

AMOS

Introduction

The times of Amos

The date of the earthquake (1:1) cannot now be settled and therefore we do not know exactly when Amos prophesied. Uzziah of Judah reigned from 767–740 BC and Jeroboam II of Israel from 782–753 BC and, within these limits, a date around 760 BC is suitable for Amos. See the chart ‘The prophets’ in The Song of Songs.

Jeroboam was an energetic king, ready to take every opportunity for his country’s expansion. The time favoured him: in 805 BC Adad-nirari of Assyria had conquered Syria, thus disposing of a long-standing enemy of Israel. Assyria itself then entered into a period of decline and so the way was open for Jeroboam to restore his kingdom to the boundaries it had enjoyed under Solomon. This in turn gave him control of trade routes and therefore commercial prosperity which was reflected in a dominant wealthy class living in great luxury. As often happens this went hand-in-hand with exploitation of the poor (5:11; 6:6). Amos’s prophecy against the excesses of Israel, the northern kingdom, were even more unwelcome in that he came from Judah in the south (7:10–17).

While, therefore, the land had known its troubles within living memory (4:6–11) the prospects seemed good. It was possible to defer anxiety to the remote future (5:18; 6:3) and to forget that while Assyria might be asleep it was not dead.

The teaching of Amos

God

While Amos stresses the unique privilege of Israel (2:9–11; 3:2) he never speaks of the LORD as ‘the God of Israel’; neither, indeed, does he use the word ‘covenant’. He seems to avoid anything that might foster Israelite complacency or false security. His favoured divine titles are ‘the Sovereign LORD’ (e.g. 1:8; 8:1, 3, 9, 11; 9:8) and ‘the LORD God Almighty’, i.e. the God who is in himself every potentiality and power (4:13; 5:14–16, 27; 6:8, 14). Amos does, of course, use the divine name ‘Yahweh’ (‘The LORD’) more than any other name, but throughout his prophecy he stresses the features of God’s character which underlie

universal rule and government. He sees the LORD as Creator (4:13; 5:8; 9:5, 6), the agent in all history (3:6; 4:6–11; 9:7) and the moral governor or judge of all the nations (1:3–2:16). He acknowledges one only God but recognizes that there are other objects of worship (5:26f; cf. 1 Cor. 8:5f.) to which people can be drawn away.

Judgment

The only God is the judge of all the earth. Over the whole wide world, crimes against humanity, wherever, whenever and however committed, whether recorded by man or noted only by God, are abhorrent to him and will receive an appropriate recompense. To be brought near to such a God through the privilege of being his chosen people carries the consequence of weightier and more certain judgment (3:2), for the sins of God’s people are not just offences against conscience (as in the case of the nations) but specific rebellions against the light of revelation (2:4ff.). Both affronts to God and offences against mankind are offensive to God and his judgment will fall.

Society

The assumption that crimes (social offences) are sins (offences against God) lies at the heart of Amos’s sociology. In every aspect of society it is with the LORD that we have to deal, whether conduct pleases him and comes under his blessing, or offends and merits wrath. Society does not rest on independent, mechanical principles—market forces, money supply, Gross National Product—for its prosperity. Prosperity comes with divine blessing and no matter how efficient the economy it cannot prosper if it is under his curse.

The LORD is concerned with how war is waged (1:3, 13), how commerce is carried on (1:6; 8:5–7) and whether obligations solemnly undertaken are fulfilled (1:9). He is offended by the acquisitiveness which allows the end to justify the means (4:1–3), when ruling classes become self-important and callous (4:1; 6:1), and when wealth is only a means to luxury for some to the neglect of those less well supplied (3:12–15; 4:1; 6:4–6). The perversion of justice in the courts rouses his animosity (2:6, 7; 5:7, 10, 12, 15) as does commercial dishonesty—the petty fraud of the shopkeeper who tampers with his scales (8:5–7) and the inhumanity of ‘big business’ when it treats people as commodities (1:6). On all these grounds, Amos’s people came under judgment and by extension our modern industrialized, post-biblical world falls under God’s judgment too. These aspects of commercial and materialistic society, which makes a god out of prosperity, have an ominously familiar ring.

Hope

For Israel, as for the world, will judgment spell an utter end? Amos is a prophet of Yahweh, and this alone should have been sufficient to preserve him from the charge that he

lacked a message of hope (possibly more unhesitatingly made twenty years ago than today) and that passages like 9:11–15 are later contributions by other writers. ‘Yahweh’ revealed the meaning of his name (Ex. 3:15; 6:6–8) in a single exodus-event which both saved his people and overthrew his foes. Preaching about such a God cannot exclude hope because it is of the essence of his nature. This becomes clear in 7:1–6 where Amos is made to face the full consequence of Israel’s sin in great judgments which would leave no survivor. When he prays against such eventualities he is assured that ‘this will not happen’. The commentary will show that the negative statements of 7:3, 6, denying total destruction, develop into the positive hope of 9:11–15: a restored ‘David’, a restored creation and a restored people.

Prophecy

Ch. 7:14 is a key verse. In Hebrew the omission of the verb ‘to be’ (lit. ‘I not a prophet’) usually implies a present tense (RSV, ‘I am no prophet’). Those who follow this interpretation (e.g. Wolfe, *Joel and Amos*, Fortress Press [1977], pp. 306, 312f.) suggest that Amos is denying that an office or official position has anything to do with the case, for what matters is the proclamation of the divine word. Wolfe must deny that 2:11 and 3:7, which are positive about the prophetic office, come from Amos himself, and then assert that Amos says ‘I am not a prophet’ (7:14) immediately before he says that ‘the LORD sent me to be a prophet’ (7:15).

As far as the Hebrew is concerned, while possibly the majority of cases where the verb ‘to be’ is left unstated needs a present tense, each case must be decided by its own needs. Thus, in the present context, in reply to the challenge from the priest, Amos looks back to a time when he was a prophet neither in fact nor prospect, until divine appointment and commissioning gave him prophetic status and work, as the NIV correctly implies. He also stands within the tradition of classical OT prophecy as one endowed with the divine word. Like all the prophets who speak on this point (cf. Je. 1:9; Ezk. 2:7–3:4) Amos asserts the exact identity between his words and the LORD’s words (1:1, 3).

This is the unique fact of verbal inspiration: that the LORD did not just share with the prophets the ‘drift’ of what he wanted them to say but that they were people so worked upon by God that the words which were naturally theirs, bearing the imprint of their times, personalities and studies, were the very words in which the LORD intended his truth to be perfectly enshrined.

Religion

Israel in Amos’s day was extremely religious but it was a religion astray from the law of God (2:7–8), devoid of spiritual benefit (4:4–5), incapable of protecting its devotees (3:14; 5:5–6) and lacking moral and social justice

(5:21–25). Did Amos then swing to the opposite extreme, looking for a religion of ethical behaviour without cultic, sacrificial expression? His question in 5:25 seems to suggest this and, indeed, has often been so understood (C. F. Whitley, *The Prophetic Achievement*, Blackwell [1963] p.73). But for a preacher to ask a question makes him dependent on the answer his hearers will give, and there can be no doubt that Amos’s congregation would have replied heartily that indeed they were obeying divine law that reached back to the days of Moses. On any view of the dating of the Pentateuch, but particularly if the Pentateuch stems from Moses, sacrifices were a fundamental part of the Israelites’ religion as received from God. This leads us to the view taken in the commentary (cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Unity of the Bible*, Carcy Kingsgate [1953] p.42) that Amos’s question is not whether sacrifices were right but what place they were intended to have. The LORD’s priority was that his people should obey him (Ex. 19:4–5; 20:2–3ff.), and the sacrificial code was a provision for their lapses in obedience. Then, as now, the divine call was to holiness, but if people sinned they had an advocate and a propitiation for their sins (1 Jn. 2:1–2). Ritualized religion, then and now, is a reversal of this priority. (See further on 5:24ff.)

The book of Amos

The book of Amos has come to us as a carefully edited piece of literature and there is no reason to doubt that Amos was his own editor. In fact, when we consider his conviction that his words were God’s words it is unlikely that he would have left them to the risk of oral tradition or to unpredictable later editors (cf. Is. 8:16–20; Je. 36). But the question must be asked, nonetheless, whether there are parts of the book as we have it that might more reasonably be seen as the work of others.

(i) The oracles against Tyre, Edom and Judah (1:9–12; 2:4–5). These are often treated as additions because they are briefer than the oracles against Damascus (1:3–5), Gaza (1:6–8), Ammon (1:13–15) and Moab (2:1–3). But when the evidence is added up there are, after all, three oracles in the short form and four in the longer form and, as Hubbard says (TOTC, p. 97), ‘variety may be as strong an evidence for authenticity as similarity is’. Furthermore, as a Judahite (1:1) the condemnation of Judah is the one thing Amos dare not leave out unless he wishes to discredit his message by partiality.

(ii) The hymn-like fragments (4:13; 5:8–9; 9:5–6). Hyatt (‘Amos’, *Peake’s Commentary* (1963), p. 617) urges that the doctrine of God the Creator evident in these passages requires a later date than the time of Amos (cf. H. W. Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, OUP (1946), p. 22). But archaeology has shown that the concept of the gods as creators is as old as religion. It would be remarkable indeed if the OT was laggard in ascribing this glory to the LORD! Furthermore, as the

Commentary shows, the passages are carefully embedded in their respective contexts. So perhaps Amos was quoting well-known hymns on the topic of God the Creator, but doing so with an eye to the needs of his message at each point.

