Amos

# Introduction

In English Bibles the Amos scroll comes only third in the Twelve Prophets, and thus way behind Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel (not quite so far behind in the orders in the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Bible, but still behind). Yet Amos was the first prophet whose messages were collected into a scroll. As far as we know, he was the first prophet to confront either Ephraim or Judah as a whole with a fundamental critique of its life and worship, with a declaration that Yahweh intended to bring terrible calamity to the nation, and with an exhortation therefore to have real recourse to him. Over against Elijah and Elisha and Hosea and Isaiah,

his particular contribution to the biblical message is that the affair of God is the affair of man; the affair of the fellow-man who is so severely and constantly hurt by man, and so inflexibly and relentlessly championed and defended by God. In the history of the active exposition of the Bible it is not for nothing that on the one hand Amos has been so frequently neglected and that on the other he has been the classical biblical witness for all the movements in which the conscience of the Church has been reawakened in this direction, and therefore to a repudiation of the base and dangerous overlooking of this basic element in Christian truth and the revealed Word of God Himself.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Like Hosea (and Jonah), Amos preached in Ephraim, but like Joel (and Obadiah and Micah), he was a Judahite. Like Hosea, he preached during the time of Jeroboam II, but the preface to his scroll also names the contemporary Judahite king, an in initial pointer that his message was taken to Judah in due course, like Hosea’s. Like Hosea, he becomes part of his message (7:10-17)—in his case, Ephraim’s treatment of him expresses the way it treats Yahweh. Unlike Hosea, the focus of message lies not on the faithless nature of Ephraim’s worship or its faithless political policies but on wrongdoing within the community, in particular a failure to expresses mutual faithfulness in the exercise of power, which compromises Ephraim’s wholehearted worship in a different way.

Hosea and Amos may have overlapped, but we have no record of their meeting and there is no indication of their knowing each other’s message. Possibly Hosea worked in the capital, Samaria, and Amos stayed in the sanctuary town, Beth-el, nearer home (cf. 7:10-17), where he could find a hearing both in the sanctuary and in the public square. He would be able to reach the Samarians, and specifically the members of the administration and other key people, when they made their regular visits to their nearest sanctuary at Beth-el.

## A Message from God in a Context, Powerfully Expressed

Amos’s differences from Hosea reflect a difference in the period when he prophesies. Whereas Hosea preaches in the context of the political situation of the last three decades of Ephraim’s life, from about the 750s to the 720s, Amos preaches only at the beginning of that period, towards the end of the years of stability and security during the reigns of Jeroboam and Uzziah in the first half of the eighth century, before Assyria started to take an interest in affairs in Syria-Palestine (see the Introduction to this commentary). It is also a time of more settled relationships with both Aram and Judah. But it is also (Amos indicates) a time in which not everyone shared in national prosperity, and in which people with power, shrewdness, and resources are able to improve their own position further at the expense of people with less power, shrewdness, and resources.

Amos was a well-to-do sheep-farmer (1:1) who was also well-acquainted with international affairs and was good with words. Even as a foreigner, he could relate on an equal basis with the well-to-do professional people, the priesthood, and the administration in Ephraim. It’s therefore not so difficult for the kind of people who write and read commentaries on Amos to relate to what he has to say. But we are not on his side; he is confronting people like us.

His words are something he “saw,” which fits the way he is described as having visions (7:1-9; 8:1-3). He is the most skilled rhetorician among the Prophets in the sense that he is gifted in the way he goes about seeking to persuade people to respond to his message.[[2]](#footnote-2) He has a great gift for irony.

* He declares judgment on the nations around, and on Judah—but he is softening up Ephraim for when he declares its judgment (1:3—2:16)
* He affirms that Yahweh has acknowledged Israel—but he is softening up the people for a declaration that he is going to attend to them (3:2)
* He asks questions (3:3-8)
* He has a worrying doctrine of the remnant (3:12)
* He invites people to worship—in order to sin (4:4-5; cf. 5:4-6, 14-15)
* He invites Ephraim to listen to a funeral dirge—one that marks its own death (5:1-2)
* He turns upside down people’s expectations of Yahweh’s day (5:18-20)
* He turns upside down their assumptions about the importance of worship (5:21-25)
* He takes up a prophet’s vocation to pray, but then puts it down (7:1-9; 8:1-3)
* He turns upside down people’s assumptions about what makes someone a prophet (7:10-17)
* He turns into bad news the fact that we are never beyond Yahweh’s reach (9:1-6)
* He denies the uniqueness of Yahweh’s having brought Israel out of Egypt (9:7)
* Yet when you think it’s all bad news, he also reverses that assumption (9:8-15).[[3]](#footnote-3)

So he is a gifted communicator, but he is a failure. He is like Jesus. The nearest we get to a hint from the scroll or from 2 Kings that anyone took any notice of him (until the later disciples who provided the preface in 1:1) is that someone wrote down the story in 7:10-17. For all we know, to write down the messages that he thought should be preserved he had to hire a secretary who just did it for the money. Maybe he undertook this action after the event narrated in 7:10-17. Maybe it was only the fall of Samaria that led to his being taken seriously (after his death?) because he was thereby proved right.

