be heard saying: "God is dead!"

On the one hand, the fact that the earth trembles is proof of the fact that sin does affect the character of God, but on the other hand it proves that it does not compromise Him; otherwise the land would not merely tremble. When Satan fell, he unleashed a tremendous energy, but that energy is related to God's being, not to the being of the devil. It does not need tremendous energy to cause God's holiness to react. God's holiness is so perfect and sensitive that "a small transgression," such as eating a forbidden fruit, caused a total reaction of God and necessitated the death of Jesus Christ.

Vs. 9,10 – "In that day" is on the day of the earthquake. For those Israelites who paid attention to Amos' words, the earthquake that occurred two years after Amos' prophecy, according to ch. 1:1, this message became very timely. We who look back upon history understand that God points here to the day Jesus died. We read in Matthew's Gospel: ">From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split."⁶⁰ That is the final outcome of the sin into which Israel sank. God pronounced judgment upon them, a judgment that He executed in His Son. In dealing with sin, God always has atonement in mind.

If Amos could have understood the miracle of love and grace that was hidden behind this prophecy about the earthquake and the eclipse of the sun, he would, beyond doubt, have fallen on his face and worshipped. But Peter's words about the Old Testament prophets' understanding of the message they proclaimed applies to Amos also: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things."⁶¹ That which, to Amos seemed to be perdition, turns out to be man's salvation. Paul's words in Romans are certainly appropriate here: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"⁶²

Vs. 10 is a perfect example of a prophetic telescopic view. Two peaks of history are brought into focus on the same level so that the space of time in between falls away and they are seen as if they happen simultaneously. We may expect that the eclipse of the sun will happen more than once, because both Joel and Peter refer to it in connection with "the great and glorious day of the Lord."⁶³ The turning of religious feasts into mourning was, evidently, not fulfilled either at the death of our Lord. The mourning for an only son is a

⁶⁰ Matt. 27:45, 51

⁶¹ I Peter 1:10-12

⁶² Rom. 11:33

⁶³ See Joel 2:30; Acts 2:19,20

theme that Zechariah and John announce in connection with the Second Coming of Christ.⁶⁴ Those words also remind us of the tragedy of the Tenth Plague in Egypt. Mourning over an only son occurred in the houses of those who did not have the blood of the lamb applied to the doorposts.

In verses 11-14 Amos announces that a time will come when God is silent. People will want to hear the Word of God but it will not be heard. The reference is not to the written Word but to God's speaking through His prophets. When God is silent, Man has come to the last stage of corruption. As long as God is speaking, there is hope. God's speaking proves that grace and mercy are still available. When God ceased to speak to King Saul, it was too late for Saul to return.⁶⁵ The same was true for Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate, whom Jesus did not deem worthy of an answer.

We find the reason for God's silence in vs. 14. The people kept on swearing by the idols that had removed Israel from fellowship with God. When people swear by something or someone, they appeal to that which they consider of the highest value. The character of God was no longer considered as supreme and Most High. This made the people's search for truth meaningless. Seeking the Word of the Lord always involves the sacrifice of everything else.

F. Vision of the Doorposts

9:1-10

1 I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said: "Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake. Bring them down on the heads of all the people; those who are left I will kill with the sword. Not one will get away, none will escape.

2 Though they dig down to the depths of the grave, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down.

3 Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, there I will hunt them down and seize them. Though they hide from me at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them.

4 Though they are driven into exile by their enemies, there I will command the sword to slay them. I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good."

5 The Lord, the LORD Almighty, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who live in it mourn- the whole land rises like the Nile, then sinks like the river of Egypt-

6 he who builds his lofty palace in the heavens and sets its foundation on the earth, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land- the LORD is his name.

7 "Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?" declares the LORD. "Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?"

8 "Surely the eyes of the Sovereign LORD are on the sinful kingdom. I will destroy it from the face of the earth- yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob," declares the LORD.

9 "For I will give the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble will reach the ground.