(iii) The words of 9:11–15 are much disputed because they have such a golden message of hope as compared with the solemnity of the rest of the book. It used to be held that, in any case, such a doctrine of hope required a post-exilic date. The language of the passage fits well with the rest of the book, however. Besides this, there is an inherent absurdity in thinking that it was a later editor who added the note of hope, presumably when the full-blown message of doom did not eventuate and an Israelite people continuing to exist after the exile. For if Amos is only a prophet of doom, foreseeing only the end of the covenant and of the covenant people, hope could only be added at the expense of making him a false prophet! On the other hand, if Amos really believed his own message about fire on Judah and Jerusalem (2:5) it is reasonable to expect that he would look to the LORD for some word about the future beyond the fire and then express it in symbols and motifs familiar in his own day.

Further reading

- J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Amos*, BST (IVP, 1974).
 P. C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, Vol. 1, DSB (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1984).
 J. M. Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 2 vols. (Zondervan, 1983, 1986).
 D. A. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, TOTC (IVP, 1989).
 T. McComiskey, *Amos*, EBC (Zondervan, 1985).
 J. Niehaus, *Amos*, in T. McComiskey (ed.), *The Minor Prophets*, vol. 1 (Baker Book House, 1992).

Outline of contents

The three main sections of Amos are marked out by what is known as ‘inclusio’, which means that each begins and ends on the same note: the roaring lion (1:2; 3:8), the surrounding foe (3:9–11; 6:14) and (by contrast) the judgment that will not happen (7:1–6) and the hope that will (9:11–15). Each section has a symmetrical pattern: the first (1:2–3:8) takes the form ABBA; the second (3:9–6:14) the form ABCCBA and the third (7:1–9:15) the form ABCDCBA.

1:1	Title
1:2–3:8	The Lion’s roar: universal judgment and its grounds
1:2	A The Lion’s roar: the Lord’s voice

1:3–2:3	B Against the pagan peoples
2:4–3:2	B Against the chosen people
3:3–8	A The Lion’s roar: the prophetic word

3:9–6:14

An enemy around the land: the Lord’s anger

3:9–15	A The shattered kingdom
4:1–3	B The leading women
4:4–13	C Religion without repentance
5:1–27	C Religion without reformation
6:1–7	B The leading men
6:8–14	A The shattered kingdom

7:1–9:15

The Lord God: judgment and hope

7:1–6	A The devastation that will not be
7:7–9	B Discriminating judgment
7:10–17	C The inescapable word
8:1–14	D ‘In that day’
9:1–6	C The inescapable judgment
9:7–10	B Discriminating judgment
9:11–15	A The hope that will be

Commentary

1:1 Title

As the book proceeds we learn that the words of Amos are in fact the words of the LORD (e.g. 1:3, 6; 3:1, 11; 5:1, 4; 9:11–15). But Amos clearly did not lose his personality through becoming the vehicle of the LORD’s words. This is the miracle of inspiration. *Shepherds* is a word only used elsewhere of ‘sheep-breeder’ (2 Ki. 3:4). The LORD chooses whom he will, making the very ordinary his agent for unique purposes. Only the work of God—not human training or even personal choice—could have made Amos what he became. *Tekoa*, 12 miles (19 km) south of Jerusalem. *Saw* is often used, as here, to describe the spiritual ‘perception’ granted to the prophets (Is. 1:1; Hab. 1:1), not necessarily visionary experience but the ability to ‘see what is true’. It blends revelation and inspiration, for it implies both an objective truth ‘seen’ and the subjective faculty to ‘see’ it. God gave both the truth and the ability to

grasp and express it (NBD, 'Prophecy, Prophets'). *Uzziah ... Jeroboam ... earthquake*, see Introduction.

1:2–3:8 The Lion's roar: universal judgment and its grounds

1:2 *The Lion's roar: the Lord's voice*

Like a good open-air preacher, Amos gathers hearers by telling them what would arouse their enthusiasm—the judgment about to fall on hated foes. Imperceptibly, however, he moves their attention from pagan nations (e.g. Damascus in 1:3) to 'cousin' nations (e.g. Edom in 1:11; cf. Gn. 36:1), then to the 'sister' nation Judah (2:4), and finally the crowd finds itself listening to its own condemnation (2:6). Though judgment is pronounced throughout in parallel terms (sending 'fire'), the ground of judgment changes. The nations around are brought to trial for 'crimes against humanity' (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1), things conscience should have warned them not to do; but Judah (2:4) and Israel (2:11–12) are judged for abandoning revealed truth. The cardinal sin of the LORD's people is to depart from the LORD's word. Their cardinal virtue is obedience to revelation.

The great Lion's roar heralds the judgment to follow (1:3–3:2) by underlining three general aspects. (i) It is imminent. *Roars* is the 'pouncing roar' intended to terrify the prey into submission (Jdg. 14:5). Both verbs, *roars* and *thunders*, express repeated action; i.e. in the following series of condemnations we hear roar after roar. (ii) It is comprehensive. The whole land from the lush, low-lying pastures of the shepherds to the heights of the top of Carmel, is blighted. (iii) It is divine. The words *the LORD ... from Zion ... from Jerusalem* are emphasized, the holy LORD in his earthly dwelling place. The roar is the expressed anger of the Holy One but, even in wrath, his name, Yahweh, and his chosen residence in a house where sacrifices for sin are provided prompts the question whether wrath is the whole story. In this God there is always the blessed ingredient of grace; in wrath, he remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2). The triumph of grace begins to emerge in the final section of Amos (7:1ff., see outline above), but until then the roar predominates.

1:3–2:3 *Against the pagan peoples*

The grounds of judgment. Everything written in the Old Testament is a contemporary word of God (Rom. 15:4). We must listen to the 'roar after roar' of this section and learn what angers the LORD, as he accuses first the surrounding pagan nations (1:3–10), next the related pagans (1:11–2:3) and finally the people of God themselves (2:4–16). In 1:3–2:3 we learn that, for Amos, the law written on the human conscience (for these nations knew no special revelation of God; see Rom. 2:14–16) is spelt out in terms of human relationships. The first two condemnations (3ff.,

6ff.) are linked simply by the thought of gross cruelty (3, 6); the second pair (9f., 11f.) by unbrotherly action (9, 11); and the third pair (1:13ff., 2:1ff.) by the contrasting ideas of destroying the future (13) and desecrating the past (2:1) and by condemnation of what instinctively commands respect, the pregnant mother and the human corpse.

3–5 Damascus. Hazael of Syria (842–806 BC) pursued an expansionist policy, extending his kingdom into Israelite territory with vicious cruelty (2 Ki. 8:12). But Damascus fell to Assyria in 732 BC. God is not mocked. **3** The numerical idiom, *three ... four*, here and throughout this series of oracles (cf. Ps. 62:11; Pr. 30:15, etc.) basically suggests that three transgressions would have been sufficient for divine judgment to fall, but the fourth transgression puts the matter beyond doubt. It suggests the patience of a God who waits beyond the point where action is merited, who longs for repentance and leaves space for it (Gn. 15:16; 2 Pet. 3:8f), who never acts without evidence (Gn. 18:21) but in whose eyes there are the 'fourth sins' which are truly intolerable to him so that, when they are committed he will not *turn back his wrath* (lit. 'turn it back', cf. Nu. 23:20; Is. 14:27).

The 'fourth sin' was in this case barbarity in war: *sledges having iron teeth* (heavy wooden platforms, weighted above and studded with sharp metal underneath) were made for chopping the crop prior to winnowing, but here were used on people, treating them as things, a mere crop for personal profit. **4 Benhadad** (2 Ki. 8:7ff.; 13:3), the dynasty of Hazael. Vengeance comes upon persons, the family of the perpetrator of the crime. **4–5** Vengeance falls on things, such as palaces (signifying wealth and pomp), the *gate* (lit. 'bar'; i.e. the security they made for themselves) and home territory (*Aven ... Eden* was probably north-east of Damascus). The wrath of God, spreading from the instigator of the sin to his family and land finally brings all to total ruin. From the unknown *Kir* the Aramaeans came (9:7) and into the unknown they disappeared, with Tiglath Pileser of Assyria (2 Ki. 16:9) having been the agent of God.

6–8 Gaza. Representing the LORD's judgment on Philistia, *Gaza* fell to Assyria in 734 BC (the other Philistine cities followed: Ashdod, 711 BC; Ashkelon and Ekron in 701 BC). They were involved in the same sin as Damascus, treating people as a commercial crop with *Edom* acting as their middleman. They were so obsessed with the profit motive that no other consideration mattered—no plea of age or sex, of child for parent or parent for child. The saleable were sold; market forces alone mattered, to the exclusion of humanity. No word could be more timely than this of Amos for our present generation. 'The Sovereign Yahweh', is a term used only here in the list of condemnations, as if to suggest that nothing calls for the omnipotence of God in punitive action like using people merely as commodities.

9–10 Tyre. Renowned for commerce, the Tyrians are revealed as handling the business side of the slave trade,

but the particular accusation is not the same as in vs 6–8—though doubtless the sin under this heading was every bit as serious—but breach of covenant. Solemn undertakings must be kept, for such infidelity is a ‘fourth sin’. *Treaty of brotherhood* (1 Ki. 5:1, 12; 9:13 note references to friendship, treaty and brotherliness). Amos is looking back 250 years, but the passing of time does not absolve anyone from their obligation to keep their word. Tyre became tributary to Assyria, surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar (585–573 BC) and fell to Alexander (332 BC).