As is the case with Hosea, there are references to Jerusalem, Judah and the Davidic line within Amos that would ring different bells in Judah from the ones they would ring in Ephraim (see especially 1:2; 2:4-5; 6:1; 9:11-15).

## Structure and Outline

There is no basis for thinking that the prophecies in Amos are in chronological order, any more than they are in other prophetic books. So what is their order? In the scroll’s opening and closing chapters (see especially 1:3—2:16 and 7:1—8:3) its structure and divisions are well-signposted and interpreters broadly agree on them. In the middle of the book (especially chapters 5—6) short units follow one another with fewer signposts as to their interrelationship, and different interpreters offer different accounts of their structure. In those chapters, then, I offer my way of reading the logic of the sequence, but readers of the scroll may also learn from other ways of filling in the gaps.[[4]](#footnote-4)

1:1 A preface by disciples of Amos

Part One

One long exposition flanked by an introduction and a conclusion

1:2 An introduction by Amos: Yahweh roars from Zion

1:3—3:2 How Yahweh looks at the nations and at his people

3:3-8 A conclusion by Amos: The lion has roared

Part Two

A collection of shorter messages turned into four combative compilations

3:9—4:3 Confrontation reversed

4:4—5:3 You wouldn’t turn back

5:4-27 Where to have recourse

6:1-14 The people who are relaxed

Part Three

Five visions providing the framework for more confrontation

7:1-17 Three revelations and a clash with a priest

8:1-14 A fourth revelation and a series of critiques

9:1-15 A fifth revelation and some good news

# Amos 1:1—Preface

## Translation

1The words of ‘Āmôs, who was among the sheep-farmers from Təqôa’, which he saw[[5]](#footnote-5) concerning Yiśrā’ēl in the days of ‘Uzziyyāh king of Yəhûdāh and in the days of Yārob’ām ben Yô’āš king of Yiśrā’ēl, two years before the earthquake.

## Interpretation

On this preface, presumably provided by Amos’s disciples, see also the comments on Hosea 1:1. The expression “the words of so-and-so” distinguishes the beginning of Amos from the other prophetic books except Jeremiah; it is a nice coincidence that Amos’s words manifest such rhetorical skill. The expression is more common in Proverbs (e.g., 30:1), so it is paradoxical that a prophetic scroll should begin in this way when the subsequent form of Amos’s words will identify them as Yahweh’s words more consistently than is the case with (for instance) Hosea, Joel, or Micah. In other words, Amos talks more *as* Yahweh than they do, and less *about* Yahweh. But Amos was the first prophet to have a scroll named after him, so there was no precedent for knowing how to describe one, and the unpretentious expression which appears in the compilation of aphorisms in Proverbs was perhaps up for appropriation.[[6]](#footnote-6) It is also ironic that it’s been suggested that Amos’s name (from the verb *‘āmas*) suggests he was “burdened” in the sense of tongue-tied,[[7]](#footnote-7) like Moses (actually the name more likely denotes him as someone whom Yahweh “carried”).

Like other prophets, Amos is identified by something beyond his name to make sure we don’t confuse him with another Amos. The identification comes not in the form of his father’s name (as is the case with Hosea and Joel) but by telling us where he hails from (as is the case with Micah). A Teqoa in Galilee is known from post-biblical times;[[8]](#footnote-8) if Amos came from there, he would be preaching in his own country, like Hosea. But his subsequent references to Zion and Jerusalem, and Amaziah’s suggestion that he should go (back) to preach in Judah, suggest that he comes from the Teqoa half way between Jerusalem and Hebron (cf. Jer. 6:1). He was not the only smart person who came from there (see 2 Sam. 14:2); Teqoa’s reputation for smart thinking may be another factor that led to his scroll’s beginning with that phrase “the words of Amos” which suggests a collection of aphorisms. Teqoa is on the edge of the dry side of the Judahite mountains and thus lies in sheep-pasturing country; hence the phrase “the Teqoa wilderness” (2 Chron. 20:20). Amos is not a shepherd (a *rō’ēh*, the word in v. 2) but a sheep-farmer (*nōqēd*;cf. Tg; see further 7:14). The word is otherwise used in the First Testament only of the king of Moab (2 Kings 3:4), though it could have been used of the notorious Nabal (1 Sam. 25) who operated a little way south of Teqoa—in Carmel. Amos is a significant figure in the Judahite agribusiness.