10 All the sinners among my people will die by the sword, all those who say, 'Disaster will not overtake or meet us.'

The Lord stands by the altar, obviously the altar of Bethel, not the one in the temple of Jerusalem. It is the altar that caused Israel's distancing themselves from God. It symbolized the break with God's revelation of Himself. Now, God does reveal Himself at this place, even for the second time in history. God's revelation now is a revelation that destroys, not one that makes alive. The first time was when a prophet from Judah confronted King Jeroboam I at the altar of Bethel. At that occasion, the altar split to symbolize the rupture between the people and God.⁶⁶ At that time, the altar still stood in the open. In the meantime, a shrine had been built around it. Now God stand by the altar to continue the initial splitting. The whole house is demolished and the break with God falls on the heads of those who had caused it, killing them. The point is not what happens to altars and temples but what happens between God and men and their relationship with one another. That is a matter of life and death. Yet, the altar is important. There is only one

⁶⁴ See Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7

⁶⁵ See I Sam. 28:6

⁶⁶ See I Kings 13:1-6

altar in this world, which is the place where God has revealed Himself. It is the cross of Jesus Christ. If that altar stands between God and us, we have fellowship with God. If our attitude toward the atonement of our sins in Jesus Christ is not correct, then God's presence means perdition to us also.

We may compare Amos': "Though they dig down to the depths of the grave, from there my hand will take them" with David's: "If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there."⁶⁷ The words are the same, but for one God is the terrible inescapable One, for the other He is the wonderful God who puts His hand of blessing upon him. In both cases it involves a sinful person and the same God. The difference is in the altar: Bethel or Golgotha.

Verses 5 and 6 are actually expressions of worship. In an earlier chapter, Amos had spoken in similar fashion about God's majesty: "He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth- the LORD God Almighty is his name."⁶⁸ We saw that it is God's greatness and infinite holiness that makes the earth tremble, so that the water level of the River Nile goes up and down.⁶⁹ There is clearly something wrong with us if we only recognize an "Act of God" when the balance of nature seems to be in danger. If we have been reconciled with God by the blood of His Son, we acknowledge that He is "sustaining all things by his powerful Word."⁷⁰ In all this Amos is moving toward the great earthquake that would come two years after the end of his prophecy. People, who now paid no attention to his words, would then, in their time of need, come to the conclusion: "the LORD is his name."

Vs. 7: "Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?" seems to contradict a statement in ch. 3:2 - "You only have I known of all the families of the earth."⁷¹ It has come to the point now, where God no longer recognizes Israel's privileged position. It is true, of course, that God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."⁷² What He did for Israel in leading them out of Egypt, He also did for the Philistines and the Arameans. Apart from fellowship with God, however, there are no facts of salvation. God's acts only acquire significance for us if we have the right relationship with Him.

Another instance of contrasting Scripture statements is found in vs. 8 - "Surely the eyes of the Sovereign LORD are on the sinful kingdom." In another age, a prophet had said to King Asa of Judah: "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."⁷³ This is a strange kind of expression. If we read that God's hand is against them, we understand that God commits acts that lead to Israel's destruction. But here Amos describes God's way of looking at the people. We would almost say that God is prejudiced against them. This is literally true, more literally than the meaning of the expression we use: they are pre-judged, judgment has already been passed upon them. Israel, like every human being, is born under God's judgment. Unless there is a radical change of position, one remains where one is: judged and condemned. God is against them, because He sees them as they really are. God's eyes are only for us if we are covered by Jesus Christ.

This is the only place in the book where the expression "the sinful kingdom" is used. The kingdom of Israel was a theocracy. Israel's king was God. Gideon understood this when he refused the crown of Israel and said: "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you."⁷⁴ Few of Israel's kings had this theocratic vision. David knew that he was not the highest authority in Israel and, initially, Solomon understood this also, at least in his early life. In the northern kingdom, however, no king

⁶⁷ Ps. 139:8

⁶⁸ ch. 4:13

⁶⁹ See ch. 8:8

⁷⁰ Heb. 1:3

⁷¹ NKJV

⁷² See Matt. 5:45

⁷³ II Chr. 16:9

⁷⁴ Judg. 8:23

realized that he reigned by the grace of God. They all considered the throne to be their private possession. This was their undoing.

We also find in this verse the first proclamation of grace. Israel is thrown in a sieve. This means that all the dust and grit is separated. But with the greatest care God concerns Himself about a few pebbles, which form the rest of Jacob and the basis of the new kingdom. And so it happened. Israel was dispersed among the nations of the world, but it has never lost its identity.

Those who say: "Disaster will not overtake or meet us" are the one who have introduced disaster. Everyone says with his mouth that he would like to go to heaven, but that does not mean that everyone walks on the way that leads there. The stupidity of most human lives consists in the fact that people do not know what they are doing, but they do it anyhow and with great zeal. We walk on the paths of evil and we think that we will finish with good. We sow wickedness and we are amazed when it does not produce any edible fruit.