11–12 Edom. Edom’s ‘fourth transgression’ was a ceaseless animosity which *pursued* (i.e. sought every opportunity to express itself) in those hostile actions in which neighbouring states could easily vent their spleen without ever declaring war. Historically, the bitterness between Esau and Jacob reached back to the original brothers (Gn. 27:41). In Nu. 20:14ff. hostility became open and a pattern for the future was established. Saul found it necessary to go to war (1 Sa. 14:47); David conquered and annexed Edom—the only king to do so (2 Sa. 8:14). Solomon faced rebellion from Edom (1 Ki. 11:14ff., 25) as did Jehoram a century later (2 Ki. 8:20). Fifty years on, Amaziah was fighting Edom (2 Ki. 14:7, 10). The accusation of anger that raged continually is proved, but not justified, before God. It was contrary to nature (*brother*), a denial of the emotion of *compassion* (the spontaneous overflow of pity or love; e.g. 1 Ki. 3:26), and constantly maintained at fever pitch (*continually ... unchecked*). Such rage, whatever its origin and supposed justification, is inadmissible. It lives in the heart but it is seen on high. **12 Teman** was Edom (Ob. 9); *Bozrah* was its chief city.

13–15 Ammon. The Ammonite—Gileadite war is not otherwise known, but it was recorded in heaven. Its motive was acquisition (*extend his borders*) and in the interests of territorial increase they were ready to destroy human increase (*pregnant woman*). Once more the material is prized above the human: if there is a single thread uniting Amos’s list of ‘fourth transgressions’ this is it. Here they ministered inhuman savagery to those who, more than any other, merit tenderness—the expectant mother and the unborn child. No amount of national aspiration (maybe even appeals to ‘national security’) can excuse such behaviour before the automatic wrath of God. Compare the elaborate detail of v 14 with the parallel vs 5, 7, 8, 10 and 12. *Fire* is the motif of divine holiness (Ex. 3:2, 5; 19:18). *Violent winds ... stormy day* or ‘day of whirlwind’ indicate how the ‘forces of nature’ can be a picture of personal divine intervention (Ps. 18:9–14).

2:1–3 Moab. A pagan people and violence to a corpse—all this lies within the concern of the holy God. Wherever crimes against humanity are committed in violation of conscience, for whatever reason, the LORD is the criminal’s implacable foe. 2 Ki. 3:26 hints at particular animosity between Moab and Edom. The same nationalistic enmity probably fuelled the outrage described here, revealing a vengeful spirit. What could not be settled while

the parties were alive followed the king into his tomb. Could anything more clearly expose the senseless irrationality of nourished hatred than to see a venerable corpse dragged out to suffer purposeless indignities? Hatred is like that: poisoning the heart of the doer, inviting the anger of God. **2** That *fire* should recompense the cremation fire described in v 1 exemplifies the law of exact equality between crime and punishment that undergirds divine law and is held up as a standard for human courts (Ex. 21:23; Lv. 24:19f; Dt. 19:21).

2:4–3:2 Against the chosen people

4–5 Judah. The roll-call of condemnation now takes a significant turn. Judah, one section of the LORD’s people, is summoned to the bar, no less under divine scrutiny and sentence than the surrounding heathen, as the identical formula, *three ... four*, implies. But what is Judah’s fourth transgression? *They have rejected the law of the LORD*. (i) *Law* means ‘teaching’ (e.g. Pr. 3:1), such as a loving parent imparts to a dear child. The people of Judah have spurned the LORD’s personal, fatherly word. (ii) *Decrees* are something engraved in rock for perpetuity: they have changed the unchangeable. (iii) They have replaced truth not with *false gods* but ‘falsehoods’ (2 Tim. 4:4). (iv) *Their ancestors* or ‘fathers’: their guilt is deeply ingrained, for the Bible never uses the moral inheritance from past generations as an excuse. The present generation is accountable for an accumulated guilt (Ps. 51:3–5; Mt. 23:31–36). *False gods ... gods* narrows the accusation too much. Such gods would be included by implication but the words of Amos are stronger: ‘their falsehoods have led them astray, after which their fathers walked’. Outside revealed truth there is only human error. **5 Fire ... consume**, see 2 Ki. 24–25.

Note. The oracle recorded in 2:6–3:2 has a symmetrical shape common in the prophets:

- (a¹) 2:6a, b Threat stated
- (b¹) 2:6c–8 Sin exposed
- (c) 2:9–12 The goodness of God
- (b²) 2:13–16 Punishment announced
- (a²) 3:1–2 Threat renewed and justified

Central are the good acts of God which made Israel special and to which they failed to respond: in particular, the gift of the land (9), redemption from Egypt and care in the wilderness (10), and the revelation of the LORD’s requirements (*Nazirites*) and of his word (*prophets*).

6–8 Israel’s sins. Amos reviews Israel’s sins socially (6–7) and religiously (7–8). Their lawlessness against the righteous, callousness against the poor and rapacity towards those who can be oppressed is first described. **6 Righteous**, innocent before the law. Judges were open to bribery (*silver*), verdicts were sold for as little as a *pair of sandals* or cases were brought over as small a matter as shoes—such was the covetousness of the time. The word *needy* implies those who cannot resist or who have to bend to

superior will and strength, those who socially have no means of redress.

7 *Trample* arises from a slightly altered text which reads lit. ‘pant after the dust’—they had such covetousness for land that they grudged the *poor* (those lacking money and influence) even the earth they daubed on their faces as a sign of mourning (Jos. 7:6)! *Oppressed*, down-trodden, those at the bottom of life’s heap.

7–8 Sins against the revelation of God begin here. The LORD has revealed his holy name, letting them into the secret of his inner nature, but they openly defied his prohibition of adultery (Ex. 20:14) and of fornication in the name of religion (Dt. 23:17f). Canaanite religion used human procreative acts as reminders and stimuli to the god Baal to perform his function of making humans, animals and land fertile. In Amos’s day, the holy LORD was being worshipped as a Canaanite Baal. But he will only be worshipped as he dictates (Mt. 15:9), not by our notions of exciting religion. *The same girl*, lit. simply ‘the girl’. The condemnation is not of father and son using the same girl—as if it were a charge of aggravated immorality—but of the whole male community, ‘father and son alike’, being involved in orgiastic Baalism. **8** Divine grace was flouted by their religion. In the very place of atonement, *beside every altar* (Lv. 17:11), they indulged their lusts and made the house of God, potentially the place for enjoying the LORD’s fellowship, the scene of revelry. *Lie down*, in the very act of fornication. *Garments ... pledge*, see Ex. 22:26ff., where garments taken as security against a loan were always to be loaned back for the night. *Taken as fines*, the material of their revelry was acquired by the illegal processes described in v. 6.

9–12 Israel’s privileges. At every point where they sinned, divine grace had made a very different way open to them. The LORD has given them a land (9) in which to develop a different society, based on his law (contrast vs 6–7), in bringing them out of Egypt (10) he had revealed his name (Ex. 3:14f; 6:6–7; 20:2) which they had profaned, and in order to save them from a sinful lifestyle and unacceptable worship (8) the LORD had given them special agents of revelation (11). They had reversed his whole work of grace. **9** *I* is emphatic, meaning ‘As for me, it was I who’. *Amorites*, general name for the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan. Notwithstanding their humanly unconquerable might (Nu. 13:28), divine power destroyed them totally (*fruit ... root*). **10** See outline above: the central truth of the whole oracle like the central OT act of the LORD—the exodus—is at once liberation, redemption and settlement (Ex. 6:6–8). **11** *Prophets* prolonged in Israel the foundational revelation through Moses. *Nazirites* (Nu. 6:1ff.) typified the consecrated life the LORD desired of his people (Lv. 19:2). **12** The people neither wanted to see the example nor hear the word.

2:13–3:2 Inevitable divine judgment. 13–16 Amos announces divine action against which neither natural ability, equipment nor courage will avail. **13** Israel under

Jeroboam was flourishing (see Introduction) but there are other aspects of harvest-time. The loaded harvest wagon presses down on the helpless ground beneath it. So Israel was heaping up a weight of divine wrath which would press it to destruction. The Hebrew can be translated ‘as the purposely filled cart presses the sheaves’ (a method of threshing), but the picture is the same. **3:1–2** address *the whole family I brought up*, and thus form a conclusion not only to 2:6–16 but also to 2:4–16. After the call to *hear* there is reference to the acts of God and the exodus-redemption which made them his people. V 2 begins with the unique position which they occupy and ends with its inevitable consequence: punishment for sin belongs in the very constitution of the people of God. *Therefore*, there is an automatic sequence involved: much will be required of those to whom much has been given (Lk. 12:48). This is the heart of Amos’s message. Privilege is wonderful but it is not a shelter; it is a responsibility and a treasure for which we shall have to give account.