The expression “the words of Amos” is complemented by the description of these words as ones that he “saw” (*ḥāzāh*). The verb is used elsewhere of prophets “seeing” things (Isa. 1:1; 2:1; 13:1; Mic. 1:1; Hab. 1:1) and it generates the noun for a vision (*ḥāzôn*; e.g., Isa. 1:1; Obad. 1) as well as Amaziah’s description of Amos as a seer (Amos 7:12), though for his visions Amos himself uses the more common verb *rā’āh* (7:1, 4, 7; 8:1; 9:1). To speak of Amos seeing his words is to indicate that though they were his, they were also something that came to him; he received them.[[9]](#footnote-9) One should not be literalistic about the “seeing” metaphor; it compares with the way English can use words such as revelation and vision.

Amos saw these things concerning Israel—that is, Ephraim (contrast the prefaces to Micah and Isaiah). Unlike Hosea, Amos never actually refers to the northern kingdom as Ephraim, though even in Hosea there can be uncertainty about whether references to Israel point to the northern kingdom or to the people of Yahweh as a whole. In principle this question arises more systematically in Amos, and one might stretch “Israel” to include Judah on this first occurrence. It is worth noting that even the messages about the rebellions of other nations in 1:3—2:3 are actually “about” Israel, in either sense. Amos saw these things in the time of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam of Ephraim, who both reigned roughly 790 to 750. The provision of Uzziah’s date helps later Judahite readers relate Amos to their own story, and the naming of Uzziah before Jeroboam suggests that this preface was formulated in Judah. In a sense the Amos scroll is “more about Judah than about Israel. For otherwise it would never have been preserved or canonized and we would never have known about Amos at all.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

The earthquake apparently happened in Uzziah’s time (cf. Zech. 14:5). There are some archeological indications of a catastrophe about 760 that could link with it,[[11]](#footnote-11) and it apparently caused the slight depression between Mount Scopus and the Mount of Olives where the Al-Muqased Hospital is now located.[[12]](#footnote-12) Presumably one point of referring to it is that it confirmed Amos’s warnings of disaster and that it was one of the factors that led to the community acknowledging that Amos had been sent by Yahweh, and thus to its holding onto his words. The time reference may indicate when he began to prophesy; it need not imply that he prophesied only for a year or two or that all his messages come from before the earthquake. Indeed, one might turn the inferences about the two years on their head. The earthquake reverberates through the scroll (e.g., 3:14-15; 9:1),[[13]](#footnote-13) and this opening note could remind people listening to Amos to keep in mind that his prophecies about such matters have already received partial fulfillment, so….[[14]](#footnote-14)

## Theological Implications

1. We are reading the words of Amos: the scroll invites us to assume that God can make use of our human wisdom. But we are reading words that Amos saw: they did not just have their origin in his insight and expertise. As human actions can also be God’s actions, so can human words also be God’s words. One needs both levels of explanation in order to understand their nature.
2. We are reading words that belong in a particular historical context and need to be understood in light of their context. But we are reading words that were taken from the place where they were first uttered and at which they were directed, to another place where they needed to be heard. We need to see how they apply in our place.
3. We are reading words that were confirmed by a subsequent event, which is another reason to take them seriously.

See also the comments on Hosea 1:1.

# Part One: Amos 1:2—3:8 The Lion Roars

Amos 1:2 as an introduction to the scroll from Amos’s own words: the lion roars or will roar. The main bulk of Part One (1:3—3:2) comprises an indictment and declaration of intent regarding the peoples around Ephraim, eventually focusing at length on Ephraim itself. A conclusion about Yahweh’s activity and his speaking (3:3-8) then ends with the declaration that the lion has indeed roared.[[15]](#footnote-15)

# Amos 1:2—Yahweh Roars from Zion

## Translation

2So he said:

Yahweh—he roars from Ṣiyyôn,

gives voice[[16]](#footnote-16) from Yərûšālayim.