V. The Five Promises of the Restoration of Israel 9:11-15

11 "In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be,

12 so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name," declares the LORD, who will do these things.

13 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.

14 I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit.

15 I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God.

This surprise ending of Amos' condemnatory prophecy makes his book end in a major key.

James quoted the first part of this prophecy during the church congress in Jerusalem, at the decisive moment in the history of the church. The restoration of David's fallen tent marks the beginning of the restoration of all of creation: the new man.

Thus, Amos returns to the beginning of his prophecy, to the theme mentioned in the opening verses. God's voice is heard from Zion. That is the place of God's revelation. But here it is no longer that topographical location; it is the person.

The house of David has become David's fallen tent. The descendants of the one who was the man after God's own heart have fallen into a state of dilapidation. Nothing but a ruined hut is left of David's vision, his surrender to God, and his love for God. God takes this rubble and rebuilds. He plans to reveal Himself again to man and through a man from the house of David. Jesus says in Revelation: "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."⁷⁵ In Him, the fallen tent is not only rebuilt into a palace, but He is the origin, and the continuation, the perfection of everything David ever wanted to be. This promise concurs with the prophecy Nathan gave to David: "I declare to you that the LORD will build a house for you: When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever."⁷⁶ This promise clearly refers to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a parallel with the promise given to Abraham. If David had still been alive and had been able to see the condition of his house at the time Amos pronounced this prophecy, he would have concluded that nothing was left of God's promise. Like Abraham, who came to a point in his life where he had to admit that his body and that of Sarah had died to the point that there was no longer a natural way for the promised

⁷⁵ Rev. 22:16

⁷⁶ I Chr. 17:10-14; see also II Sam. 7:11-16

son to be born, so David would have to understand that only God's miracle could bring life where everything was dead. David's family tree had become a cut down stump; his house had become a fallen tent. The restoration of David's fallen tent is a miracle of resurrection from the dead.

The sentence: "So that they may possess the remnant of Edom" is one of those difficult Hebrew phrases that are open to more than one translation. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* states: "Dr. Newcome translates this clause as follows: 'That the residue of men may seek Yahweh, and all the pagan who are called by my name. Here, instead of 'Edom... , he reads 'Aadaam... , men or mankind,' which is the reading of the Arabic, and some MSS. of the Syriac, and of Acts 15:17.'" James' quotation in Acts is taken from the Septuagint, which read: "that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things"⁷⁷ The words "Adam" and "Edom" are related, both meaning "red." Linguistically, "the remnant of Edom" and "the remnant of men"⁷⁸ are acceptable translations. This being true, we see the interesting phenomenon that some primitive tribes still call themselves "the real people." The Edomites called themselves arrogantly "Edom"; the Kapauku tribes people in Papua, Indonesia call themselves "Mè," meaning: "Real People."

The interesting difference between Amos' text and James' quotation is in "possess the remnant of Edom" and "that the remnant of men may seek the Lord." The spiritual significance, however, is the same. "All the nations that bear my name" connect God's Name to the nations. Thus God demands all of humanity, which he robbed, back from Satan. God's Name represents His being. It is about man created in the image of God. The Word of God comes to people in whom God's image is marred and broken and creates a new life within them. God says about His Word to Isaiah: "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."⁷⁹ How else could this prophecy be fulfilled? The amazing thing is that that fulfillment is achieved in that the individual, whom the Word reaches, surrenders his life in faith to God. People, after all, consist in individuals.

The meaning of the text is clear from what follows. The plowman will join the reaper. The Lord Jesus quotes this verse to His disciples after His conversation with the Samaritan woman: "Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together."⁸⁰ The woman's conversion led to the whole city coming to faith in Christ. The fields are white for harvest. God's Name is proclaimed to people and everyone who believes receives eternal life. There is sowing, which is the proclamation of the Name of God, and there is harvesting. There is an abundance of wine. The Holy Spirit is not given sparingly to those who believe. "New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills." "The Taste of New Wine" will be in everyone's mouth.

The last two verses foretell the return of the people of Israel to the Promised Land and the restoration of the cities. Up till today, God has twice fulfilled this promise. We cannot say for sure, however, if Israel, in its present condition, will "never again to be uprooted." The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy will be when the Lord returns and takes over the government of all nations.

Kebo, Irian Jaya, Indonesia October 5, 1973

⁷⁷ Acts 15:17

⁷⁸ Acts 15:17

⁷⁹ Isa. 55:11

⁸⁰ John 4:36