3:3–8 The Lion’s roar: the prophetic word

3–6 The Lion roars again: the message authenticated. Amos rounds off the first cycle of his prophecies (see Introduction) with a series of sayings about cause and effect. He builds up to the double climax; first that calamity does not come without divine agency (6), and secondly that no true prophet speaks without divine revelation (7–8). In summary, nothing short of divine compulsion would make Amos preach such a message to his people, but the LORD has spoken to him and he has no option. **3** *Walk together* expresses habitual companionship such as can only arise from the LORD and Israel being ‘in agreement’. They are together in covenant but can their fellowship continue if they are at odds? The law of cause and effect would operate to separate them. **4** Two illustrations from the angle of a predator: the *lion* does not *roar* to attack (1:2; Judg. 14:5) unless *prey* is sighted, nor *growl* (contentedly) *in his den* if he has no prey to eat. **5** Two illustrations from the angle of the prey: a *bird* does not venture into a *trap* unless there is a *snares*, i.e. ‘bait’, nor does a trap snap shut unless the bait has been taken and there is something to catch. **6** The application: the prey hears the warning of the predator’s coming and trembles. It is the great ‘divine predator’ who stands behind every disaster. The thrust of Amos’s argument is to invite people to explain disasters past and future. Do they accept the Bible view of history that the LORD is the agent in history, that just as behind every event there is a cause so behind history there is the LORD? If so, then their only reasonable action is to make sure they stand in a right relation and fellowship with him.

7–8 A true understanding of the function of a prophet confirms the interpretation that God is in control. First (7), the prophet has been let into the secret of the LORD’s plans. *Revealing his plan* or ‘opening his fellowship’ (Je. 23:18): the essential experience of the prophet was to be brought

near to God. This explains how they could both speak God's words and also be completely themselves, for the nearer a person comes to God the more he or she becomes a person. But the OT prophets also expected to be aware beforehand of what the LORD would do (cf. Elisha's surprise when this was not so, 2 Ki. 4:17). If this is so, then in Amos's message, *the lion has roared ... the Sovereign LORD has spoken*.

3:9–6:14 An enemy around the land: The Lord's anger

The bracketing verses of 3:11 (lit. 'an enemy all around the land') and 6:14 (*I will stir up a nation ... from Lebo Hamath to ... the Arabah*) state the theme of this section. Within the brackets the onset of the foe is explained by the self-indulgence and social carelessness of the ruling classes (4:1–3; 6:1–7) and, centrally, by religious failure (4:4–5:27). These are the age-old faults of failure to love one's neighbour, arising from failure to love the LORD our God.

3:9–15 The shattered kingdom

With telling drama Amos calls pagan nations to see what is afoot in Samaria (9) and then, themselves, to announce divine judgment (13). It is as if even the heathens have sufficient moral awareness to judge the LORD's people! The evidence is of *unrest* and *oppression* (9); failure in character and conduct (10). Here is a religion (14) and an affluent society (15) meriting divine wrath. The agent of overthrow is both the surrounding foe (11) and the avenging LORD (13–15). The plan of the passage is:

- (a¹) v 9 Nations called to observe
- (b¹) v 10 Report on character and conduct
- (b²) v 11 Punishment by overthrow
- (b³) v 12 Illustration: nothing to survive
- (a²) vs 13–15 Nations called to testify

9 The sins of Israel are so blatant that even the most despised heathen, the ancestral enemies of *Ashdod*, the Philistines (Jdg. 14:3; 1 Sa. 17:36), and *Egypt* have sufficient moral superiority to discern that Samaria was under divine judgment. *Fortresses* or 'palaces', the appeal is to the ruling classes to act as examiners of ruling classes (cf. *fortresses*, v 10; *mansions*, v 15), a fair trial by their peers. *Unrest* means uneasiness, instability in society. *Oppression* is extortion and persecution. **10** *Know not to do right* (omit *how*; 'right-doing' as such is beyond them), devotion to wrong-doing blunts moral perception and their sole concern is what they have stored up in the *fortresses* or 'palaces'. They are unaware that illgotten gains are like so many barrels of unstable explosive: they are actually storing up for themselves lit. 'violence' (*plunder*) and 'destruction' (*loot*). What they at present hand out to others will, at the end, be their own portion.

12 cf. Ex. 22:10–13. If a shepherd could bring back the tattered remnants of a sheep, he absolved himself of the charge of negligence: he had tried to save the beast and failed. But what he rescued was only evidence of a total loss! So for Samaria: what is left will speak only of total overthrow, but just as *leg bones* and ears were evidence of a destroyed animal, the typical remains of Samaria would be *beds* and *couches*, evidence of an indolent, luxury-loving, effete society.

14 Amos passes easily from speaking of the historical agent in Samaria's overthrow (11) to speaking of the LORD as the destructive agent. In this direct way the LORD is behind all history (cf. 9:7). *Sins* ('rebellions') are the wilful flouting of the LORD's law. The social crimes described in vs 9–10 are sins against the LORD. In his punitive action the LORD starts with false religion and moves to false society (14–15). Just as true religion is the root of true society so false religion is the root of social corruption. *Horns*. In pagan, though not in Israelite practice (1 Ki. 1:51), holding the horns of the altar afforded sanctuary. In the day of judgment, false religion offers no sanctuary; its altars have no horns! **15** The main blow falls on the affluent, the 'two-home' element in society with its *winter* and *summer* residences and its ostentatious luxury (*ivory*). Like the rest of the Bible, Amos has no complaint against wealth as such. The questions are always how it was gained (Je. 17:11) and how it is used and, especially for Amos, how people used the power wealth bestowed. But like their false religion, their gain by oppression leaves them defenceless in the day of visitation.

4:1–3 The leading women

From general accusation (3:9–15), Amos comes to particular issues. **1** The indolent women of Samaria, who *oppress the poor* (those financially poor and vulnerable in life), who dominate their *husbands* in their insistence on gratification, what are they but prime beasts from that great cattle country, *Bashan* (Dt. 32:14; Ps. 22:12), living a purely animal existence, fattened for slaughter? **2** In 3:9 we read of social offences; in 3:14 rebellions against God, but here affronts to his *holiness* are recorded. Crime is crime and sin is sin because the holy God is holy and his holiness erupts against all that offends him. Captive to indulgence, the criminals and sinners of Israel become captives in fact (2–3). *Hooks ... fishhooks*, the doublet stresses the impossibility of escape. Captives were in fact led away by cords attached to hooks in their lips. **3** *Breaks*, caused by the enemy described in 3:11. *Harmon* is an unknown location; nor is there any satisfactory suggested identification or emendation.

4:4–13 Religion without repentance

Amos now comes to the heart of the matter. In the long run the serious thing is not their crimes (3:9–10), rebellions (3:14) or offence to God's holiness (4:2) but that, given the

chance to repent they did not do so. The heart of the passage (6–11) teaches that in all the varied circumstances of life the LORD is the cause and that his purpose in every act of affliction is to bring his people right back to himself. The initial, ironical command *Go* (4), introducing an exposure of a religion that failed (4–5), is balanced by a final call to be ready to meet the LORD (a religion that will not fail) in vs 12–13. In between these calls there are seven acts of God aimed at bringing his people back to himself (6–11). In Israel's case the specific aim of the divine acts was repentance, but the principle is that in every experience of life the LORD is directly at work to bring us close to himself.

4–5 Bethel (Gn. 28:10–22) and *Gilgal* (Jos. 4:19) commemorated new beginnings with God but the worshippers' use of the shrines involved no new start but simply confirmed them in *sin*. (i) It was mere religion. The religious act was everything. *Every morning* and 'on the third day' (NIV mg.) may point simply to punctiliousness: the sacrifice had to be offered on day one and the tithes on day three. It may, however, be evidence of acts repeated beyond the law of God: *sacrifices* not once a year (1 Sa. 1:3) but once a day; *tithes* not every three years (Dt. 14:28) but every third day—for if the act is everything, the more the merrier! (ii) Its basis was self-pleasing and self-praise: *what you love to do*, even if it contravenes God's law (see Lv. 2:11, where to *burn leavened bread* brings together what God forbade). Even personal acts of devotion (*freewill offerings*) were turned to the praise of self (*brag ... boast*). But true religion 'must be conformed to the will of God as its unerring standard' (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, SCM [1961] p. 49) (Mk. 7:6). Outside that revealed will, religion is simply another form of rebellion (4).

6–11 Seven divine acts: famine (6), drought (selective rainfall) (7–8), blight (9), locusts (9), plagues (10), military defeat (10) and natural disaster (11). Things which are ordinarily attributed to chance, natural causes or human folly are all the direct acts of God aiming to produce what he wishes to see in his people. He wants a personal nearness to himself couched in whatever terms are appropriate to the circumstances; repentance if sin has been involved, fleeing to him for comfort, *etc.* Without relationship there is no religion. In Amos's day, while they were being religious, the LORD was working for and looking for repentance.

12–13 Is v 12 a message of hope (there is still time to prepare to meet him in peace) or a dire warning (the LORD is drawing near in unspecified judgmental action and your last chance has gone)? V 13 can suggest 'yes' to both these possibilities, for the LORD is fully in command of his whole world—things visible (*mountains*), invisible (*wind*), and the human mind (lit. 'declares to man what is his [inmost] thought'). He is the LORD of all change, turning *dawn to darkness* (*i.e.* bringing the judgment that may be implied in v 12, darkening every human hope) or, a rather more likely

translation, turning 'darkness to dawn' (*i.e.* bringing hope where there seemed to be none). Furthermore, he dominates the earth (*treads the high places*) and can therefore do what he pleases for he is *the LORD God Almighty*. Like Moses (Dt. 30:19f.) Amos sets before his people life and death: the choice is theirs; they have come to the moment of decision. The idea of 'meeting God' (12) looks back to Ex. 19:17, where both grace and law were combined in one revelation. It was for Amos's people and it is ever the portion of the people of God to live in the place of choice (Dt. 27:4–6). This is what Amos sets before them in v 12. It is as if he said, they can choose in what character the LORD will come to them: repentance will summon the LORD of sovereign grace to turn their darkness to dawn; religion without repentance will expose them to the Sovereign LORD with all the terrors of his law and the fading of light in the darkness of judgment.