And the shepherds’ pastures[[17]](#footnote-17) wither,[[18]](#footnote-18)

the Karmel’s head dries up.[[19]](#footnote-19)

## Interpretation

After Amos’s disciples’ further introductory “so he said” comes a neat double bicolon with parallelism in both lines (abcb’c’ and abca’b’c’). “The first word that Amos takes into his mouth” is “Yahweh”; he is the one with whom Amos’s words (v. 1) have to do.”[[20]](#footnote-20) An opening declaration about Yahweh roaring and giving voice from Jerusalem where he dwells on Mount Zion (cf. Ps. 50:1-6) is especially proper to a Judahite prophet. The declaration follows nicely on the reference to the earthquake: see the collocation in Joel 3:16 [4:16], which links it with the earth shaking. Joel is there speaking of the ultimate day of Yahweh. Like Joel earlier in his scroll, Amos is speaking of Yahweh’s acting on what we might call “*a* day of Yahweh” (cf. 5:18-20), acting decisively and devastatingly in the context of Ephraim’s life now. It will be an earth-shattering coming (cf. e.g., Nah. 1:2-6). The verse nuances the earlier statement that the scroll is about Israel and again forewarns people listening to the scroll that they should not be too ebullient as they hear the declarations about other peoples that will begin in 1:3. The verbs in v. 2a will recur in 3:4, 8, with the implications that the general statement here in v. 2a has been illustrated in 1:3—3:2. This opening statement thus draws in its readers, in a way that shapes and guides their interpretation of what follows.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Notwithstanding the talk of seeing in v. 1, the scene has a “sinister character…: everything comes only by hearing; nothing is seen.”[[22]](#footnote-22) While the declaration would be annoying if Amos shared it in Ephraim, another significance of its appearing here is to remind Amos’s later Judahite audience not to think that his message applies only to Ephraim. The thunder coming out from Jerusalem affects the wilderness pasturage (Judahite readers would be wise to think of places like Teqoa) as well as the forests, orchards, and vineyards of a place like Mount Carmel in Ephraim.

## Theological Implications

1. Jerusalem is the place where Yahweh dwelt, and from which he has spoken powerfully and destructively. “By roaring is signified… the terrible voice of God.”[[23]](#footnote-23) “It is because God loves justice that he roars.”[[24]](#footnote-24) “Amos had a vision of God’s power that could and would strike in the natural world and have long-term effects in the human world.”[[25]](#footnote-25)
2. The word for “wither” is also a word for “mourn,” or has a homonym with that meaning. Perhaps withering is the pastures’ way of mourning, as human beings put on sack and cut their hair (cf. 8:10).

# Amos 1:3—3:2—How Yahweh Looks at the Nations and Us

## Translation

3Yahweh said[[26]](#footnote-26) this:

For three acts of rebellion[[27]](#footnote-27) by Dammeśeq,

and for four, I will not take it back,

for their threshing[[28]](#footnote-28) the Gil’ad with iron boards.

4I’ll send off fire against Ḥăzā’ēl’s household,[[29]](#footnote-29)

and it will consume Ben-hădad’s citadels.

5I’ll break Dammeśeq’s gate-bar,

and cut off the one seated[[30]](#footnote-30) from the Valley of Trouble,

The one who holds the club from the House of Delight,[[31]](#footnote-31)

and the people of Aram will go into exile to Qîr—[[32]](#footnote-32)

Yahweh has said.[[33]](#footnote-33)

6Yahweh said this:

For three acts of rebellion by ‘Azzāh,

and for four, I will not take it back,

For their exiling an entire community,[[34]](#footnote-34)

for handing over to ‘Ĕdôm.

7I’ll send off fire against ‘Azzāh’s wall,

and it will consume its citadels.

8And I’ll cut off the one seated from ‘Ašdôd,

and the one who holds the club from ‘Ašqəlôn.

I’ll turn back my hand against ‘Eqrôn,

and what remains of the Pəlištîm will perish,

the Lord[[35]](#footnote-35) Yahweh has said.

9Yahweh said this:

For three acts of rebellion by Ṣōr,

and for four, I will not take it back,

For their handing over an entire exile community to ‘Ĕdôm,

and not being mindful[[36]](#footnote-36) of a brothers’ pact.

10I’ll send off fire against Ṣōr’s wall,

and it will consume its citadels.

11Yahweh said this:

For three acts of rebellion by ‘Ĕdôm,

and for four, I will not take it back,

For his pursuing his brother with the sword,

and destroying[[37]](#footnote-37) his wombs.[[38]](#footnote-38)

His anger tore perpetually,

his fury—it kept watch[[39]](#footnote-39) forever.[[40]](#footnote-40)

12I’ll send off fire against Tȇman,

and it will consume the citadels of Boṣrāh.

13Yahweh said this:

For three acts of rebellion by the ‘Ammônites,

and for four, I will not take it back,

For their tearing open[[41]](#footnote-41) the pregnant woman in the Gil’ad,

in order to extend their territory.

14I’ll set fire to Rabbah’s wall,

and it will consume its citadels,

With a shout on a day of battle,

with a storm on a day of hurricane.

15Their king[[42]](#footnote-42) will go into exile,

he[[43]](#footnote-43) and his officials altogether,

Yahweh has said.

2:1Yahweh said this:

For three acts of rebellion by Mô’āb,

and for four, I will not take it back,

for its burning the bones of the king of ‘Ĕdôm for lime.

2I’ll send off fire against Mô’āb,

and it will consume the citadels of Qəriyyôt.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Mô’āb will die with a boom,

with a shout and with the sound of a horn.

3I’ll cut off the one holding authority from within it,

and all its officials I’ll slay with him,

Yahweh has said.

4Yahweh said this:

For three acts of rebellion by Yəhûdāh,

and for four, I will not take it back,

For their rejecting Yahweh’s instruction,

and not keeping his decrees.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Their lies have led them astray,

after which their ancestors walked.

5I’ll send off fire against Yəhûdāh,

and it will consume the citadels of Yərûšālaim.

6Yahweh said this:

For three acts of rebellion by Yiśrā’ēl,

and for four, I will not take it back,

Because of their selling a faithful[[46]](#footnote-46) person for silver

and a needy person for a pair of shoes,[[47]](#footnote-47)

7People who trample on[[48]](#footnote-48) the head of poor people, onto the dirt of the ground,[[49]](#footnote-49)

and turn aside the path of lowly people.

A man and his father go to a girl

in order to[[50]](#footnote-50) treat my sacred name as ordinary.

8On sequestered clothes

they turn aside beside every altar.

Wine of people who’ve been required to pay compensation

they drink in their God’s house.[[51]](#footnote-51)

9Whereas I[[52]](#footnote-52) had destroyed the ‘Ĕmōrite from before them,

one whose height was like a cedar’s height,

and he was stout like oaks,

And I had destroyed his fruit above,

and his roots below,

10And whereas I had got you up

from the country of Mișrayim,

And had enabled you to go through the wilderness

for forty years

to possess the country of the ‘Ĕmōrite,

11and had set up some of your children as prophets,

and some of your young ones as dedicated people,

It’s also so, isn’t it,[[53]](#footnote-53) Yiśrā’ēIites (Yahweh’s proclamation),

12that you got the dedicated people to drink wine,

And the prophets you ordered,

“You will not prophesy.”

13Here I am, groaning[[54]](#footnote-54) under[[55]](#footnote-55) you

as a cart groans,

full of its sheaves.[[56]](#footnote-56)

14But flight will perish from the swift,

the vigorous will not get a firm hold on energy,

The strong man will not save his life,

15the one who wields a bow will not stand,

The swift of foot will not save [his life],[[57]](#footnote-57)

the one who rides a horse will not save his life,

16The one who is firm of mind among the strong men

will take flight naked on that day (Yahweh’s proclamation).

3:1Listen to this message which Yahweh spoke for you, Yiśrā’ēlites,[[58]](#footnote-58) for the entire family which I got up from the country of Mișrayim:

2Only you have I acknowledged,[[59]](#footnote-59)

of all the families on the face of the ground.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Therefore I will attend[[61]](#footnote-61) to you,

for all your acts of waywardness.

## Interpretation

The main part of the scroll begins with a series of declarations that Yahweh intends to act against the peoples in Ephraim’s region and then against Ephraim itself. Although they are mostly peoples with whom Ephraim had been in conflict at one time or another, they are not as such Ephraim’s enemies against whom Amos is declaring curses, though neither are they Ephraim’s friends. The section is a substantial, carefully-composed creation, combining pattern with variation, straightforwardness with adroitness, intelligibility with rhetoric, coolness with horror, factuality with forthrightness, the political with the personal, ethics with theology, and human skill with divine authority.

Yahweh first declares that he will act against Ephraim’s neighbors for their wrongdoing, mostly for what we might call war crimes, though the war crimes (as is commonly the case with war) are an incidental offshoot of a concern with economics and with trade.[[62]](#footnote-62) “The cumulative, cascading references to violence” are “an assault on the mind.”[[63]](#footnote-63) He begins with Damascus, Gaza, and Tyre to the northeast and west, comes to Edom, Ammon, and Moab to the southeast, then concludes with Judah. He thus begins with three peoples with whom Ephraim had virtually no family relationship except that its ancestors originally came from Aram, of which Damascus is the capital, then comes to three further peoples that descended from Abraham, like Israel, and finally confronts brother Judah, before turning his attention to Ephraim itself.

Each declaration opens with the solemn affirmation that “Yahweh said this” (conventionally, “Thus says the Lord”), the kind of declaration with which a king’s messenger would open an account of something that his master has sent him to say (e.g., Exod. 5:10; Num. 22:16; 1 Kings 20:2, 5; 2 Kings 18:19, 29, 31). It indicates, “You must take what I am about to say with absolute seriousness, because these are not my words: they are the king’s/King’s.” Four of the seven messages close with a recapitulation of such an affirmation, and to underscore the point one of them adding the reminder that it is “the Lord” that we are talking about. Amos thus incorporates some variation in the form of introductions and conclusions rather than seeking uniformity. The messages’ addressees are not identified. Even Amos’s presumed actual Ephraimite listeners are referred to in the third person until Yahweh turns on them in 2:10.