5:1–27 Religion without reformation

This passage is built around three appeals: (i) for spiritual reformation, *Seek me ... seek the LORD* (4–6); (ii) for personal and social reformation, *Seek good ... maintain justice* (14f.); (iii) for religious reformation, *Let justice roll ... did you bring me sacrifices ...?* (24f.) But the appeals are bracketed by affirmations of disaster (1–3, 26–27) and interspersed with diagnoses of how things are (7, 10–13, 16–20). The *therefore* of v 16 gives us a clue how the chapter is to be understood: how can an appeal (14–15) have as its consequence (*therefore*, v 16) a forecast of unconsolable sorrow? Only if Amos is recalling appeals made and refused! The chapter, therefore, is a record of an opportunity lost and of the grim consequences now inevitable. Once more, God is not mocked.

1–3 A funeral lament: death and its cause. Though the death described is still in the future (3) it is so certain that the dirge may be composed and sung already (2). **2** *Fallen* in death, the dead girl has no inherent power of recovery (*never to rise*) nor any external aid (*deserted ... no-one to lift*). **3** The immediate cause of this helplessness and hopelessness in death is military overthrow in which national forces have suffered a 90% casualty rate. But what is the ultimate cause? The remainder of the chapter declares that this is what death due to sin is like.

4–13 The LORD could have given life but they chose the way of death. It is better to restore the original 'For' at the start of v 4. The great disaster (1–3) is traced to a root cause. The Israelites were invited to seek the LORD and live (4, 6), warned of the way of death (5, 11), reminded that the LORD can give light but also darkness (8). They were put in the place of choice and chose wrongly.

4–5 The LORD is loving in his invitations and faithful in his warnings. He offers himself as the remedy they need; *seek me* is an invitation to closeness, fellowship and newness of life. On the other hand, however, *Bethel* and *Gilgal* are honoured by time and tradition (*cf.* 4:4). *Gilgal*, the place of entrance upon the promised land (Jos. 4:20),

will prove to be the place of *exile*; while Bethel, 'the house of God' (Gn. 28:17, 19) will become *nothing* ('Aven', NIV mg.), as useless as an idol.

6–7 Loving in his invitations, God is faithful in his denunciations. Once more he is himself all that his people need (*Seek the Lord and live*), but outside of him there is no life. *Bethel* may claim tradition and veneration, but it is useless against the *fire* (the symbol of energized holiness) that will rage against perverted *justice* and humiliated *righteousness*. Where these two words are used together (see Is. 5:16), 'righteousness' is a summary word for the principles inherent in divine holiness, and 'justice' is the practical application of those principles personally and socially.

8–9 It is better to remove the NIV's brackets. The verses are meant to be abrupt in context. Angrily Amos switches attention from people who have wrought a bitter transformation on earth (7) to the great Transformer himself. On the one hand, human perversion cannot win against God: he has the power to make the threatened *fire* (6) *flash* out in *destruction* (9). On the other hand, should they *seek* him, as invited, they will exchange death for the promised life (6) because he can just as easily turn *blackness into dawn* (8).

Pleiades and Orion were seasonal markers; the rising and setting of the Pleiades marked, for sailors, the season of navigation and marked the seasons on nomad calendars. *Blackness ... dawn ... day ... night*, the regular transformations every twenty-four hours. *Turns* (8) is the same verb used in v 7: do their 'turnings' cause transformations? How inexpressibly greater are his in comparison! *Waters ... pours*, the LORD is not bound by his own general rules, holding the waters in their place (Ps. 104:8–9). He can bring about occasional transformations also when he commands floods to engulf the land. The rulers of Amos's day had wrought transformations (7) and silenced all opposition (13), but the one who controls the seasonal, daily and occasional transformations is well able also to overthrow what man has made strong and fortified against attack (9). What a vision for a day, like Amos's, when ungodliness is rampant, values are reversed (7) and the godly person is chiefly aware of impotence (13)!

10–13 A neatly balanced statement:

- (a¹) v 10 Hated of those who speak truth
- (b¹) v 11 Oppression of the poor
- (c) v 11 Judgment by dispossession
- (b²) v 12 Oppression of the poor (different word)
- (a²) v 13 Silenced opposition

10 The just judge (*who reproves*) and the honest witness (*who tells the truth*) are equally detested. **11** *Poor* (2:7; 4:1), financially poor and socially defenceless. *Force him*, 'take exactions from'. Amos does not specify which powerful interest is doing all this: the landlord who *trampled* by exorbitant rent and still found ways of making further 'exactions'? The moneylender? The LORD is not

concerned with 'who' but with 'whom'—the sufferer. *Therefore* indicates a heavenly agent is at work. The LORD runs his world on moral lines whereby those who gain unjustly will not enjoy perpetually. There is a principle of frustration built into the nature of things (Is. 5:8–10; 14–17). As the outline above shows, this is the central truth of the passage. Humanly speaking the people have built to last (*stone mansions*), planted to produce (*lush vineyards*) but it will not be so.

12 *Offences ... sins*, 'rebellions' (against God) ... 'missing the mark' (of his requirements). Social misdemeanours are spiritual sins; hence, a mere reformation will not do: there must be a return to God. *Righteous*, those 'in the right' in a court case. *Bribes*, the use of wealth to gain a verdict. *Deprive* ('turn aside'), of a judge refusing to hear a case—particularly dismissing that of the 'unimportant' person, the *poor* (not the word in v 11), the uninfluential who can be easily overridden. **13** The 'hatred' mentioned in v 10 easily ushers in the era of the 'heavy mob', the reign of terror in which people are no longer free to speak out.

14–20 Moral reformation: understanding the day of the LORD. The negative threat of dispossession (11) now becomes the positive threat of a coming 'day' of unrelieved weeping (16f.) and darkness (18). The 'day of the LORD' was apparently part of current popular expectation, with the assumption that it would bring 'light', *i.e.* every glad experience, to the LORD's people. Hence, they looked forward to it with confident hope. (i) Amos ironically uses the language of hope to preach doom (*e.g. pass through* in v 17 is Passover terminology; Ex. 12:12). The people have forgotten the character of their God. Passover night was a night of judgment for the unready. (ii) Spiritual blessings rest on moral conditions (14–15). God's favourable presence is a reality for those whose objectives (to *seek*) and hearts (which *hate evil, love good*) match his own and who apply these personally cherished values to the society they live in (*maintain justice*). (iii) *Perhaps* (15) indicates that God opposes arrogance. This is not to question that mercy is mercy, but to rebuke the presumption that assumes it must be so in my case.

14–15 (i) Seeking goes along with shunning *evil*. (ii) Holiness of action (*seek good*) must be accompanied by holiness of emotion (*hate evil, love good*). (iii) The deed must not wait for the feeling: *seek good* is placed before *love good*. If we wait for emotion to prompt action we might often wait in vain. We must learn to exalt duty over inclination and to discover how the loving act will presently create the loving heart. (iv) The repetition of the exalted title *the LORD God Almighty* imparts seriousness to our moral endeavour: this is the God we seek to please. We are at his disposal; it is for him to dictate. **15** *Joseph* is used as a comprehensive name for the northern kingdom because its tribes were mostly descended from his sons (Gn. 48).

16–17 On *therefore*, see introduction to ch. 5 above. *The Lord, the LORD God Almighty*, note how the message

of doom is reinforced by an even more extended title: *Lord* (lower case) means 'Sovereign'; LORD (upper case) means 'Yahweh', the exodus God who saves his people and destroys his foes; *Almighty* means 'of hosts', the One who is, in himself, every potentiality and power. The lamentation will be open (*in all the streets ... in every public square*), heartfelt and without exception, involving not only the (professional) *mourners* but also *farmers*. Traditional places of joy, *vineyards*, will be places of grief; all because the Lord 'passes through'. It needs no exceptional action, just his holy presence, to reduce all to mourning.

18–20 Popular optimism is countered by stressing the darkness of the day. Just as we expect the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ, so the OT church looked for the day of the Lord: the day of his personal coming. As we read the OT we find that what is described in advance (as here) as 'the day' turns out (27) to be an interim divine intervention and not the ultimate day of the Lord. The illustration in v 19 (instead of the second *as though*, read 'and') tells the story of inescapable fate. Looking back over vs 4–20, for whom is the day 'darkness'? Those who professed to be the LORD's but did not 'seek him' (4), did not please him in their behaviour to the needy and helpless (7ff.), did not do good and shun evil (14) nor love what he loves (15). People of profession without reality, of religion without the evidence of spiritual and moral transformation are moving in precisely the wrong direction, away from God.

21–27 Religious reformation, returning to the old values. The LORD rejects current religious practice (21–22). At first sight vs 23–24 appear to be an 'either/or'—stressing that God desires not a religion of 'services', but a religion of 'service'. V 25, however, redresses the balance, calling for a return to original priorities (see Introduction on Society). Failure to respond to the message of v 24 is implied in v 26; continuance in a self-chosen, man-made religion, which will result in exile (27).

21–24 Religion without morality attracts divine hatred, (Is. 1:11–15ff.; Je. 7:9–11). **24** *Justice ... righteousness*, practice and principle, (*cf.* v 7). **25** But Amos does not call for morality without religion, service without services. The emphasis in his question is, 'Was it sacrifices (only) that you brought me in the wilderness?' The religion of Sinai was firstly one of moral, ethical response to the redeeming God (Ex. 19:4–5; 20:2ff.). The sacrifices were introduced as a logical consequence. When the people committed themselves to obedience they were brought 'under the shed blood' (Ex. 24:7–8). For them, as for us, these things were said to them that they might not sin (1 Jn. 2:1) but in the inevitable event of sin, they had a propitiation (1 Jn. 2:2). This is what Amos recalls in his question. They had isolated the ritual of sacrifice and marginalized obedience, whereas it is commitment to obedience that makes the sacrifices necessary and meaningful. See further on 7:7–8.