Amos maintains a consistency about the way each message begins: “For three acts of rebellion by x, and for four, I will not take it back, for…” Numerical sequences such as “three… four” can imply approximation, like “three or four” in English (e.g., Jer. 36:23), or can suggest “a significant number” (cf. Mic. 5:5 [4]), or can intend precision (e.g., Prov. 30:15, 18, 21, 29). In the last instances, the real interest may lie in number four, and something analogous obtains here. Amos goes on to refer to only one act, so that the sequence suggests “a number of acts of rebellion, but finally this one, which was one too many and/or by its nature could not be ignored.” The parallel with Proverbs indicates another link between “the words of Amos” and the words of other smart teachers in a place such as Teqoa; Amos is adapting their form of speech in order to bring a message about what “Yahweh has said.”[[64]](#footnote-64) The acts are acts of rebellion against Yahweh, even though the first six peoples do not belong to Yahweh’s particular people.

For each of them, the final act has generated a determination on Yahweh’s part not to “take it back.” What is the “it”? One way or another, the threat indicates that the nation has been guilty of too much rebellion. Perhaps the “it” is Yahweh’s decision to act in punishment, with the threat raising suspense, since the nature of the punishment will be indicated only a line or two later. Or perhaps the expression refers to taking back the people into their position as underlings of Yahweh.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Yahweh speaks mostly in the terms of typical events of war, which regularly leads to the exiling and enslaving of the losers and to the crimes against women. It’s maybe the accumulation of the actions and their extreme and ongoing nature that offends him.[[66]](#footnote-66) He could probably have switched some of the accusations around and still have been accurate. Likewise he describes the calamities he will send in terms of the typical events of war: the setting on fire of city and walls (with variation between “sending off” fire and “setting” fire), the destruction of the fortified high points in a city, the deposing or execution of a ruler and of his officials, and the exile of populations. Thus it is hazardous to try to relate every message to particular acts on the part of individual peoples or to specific subsequent events. Amos uses typical language in order to make a general point. He says nothing about the human agents of the calamities that will come and speaks only of what Yahweh will do—fire often being Yahweh’s means of acting. Isaiah 29:6 refers to Yahweh as the agent of fire consuming, along with earthquake, a loud voice, storm, and hurricane, all of which also feature here.

There are some particularities relating to each people, such as the well-known rulers of Aram and the telling names of some places in the message about them (Valley of Trouble, House of Delight, Qir), the elimination of the “remainder” of the Philistines, the references to brotherhood, the encouragement of anger, the burning of the Edomite king’s bones, and then the distinctive description of Judah’s rebellion.

If Amos delivered his message at an occasion such as a festival, perhaps at Beth-el (cf. 7:10-17), his critique and declaration of judgment on Ephraim’s neighbors would be received with appreciation. People might be familiar with words of judgment declared in Yahweh’s name against enemies (cf. 1 Kings 22).

**Amos 1:3-5.** Damascus is the leading city in Aram, Ephraim’s northeastern neighbor, though it may be misleading to call it Aram’s capital, since it is not clear that the Arameans formed one political unit. Gilead is the Ephraimite region east of the Jordan. The name commonly refers to the central part of that area, from Lake Galilee to the Dead Sea, but it here likely includes Bashan to the north (the Golan Heights), the area immediately south of Aram which was vulnerable to it in times of conflict.

The boards to which Amos refers (v. 3) are platforms on which a farmer stands while his oxen pull the platform over wheat to break up the ears and separate the grain from the chaff. The boards become a metaphor for the devastation that invasion brings to a country. The picture of their being iron is a further figure to heighten the destructiveness; it may denote that the boards are inset underneath with “teeth” of iron. More than a century’s conflict between Aram and Ephraim (see 1 Kings 11—2 Kings 13) came to a climax with Haza’el’s obliterating the Ephraimite army in about 800, when he “made them like the dust at threshing” (2 Kings 13:7). So Amos uses the familiar image of threshing to describe Aram’s takeover of Gilead in particular (for which see 2 Kings 10:32-33). “Used metaphorically, the image evoked is one of destruction in which the enemy had so thoroughly ridden roughshod over the Israelite army that their battered and lifeless corpses were left split and cracked, the ephemeral trappings of glory blowing away in the wind.”[[67]](#footnote-67)

Ben-hadad (v. 4) was the name of Haza’el’s son and successor (2 Kings 13:3), though it also seems to have been a kind of throne name applied to a number of Aramaean kings. If Amos is referring to Haza’el’s son, it gives specificity in the parallelism to the reference to Haza’el’s household or dynasty. By Amos’s time the king was likely Rezin (2 Kings 15—16), during whose reign Aram and Ephraim became allies to make common cause against Assyria. Omitting reference to Rezin may then have been a slight (cf. Isa. 7:8).

For Aram’s rebellion against him (v. 5), Yahweh intends to have Damascus attacked and conquered. The bar of a town gate extends across its two doors and thus holds them shut; Yahweh will break it, the attackers will be able to storm in, and the town will be taken. Valley of Trouble (‘Āven Valley) is presumably a snide renaming of a particular place, like the renaming of Beth-el as Beth-aven (see Hos. 4:15 and the comments). Here, complementing this place name by House of Delight suggests that *‘āven* has its experiential meaning (trouble received) rather than its moral meaning (trouble willfully caused).[[68]](#footnote-68) The Septuagint has On Valley, which could be its real name (*‘āven* would just be a revocalization of Hebrew *‘ôn*). A plausible identification is then Baalbek in *the* Beqa (the word for valley), which was later known as Sun City—the Aramean equivalent to Sun City or On in Egypt. House of Delight (Bȇt ‘eden) may refer to Bit Adini on the Euphrates or to the Eden of 2 Kings 19:12, and between them the two places that are named would then suggest Aram from west to east, but the name of this second place, too, has ironic resonance.[[69]](#footnote-69) The nation that “delights” in its land is going to experience “trouble.” It will see the execution of its ruler, the one who holds the club or mace—the term suggests both a ceremonial scepter and the club as a weapon wielded by a commander-in-chief. And the people itself will be taken back to Qir. We don’t know where Qir was (though Isa. 22:6 may imply it was near Elam and thus near the head of the Persian Gulf), but the point about mentioning it is that Qir is where the Arameans had once come from (Amos 9:7). They will end up back there. Amos isn’t necessarily very interested in how Yahweh will bring about these results, though it wouldn’t be surprising that Assyria was the means of doing so (2 Kings 16:9).

**Amos 1:6-8.** Amos moves diagonally from northeast to southwest, to Gaza (v. 6). He apparently refers to the selling of an entire town or village into slavery, perhaps as a result of some local military conflict (cf. Deut 21:15-17), or perhaps as the result of a raid (cf. 1 Sam. 30). In the Middle East the transporting of entire peoples in this way has a long history. Second Kings 17 speaks in terms of the exile of the whole of Ephraim, though Gaza’s action contrasts with the Babylonians’ later exile of just the important people from Judah. But in neither of these cases was transportation tied up with the slave trade. Perhaps Edom used slaves in its mining operations or perhaps Edom sold the people on further south.

Yahweh will take the same action against Philistia as he will take against Aram (v. 7-8). He mentions three more Philistine towns; evidently Gaza stands for Philistia in general, perhaps because it was the most important Philistine town at the time. He does not refer to the fifth Philistine town, Gat, which is also unmentioned elsewhere (e.g., Jer. 25:20). It had been attacked and taken by Haza’el some time previously (2 Kings 12:17). This piece of history perhaps explains Amos’s later reference to it (6:2) and indicates why it could be ignored here. Or perhaps Gat is slyly included in the reference to the “remains” of the Philistines: already, only the remains of Gat are left; Philistia will be reduced to the same state and will then perish. A similar understated threat features in the formulation regarding Eqron. Yahweh will not merely turn his hand against Eqron. He will turn it back: hit it and then come back and hit it again (cf. *šûb* hiphil in Isa. 1:25; Jer. 6:9). If you doubt it, says Amos, note that it is *the Lord* Yahweh who has said it. This title emphasizing Yahweh’s sovereignty is Amos’s characteristic designation of God, though in 1:1—3:6 it appears only here.

**Amos 1:9-10.** Yahweh moves up the coast to Phoenicia (cf. the pairing in Joel 3:4 and the comments) and reformulates the same critique and the same threats to Tyre, which was perhaps involved in slave transportation as part of its commercial operations. Here the distinctive note is the reference to a brotherly pact. There had been a pact between Hiram of Tyre and Solomon which had made them brothers (1 Kings 9:13). Tyre had ignored this relationship in transporting some town or village, presumably a community in Galilee.

**Amos 1:11-12.** Edom now comes into focus in its own right as Yahweh moves diagonally from northwest to southeast, to Edom’s territory south and east of the Dead Sea.