26 Their self-pleasing religion (4:4–5) opened the door to a self-made religion. Without the control of the word of God it is not that people will believe nothing but that they will believe anything. *Shrine ... pedestal* (Heb. 'sikkut ... *kiyyun*'), are words known from Mesopotamia to be Sakkuth and Kaiwanu, names of the planet Saturn, a star god worshipped as *king* and *god* (see Hubbard, p. 185). The love of ritual often manifests itself in processions. **27** This procession ends in an *exile* whose destination Amos hides in the vague *beyond Damascus*. But they go, not as the victims of a conqueror or of chance, but because *I will send you*, the Sovereign LORD bringing on his people the consequences of their folly and obduracy.

6:1–7 *Leading men*

The women described in 4:1–3 are balanced by the men described in 6:1–7, *i.e.* all without exception are implicated. Here is the lordly pride which can find no fault with itself. The women were like 'cows', thoughtlessly indulging their desires; the men are animated by conscious pride: they consider themselves *notable* in 'the first of the nations' (1) and indulge themselves with 'the first' (same word) of *lotions* (6). They will be *the first* (different form of the same word) (7) to go captive! The proprieties will be observed! Complacent, indulgent, socially uncaring, exiled! It is hard for those whose position centralizes them in other people's minds to avoid centralizing themselves in their own minds, until self-concern finally obliterates concern for others. This is the particular temptation of those 'at the top'.

1 *Zion*, prophets operated in one of the kingdoms (Amos was in the north) but always kept both kingdoms in their sights. Isaiah (28:1–4) and Micah (1:5), both southern prophets, also concerned themselves with the north (see also Ho. 5:13; 6:11). It would strengthen Amos's ministry to the north for him to show impartiality in this way: pride is pride wherever it rears its head. **2** There are no verbs in the questions. Probably a present tense is intended in each. Different interpretations are suggested. (i) Amos invites his hearers to observe by comparison how great their prosperity is—and therefore how certain their judgment if they fail to be grateful to the LORD. However, the whole section implies that they would not need such proof but were already convinced of their superiority. (ii) *Gath etc.* are examples of fallen prosperity and constitute a warning of what will happen to Samaria. It is, however, doubtful if these cities were in ruins in Amos's day. (iii) Amos is quoting a propaganda 'handout' from the rulers, drawing advantageous comparisons with distant and inferior places. This has the 'ring of truth'; it is the way rulers behave and it matches the arrogance depicted in v 1. It also leads into v 3 as a deliberate concealing of the dangers which the rulers knew were on the horizon.

3 Samaria was enjoying a 'never had it so good' prosperity. The rulers knew that it could not last but they *put off the evil day* in an 'enjoy it while you can' spree. Following the boom years of Jeroboam (see Introduction)

the nation did fall into disarray. Of the remaining six kings of Israel, only one passed the throne to his son; the rest were assassinated (2 Ki. 15, 17). The description *reign of terror* undoubtedly became all too apt. **4** But even if they were to die tomorrow, why not enjoy the good life today (see Is. 22:12–13)? **5** Lesser men try to justify their frivolities by comparison with greater men. After all, *David* was a musician and composer! **6** *Bowlful* (Ex. 38:3; Nu. 7:13), very large bowls indeed; we would say ‘They drink wine by the bucketful’. *Do not grieve*, ‘have not made themselves sick’. Their revelry may have given them a bilious attack (Is. 28:7–8) but the *ruin*, the ‘broken-down state’ of *Joseph* (see on 5:6) does not ‘sicken them’.

6:8–14 *The shattered kingdom*

The concluding condemnation, matching 3:9–15, renews the divine assault on pride (8), moral indifference (12) and self-conceit (13), and dwells dreadfully on the awesome end to which these things lead (9f., 11, 14). The passage is balanced as follows:

- (a¹) v 8 Divine hatred
- (b¹) vs 8–10 Overthrow of state: total loss illustrated
- (a²) v 11 Divine judgment
- (b²) vs 12–13 Reversal of values: absurdity illustrated
- (a³) v 14 Divine management of history for moral ends

8 *By himself*, ‘by his soul’, *i.e.* an oath involving the divine person ‘heart and soul’. *Abhor* requires a small alteration to the Hebrew text (which reads ‘I desire’). An even smaller alteration yields ‘Truly I am the foe of’. **9–10** In siege conditions famine and plague take their toll and the ‘death-carts’ become a familiar sight. The sole survivor of a family acknowledges that there is no-one else, but before such news can be greeted with any sort of response (exasperation or pity) involving the name of God, his mouth is stopped: the sense of alienation from God is too great; he has departed from his people. **11** It is by divine *command* that this has happened: v 11 tells what God commands; vs 12–13 tell why he commands; and v 14 explains how he will fulfil his command. *Great ... small*, the idiom of comprehensiveness by means of opposites, meaning ‘every house whatsoever’.

12 The illustrations are of what is contrary to the nature of things. This sums up the life of the nation: justice was intended to heal (Dt. 19:16–20), not *poison* society, and (as we might say) talk about *righteousness* in public life had become a sour (*bitterness*) joke. The judgment of God is provoked by the state of society, not just by private sins. To fail to maintain true principles (*righteousness*) and sound practices (*justice*) is to promote social and national ruination. The ‘righteous LORD loves righteousness’ (Ps. 11:7). **13** *Lo Debar and Karnaim*, places in Transjordan (Gn. 14:5; 2 Sa. 9:4); may be scenes of Jeroboam’s victories when he restored Israelite territory to its Solomonic extent (2 Ki. 14:25). However, the Israelites’

glory was to be short-lived, for **14**, the very same boundaries would mark the range of enemy success, from *Lebo Hamath* in the far north to the *valley of the Arabah*, by the Dead Sea. The LORD is the enemy of vainglorious boasting of military prowess: he has his agent to hand.

7:1–9:15 **The Lord God: judgment and hope**

The judgment that will not be (7:1–6) and the hope that will be (9:11–15) bracket the final section of Amos. Within these brackets, a judgment of fearful proportions (8:1–9:6) will fall but it will be a discriminating judgment (7:8f.; 9:7–10), not a total destruction. The title ‘the Sovereign Yahweh’ which was used nine times in chs. 1–6 occurs eleven times in chs. 7–9. The LORD is never so gloriously sovereign than when he keeps his gracious promises.

7:1–6 *The devastation that will not be*

Intercession was part of a prophet’s task (Gn. 20:7; Je. 7:16). Amos does not pray against judgment but against the particular form he sees judgment taking. (i) Vs 1–3, a locust plague so timed that survival is out of the question. (ii) Vs 4–6, a fire capable of devouring even sea and land. Amos pleaded against the utter destruction of *Jacob* and his plea was heard. The repetition of the matter underlines its certainty (Gn. 41:32); the contrast between a natural plague (*locusts*) and a supernatural visitation (*fire*) embraces every sort of plague. Totality is expressed by contrast (see introduction to 6:1–7). However, the total destruction of the LORD’s people is ruled out. Hope is established.

1 *He was preparing*, the hand of God was directly behind the event. *After the king’s share ...*, presumably a royal tax. The *second crop* was that on which the farmer would depend. Without this, destitution would follow. **3** *Relented* may mean ‘repented’, but does a truly ‘sovereign God’ change his mind? According to 1 Sa. 15:29 he ‘does not lie or repent (change his mind)’, but according to 1 Sa. 15:35 ‘the Lord repented that he had made Saul king’ (not as NIV). The former verse states the ‘absolute’ truth about God; the latter indicates that his unalterable will has in fact taken into account all the variableness of human experience and response. Consequently, it necessarily appears to us that God changes course and this is what the Bible calls his ‘repenting’: the will of God, though inflexible, is not unfeeling but takes loving regard of our weaknesses and foolishnesses in his perfect and sovereign ordering of his world. **4** *dried up ... devoured*, the same verb is used twice (lit. ‘devoured ... began to devour’). Such a *fire* inevitably points to the judgmental aspect of divine holiness. Only God’s fire could ‘eat up’ his total creation (2 Pet. 3:10, 12).

7:7–9 *Discriminating judgment*

Against the third vision described in this chapter Amos offers no prayer. The LORD comes as a master-builder to

inspect the finished wall. The Hebrew does not say that the wall had been built *true to plumb* (7) but simply that it had been built 'with a plumb-line'. In other words, the standards applied at the end had been there at and from the beginning. The Lord's people were 'constructed' according to the double specification of law and grace: as his redeemed they were to obey his law (Ex. 20:2ff.), but equally as his redeemed they were 'under the blood' (Ex. 24:8) and were given the whole sacrificial code so that, even as failures in the task of obedience, they could still live in the presence of the Holy One. It is the holding of these two in balance (see 5:25) that constitutes the true life of the people of God and marks them out from legalists (obeying the law is everything) on the one hand and ritualists (offering the sacrifices is everything) on the other. This is why Amos here makes no plea: the plumb-line, the twin standards of law and grace, are the very essence of the redeemed people; they can only evade this test by ceasing to be what they are.

8 *I will spare* ('pass over'), on Passover night they sheltered under the blood (Ex. 12:7), eating the lamb, dressed for pilgrimage (Ex. 12:11)—alive by grace, alive to walk in the LORD's way. But Amos's people were not true to the double standard of their constitution and could not receive 'passover' blessings. **9** The LORD goes on to specify what will perish in his judgment, for judgment using a plumb-line is discriminating. There is always a true people within a professing people, a believing company within a formal grouping, a Church within a church. The plumb-line will spare such (*cf.* 9:8–10), but it will devastate the *high places ... and the sanctuaries* which were festering points of delusion and *the house of Jeroboam* who 'did what was evil in the sight of the LORD ... and made Israel to sin' (2 Ki. 14:24). *High places* are man-made centres of false (Baal) religion where the LORD was worshipped with Baal-rites as if he was a Canaanite god. *Isaac* is used only here as a synonym for Israel. He was linked with Beersheba (Gn. 26:33; 28:10). Maybe in Amos's day they attempted to legitimize the rites at Beersheba (5:5) by urging the patronage of Isaac.

7:10–17 The inescapable word

The heart of this section is that *Amaziah the priest* sought to rid the land of Amos's message (12) but could escape it, neither for himself nor the land (17): *You say, 'Do not prophesy ... Therefore this is what the LORD says'* (16–17). The word is inescapable. The sequence of the passage (10–12), suggests that Amaziah did not persuade Jeroboam to act and therefore took up the cudgels himself. As priest of Bethel he was a man of significance and it cannot have been easy for Amos to outface his authority, but he did so by reiterating his call: *i.e.* by asserting the authority of the LORD as opposed to the human authority defying him (see Acts 5:29). **10** *Bethel* had figured in an unfavourable light in Amos's preaching (4:4; 5:5). No wonder Amaziah was stung! *Conspiracy*, authorities customarily use the 'scare'

of 'national security' to get their own way! Amos had to bear the burden of misrepresentation. *The land*, here we glimpse the sort of influence Amos was wielding.

12 *Seer* is not sarcastic or derogatory (Is. 29:10) but the advice to go and earn a living in Judah suggests that Amos is in the job for the money—and that a word against Israel would pay well there. **14** (see Introduction on Prophecy) The NIV correctly uses past tenses in a perfect rebuttal of the charge of prophesying to earn a living. In this regard Amos was well placed with an income from his flocks and crops. For him, (i) it was not a matter of personal capacity or inclination (*I was not a prophet*); nor (ii) of enrolment by or the attractiveness of a prophetic figure. *Prophet's son* (*cf.* 2 Ki. 2:3, 5; 6:1ff.; 9:1ff.), 'schools' of 'prophet's sons' were drawn to prophetic men, to receive instruction and share their work, but not so Amos. (iii) It was not his choice to be a prophet: he was settled as a shepherd farmer. **15** It was (iv) sovereign divine choice (*the LORD took me*), and this (v) brought him into the divine fellowship (*the Lord ... said to me*), within which (vi) he was commissioned as a prophet to *Israel*.

All the prophets who have left an account of their call agree with Amos on the essentials of divine initiative (Is. 6:1; Je. 1:5; Ezk. 1), fellowship (Is. 6:6–8; Je. 1:6–16); Ezk. 2:1f.) and appointment (Is. 6:9; Je. 1:5b, 10, 17–19; Ezk. 2:3ff.). **16–17** Amos was no mere preacher, as Amaziah would have him. His word was the word of the LORD (See Introduction on *Prophecy* and commentary on 1:1) and could not be dismissed. When such evasion occurs the word that could have saved becomes a word of judgment (17). In Amaziah's case the judgment brought suffering and degradation (*your wife will become a prostitute*), bitter bereavement (*by the sword*) and personal loss—a *priest* (10) in a *pagan* ('unclean') *country*. Amaziah was a case in point of religion without repentance before the word of God.

8:1–14 'In that day'

This is the central section of the third cycle of prophecies (see Outline of contents). It consists of an initial symbolic vision (1–2) developed by four messages beginning *In that day* (3, 9, 13) and *The days are coming* (11).

1–2 Ripe fruit: the end. As a crop comes to harvest as a result of its own inner development, so divine judgment coincides with the ripening fitness of people to be judged. **2** *The time is ripe*, or better 'The end has come'. Amos says he has seen *ripe fruit* (Heb. 'qayis') and the LORD responds that 'the end' (Heb. *qēs*) has come.

3–8 The first message. The end explained. **3** Their religion will not save them: its *songs* will become part of the general 'howlings'. In four savagely sharp lines Amos catches the utter horror of the end day: 'Many a corpse ... everywhere ... flung down ... silence!' But why should such a grim thing happen? **4** The general cause is stated: the oppression of those who have no means of protection or redress. On *needy* see 2:6b; on *poor* see 2:7c (NIV

oppressed). *Trample* ('pant after'), implies covetous intent. **5–6** The details of v 4 are spelled out: the triumph of the profit motive (i) over religious devotion (5); their punctiliousness (4:4) made them observe *New Moon*, the feast of the first of the month (Nu. 28:11), and the *Sabbath* but their hearts were in their money-making; (ii) over commercial honesty (5), selling less (*measure*) but for more money (*price*), tampering with weights and measures; (iii) over humanity—maybe *silver* (6) is a loan made to the *poor* (as in 2:7a) and *sandals* the purchase he has made on credit, while privately the trader has in mind to take the poor into slavery for defaulting on the debt (2 Ki. 4:1). *Sweepings*, selling worthless and reject goods. **7–8** The effect of this bowing to 'market forces' will be nationwide disruption and disaster figured as a earthquake, as dramatic, overwhelming and all-embracing as the Nile inundations (8). **7** *Pride*, used sarcastically. An oath requires an unalterable base on which to rest. Nothing is more stable than national pride! The LORD will *never forget* the land which allows economic forces to have the last word.

9–10 The second message. Enveloping darkness, bitter sorrow. Factually this darkness has been associated with an eclipse of the sun, along with an earthquake, recorded in June 763 BC, but this is marginal to the intended meaning: darkness once figured in judgment on Egypt (Ex. 10:21ff.) but now it is evidence of the LORD's anger with his own rebellious people. Once Egypt mourned its firstborn (Ex. 12:30), but now Israel laments with equal bitterness (10). *Sackcloth* implies a mourning directed towards God. But there is a time when even penitence is too late.

11–12 The third message. Spiritual famine. The day of trouble reveals how strong (or weak) inner resources are. A life nourished only on the sweets of this world is soon stripped to the bone when they are gone. Then comes hunger for an authoritative word. But the LORD's just recompense is grim: the neglected word becomes the absent word. Like the place of penitence (10), the place of the word (12) cannot be found. Without the revealed word mankind flits here and there, *from sea to sea*, the Dead Sea in the south and the Mediterranean Sea in the west, then *north* and *east*, boxing the compass. *But they will not find it*, first because they ignored it for so long, but secondly because the northern Israelites will go anywhere except back to Jerusalem where the LORD was still in residence (1:2). Even in despair, pride can be expressed!

13–14 The fourth message. The final fall. The hope of the future, the *young*, is held in mortgage for the sins of the past. When the word of God is not believed, people will believe anything and the cults will grab the young, taking them by the hand in order to take them by the throat, till they *fall* and cannot *rise again*. **14** *Shame* (see NIV mg.), 2 Ki. 17:30 records the worship of Ashimah, but the name as a word means 'guilt' and the double meaning would not have been lost on Amos: 'the guilt-laden worship of Ashimah'. For 'guilt' is one need that the cults can never

meet: nothing but the divinely provided shed blood can do that, in the OT and NT alike. *God of Beersheba* ('the way of or to Beersheba'), perhaps spiritual merit was attached to making the journey to Beersheba.

9:1–6 *The inescapable judgment*

(See Outline of contents.) The LORD himself superintends the destruction of the shrine: all the fabric from the top down; *all the people* (1). There will be no escape (1) in the supernatural realms (2), in the physical creation (3), or throughout the earth (4). Such cosmic rule belongs to the LORD (5–6): he can do what he has threatened. **2** *The depths of the grave* ('to Sheol'), the place-name for the abode of the dead. **3** *The serpent* was a mythological sea-monster of contemporary paganism, appearing in stormy opposition to the Creator God and his purpose for a stable world. Amos makes use of this in two ways. (i) Imaginatively: just as, for the sake of argument, Amos allows the possibility of climbing into heaven (2) so he allows the existence of such a monster, waiting to devour and to cut off an avenue of escape. More importantly, Amos uses this imagery (ii) theologically: what in pagan thought was the implacable enemy of the Creator is totally at the bidding of the LORD (*I will command*)—there for his divine purposes! Amos compels mythology to serve truth: the omnipresence and omnipotence of the only God.

God's power is effective in three ways. (i) Horizontally (5): the whole earth is subject to his touch; it offers no resistance but *melts*; *all* its peoples *mourn*; it loses stability, rising and falling like the *Nile*. (ii) Vertically (6): *the heavens*, for all their lofty inaccessibility, are his 'stairway' (better than *palace*, though not certain) where he moves in sovereign freedom; or, from another view, the heavens are his vaulted 'chamber', overarching and 'binding' (a possible reference of the word translated *foundation*) the earth together. (iii) Dynamically: 'forces' like *the waters of the sea* (6) do what he makes them do.

9:7–10 *Discriminating judgment*

(*cf.* the parallel in 7:7–9 and see Outline of contents.) This is how the judgment of the plumb-line will work out: there is no privileged position before God (7) such as guarantees an automatic immunity from divine moral scrutiny (8). Wherever there is sin there must be judgment. Yet it is all with discrimination so that *the house of Jacob* will not be destroyed out of hand but will be sieved (8–10) and specified impurity will be gathered out. The pattern of these verses is:

- (a¹) v 7 The groundlessness of complacency
- (b¹) v 8a–d The inevitability of judgment on sin
- (b²) vs 8e–9 The discriminating nature of judgment
- (a²) v 10 The fate of the complacent

7 At first sight this is a typical Amos-type statement of monotheism: there is only one God and every movement

and migration on earth is equally his work. *Israel* came from *Egypt*, the *Philistines* from *Caphtor*, the *Arameans* from *Kir*, and (Amos would allow us to add) every movement of peoples, voluntarily or under compulsion, that happened before that or has happened since is under the LORD's command. The LORD is indeed LORD of history. This is true but it is not the central thrust of the verse. All Amos's hearers would have agreed so far but would have been horrified by the assertion which he is using this truth to enforce that the *Israelites* are *the same to me as the Cushites!* It is not that Amos is denying Israel's special position—which he affirmed in 3:2, and will affirm in vs 8–9. What he is teaching is this: Israel is associating 'speciality'—the privilege of being the LORD's people—with a date and fact in the past, the exodus. But considered merely as a date and historical fact, the exodus is no different from the migratory experiences of Philistines and Arameans.

A popular song of the 1950s, still wheeled out for an airing at Christmas says 'Man shall live for evermore because of Christmas Day'—as if the mere occurrence and passing of a date was the key to eternal life. Certainly, without Christmas day there would be no salvation, but the date does not save. Everything depends on what happens next, and in particular whether there is a personal response to the Saviour who was born and whether that response is validated by the moral commitment of ensuing life. In the same way there was nothing special about the people of the exodus, any more than the *Cushites*, unless they respond to the grace of divine salvation by commitment to the holiness of obedience. It is not past dates which the LORD looks upon, but the validation of the past by holiness and abhorrence of sin in the present.

The *Cushites* occupied land from Aswan south to Khartoum, typical in the OT of earth's remotest bounds. The Philistines came from *Caphtor* (Crete), moving from the Aegean area to settle on the coast of Palestine. *Kir*, see ch. 1:5. **8** *Surely* ('Behold' or 'Look at it this way'), what the LORD sees is not a date in history but the moral quality of those who claim to be his people, and where there is merely complacent reliance on a past date, devoid of present concern to flee sin and follow holiness, there can only be a fearful expectation of judgment (Heb. 10:26ff.). **8–9** *Yet*, a very strong word ('But always safeguarding this fact that ...'). *Kemel* (lit. 'pebble'), the word is only used elsewhere in 2 Sa. 17:13, and the NIV's suggestion that 'pebble' might mean the 'kernel' of good, sound grain, is without parallel. But in any case such a translation would contradict the ordinary significance of a *sieve*, which selects out the worthless and lets the good filter through. The picture here is rather of sieving soil to remove stones. Amos, consistently with his vision of the plumb-line (7:7–9) insists on a principle of discrimination within divine judgment. Nothing will be allowed to remain in the LORD's people that does not belong and at the same time, no soil will be removed with the pebbles.

10 But who are these 'pebbles', destined for removal? Not just *the sinners among my people* but a particular class of sinner: those who are complacent in the face of divine judgment, those who are sinners and who assert that sin is a permitted way of life by discounting the reality of coming judgment. *Overtake or meet*, i.e. neither catch up with us out of the past nor face us in the future, as if they were saying, 'There is nothing in our past to merit judgment, nor will there be in the future.' This is not the voice of those (the people who pass the plumb-line test in 7:7–9) who are building their lives on the level of grace with the straight edge of law, but of complacent, uncaring sinners in a world of make-believe. Neither for Amos nor for us is this a word intended to put our salvation at peril. But it reminds us that there is a double seal on the foundation of the LORD's house: 'the LORD knows those who are his' (2 Tim. 2:19) (hence our security in the unchanging will of the God who chose and took us for himself), and 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity' (see 2 Pet. 1:5–11) (the moral determination which is evidence of elect status).

9:11–15 *The hope that will be*

Amos brings the third cycle of his messages full circle (see Outline of contents). It began with a drawing back from the utter destruction of the people (7:1–6) and now ends with an affirmation of glorious promises for the future. They fall into three sections: royal (11–12), creational (13) and personal (14–15) promises.

11–12 **Royal promises.** In one sense David's *tent* fell when the northern tribes withdrew (1 Ki. 12), and Amos may be looking back to that and forward to the restoration of the full unity of the people of God under the coming 'David' (Ezk. 34:23; Ho. 3:4–5; Lk. 1:32). Or, knowing as he did that Jerusalem was doomed (2:5), Amos may be envisioning the end of even the remaining tatters of David's tent as if it had already happened. Or, since *fallen* can be translated 'falling' or 'about to fall', he may have in mind the deterioration which he foresees in Judah and its ultimate collapse. In any case, the vision is of Messianic fulfilment. The originally intended glories will be realized (*as it used to be*; cf. Is. 1:26–27) and the promised world-empire of David (Pss. 2:7f.; 72:8–11; 110:5–7; Is. 9:7; 11:4–10) will come into being.

12 *Edom* was accused (1:11) of ceaseless enmity and this matches the biblical record of the relationship between Edom and the LORD's people, from Gn. 27:41 and Nu. 20:14 onwards. This leads in turn to the use of 'Edom' as a symbol of world-enmity to the LORD and his people at the end of history. Also, David was the only king to conquer and hold Edom in subjection (2 Sa. 8:14) and because of this 'Edom' came to symbolize the defeat of all enmity by the coming messianic 'David' and his dominion over the whole world (Is. 34; 63:1–6; Ezk. 35; *etc.*). Also Amos singles out *Edom* in order to affirm that the coming Davidic

rule will bring all enmity to an end and introduce a new oneness on earth.

That bear my name, ‘over whom my name is proclaimed’. The words suggest both royal dominion (2 Sa. 12:28) and also the oneness of marriage (Is. 4:1). Certainly the coming King will assert his sovereign rule and erstwhile Gentiles will acknowledge it, but after that their status is not of second class citizens and their role is not one of subservience: they become part of the ‘bride’ of the Christ. Rightly, James (Acts 15:15) sees this prediction as fulfilled in missionary and evangelistic terms, the outreach of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ bringing in the formerly separated Gentiles, for within the OT the kingdom of Messiah is one of spreading peace (Is. 9:7) not spreading war! Naturally, since the metaphor used for the Messiah is a kingly one, he does kingly things and extends his kingdom by force of arms (Is. 11; 14; *etc.*). However, this is metaphorical: it is the high truths about their God which constitute the two-edged sword the Lord’s people carry and by which they subdue nations (Ps. 149:6–8).

13 Creational promises. Amos envisages an agricultural economy so prosperous that one year’s harvest is still being reaped when the ploughman turns out to prepare for the next year; one year’s vintage is still being trodden when next year’s seed is waiting to be planted. The clue to understanding this description follows: when man fell into sin there was a sad consequence in the physical creation. Instead of the Garden of Eden showering bounty on the man and his wife, now only grudgingly, under pressure, and through hard labour would a living be extracted from the soil (Gn. 3:17–19). The reward of labour and the spontaneous bounty of the Messianic day, therefore, indicates that the curse has ended and is gone. Adam was king in Eden (Gn. 1:28), heir and monarch of the abundance implied in the permission to eat of every tree in the Garden save one (Gn. 2:16–17). But when sin came, liberality dried to a hard-won trickle. When, however, its rightful king returns to Eden (Is. 11:6–9) all the energies, pent up while sin abounded and death reigned, will explode in an endless burgeoning as creation itself hastens to lay its tribute at the feet of him whose right it is to reign.

14–15 Personal promises. *Bring back my exiled*, a possible translation but one that suggests that the prediction is of the return from Babylon. To avoid this we should translate the phrase ‘bring back from captivity’ (in the same general sense as in Ps. 126, where everything that binds, limits and oppresses the LORD’s people is removed). However, ‘restore the fortunes’ (NIV mg.) is equally possible and more suited to this place in Amos. The LORD will gather his *people* (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:14–16) and just as the ‘royal’ metaphor was extended to picture the extending kingdom in military terms, so the gathering of the people is seen here in territorial terms of re-occupying and re-building, in a threefold picture. (i) Recovery: everything that was lost, ruined or marred in the past will be recovered and restored—nothing of the damage sin has

done will be left. (ii) Enjoyment and fulfilment: to plant and not to eat is a symbol of the frustration and the lack of fulfilment that sin brings into life (Dt. 28:30; Zp. 1:13). (iii) Eternal security: the final words of Amos set a divine seal on the promises: *says the LORD your God. The LORD*, the God of the exodus whose unchanging nature (Ex. 3:15) it is to save his people. *Your*, singular, covering the LORD’s people as a whole and in their individuality. It means not ‘by your choice’ but, ‘who has pledged himself to you’ (Dt. 7:7f; Ezk. 20:5ff.; Jn. 15:16; Eph. 1:4, 11). *Says*, lit. (a perfect tense) ‘has said’. All the Messianic promises—the rightful king, the new creation and the perfected people—are brought under an umbrella of certainty: ‘on these things the LORD your God has made up his mind.’¹

¹ Motyer, J. A. (1994). Amos. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 792–808). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.