The brotherhood (v. 11) between Edom (Esau) and Israel (Jacob) antedates their birth (Gen. 25), and the rivalry and consequent ill-feeling goes almost as far back (Gen. 27). Whereas the original Esau/Edom had more brotherly instincts than Jacob/Israel knew he had a right to expect (Gen. 33), they are now long since gone. As well as pursuing his brother he has killed his brother’s wom[b]enfolk (as Jacob feared in Gen. 33). In this period Amos can hardly claim that Israel was simply the peace-loving victim of Edomite aggression (see e.g., 2 Kings 14). But the reference to Edom’s furious anger looks at Edom through the lens of Genesis 27 and Numbers 20. References to anger, fury, and wrath in both Testaments commonly have in mind the objective force of the action that embodies wrath rather than the subjective feeling of anger, and that implication would make sense here. Amos is talking about the fury of the Edomites’ action rather than the fury of the emotions that went with it.

Teman (v. 12) was a region or a clan within Edom (e.g., Gen. 36:11, 15, 34); the word means south (cf. Tg), so presumably it lay in the south of Edom. The burning then will be the burning up of a huge area (cf. 2:1; 7:4), which again suggests something supernatural. Bozrah was a key town to the north in Edom. So Teman and Bosrah suggest the entire country, south to north.

**Amos 1:13-15.** Yahweh moves north from Edom; the Ammonites lived south east of Aram and thus east of Gilead, which explains why Gilead would be the area of Ephraim upon which they would have had designs (v. 13). Tearing open pregnant women features elsewhere in lists of the horrors of war (2 Kings 8:12; 15:16). Like the killing of babies, one point about the act is to eliminate a next generation that can hope to be the possessors of the land.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Rabbah (v. 14) is the Ammonite capital (modern Amman). For it, Yahweh supplements the description of punishment with the line about the battle cry and about how destructively hurricane-like the day will be. Amos does not use the actual phrase “Yahweh’s day” but his double reference to a “day” hints at it. The cry is not merely the battle cry of a human warrior and the storm is not a purely natural hurricane. They are Yahweh’s battle cry and Yahweh’s hurricane storm (cf. Isa. 29:6).

They will mean that Ammon’s king and his staff (v. 15) will not die, but they will go into exile.

**Amos 2:1-3**. Moab is the last of Ephraim’s eastern neighbors; its territory lies between Ammon and Edom.

Moab’s offence is distinctive (v. 1). Yahweh presupposes that respect for the human body does not stop when someone dies. The body is an essential part of the person. People should be allowed to rest in She’ol, not have their tomb desecrated (cf. Jer. 8:1-2).[[71]](#footnote-71) The Moabites have treated the Edomite king’s body as something that has no value—or rather, that has value to provide plaster and whitewash (cf. Tg).

It is enough for Yahweh to threaten Moab with the same fate as other peoples (vv. 2-3). We don’t know where Qeriyyot was, but a Moabite inscription, the Mesha Stele, indicates that there was a sanctuary of the Moabite god Kemosh there, which may be the reason for making it the object of punishment. Like Ammon, Moab will die with the noise of battle. Yahweh describes the noise in different terms, b ut again it suggests that this is not a mere human war.

**Amos 2:4-5.** Judah appears as the last of Ephraim’s neighbors. The shape of the message is similar but the critique is different because it’s possible to impugn Judah for repudiating Yahweh’s instruction. It’s thus less specific and concrete. But it’s longer, more wide-ranging, and more devastating than the ones that have preceded it, which is one respect in which it prepares the way for what will follow in 2:6-15.[[72]](#footnote-72)

“Instruction” (*tôrāh*, v. 4)comes to be the title of “The Torah,” but the word has wider application; it can apply to the teaching of prophets or sages. Here the parallel colon clarifies that it denotes material of the kind that eventually appears in “The Torah.” While the Torah had nowhere near reached its complete form in Amos’s day, I assume that the Decalogue and some of the contents of Exodus were in fairly fixed form (see the comments on Hos. 8:1), and Amos could be referring to material of this kind. The next line indicates the general area of Judah’s rebellion, matching the critique in 2 Kings 17 which accuses Judah as well as Ephraim of rejecting Yahweh’s decrees and instruction that concerned who and how people worshiped. The lies that have led Judah astray since the time of their ancestors would have included the recurrent recognition of other deities that began with Solomon, the false forms and objects of worship that they introduced into the temple, and their trust in foreign alliances. The alien deities are themselves “‘lies’ personified.”[[73]](#footnote-73)

Calamity will therefore fall on Judah and Jerusalem (v. 5); they will be the victims of the same calamitous action by Yahweh as Ephraim’s other neighbors. Heard in Ephraim, it might arouse a greater cheer than 1:3—2:3. Heard later in Judah, it would issue a warning against any feeling of Judahite superiority.

**Amos 2:6-8.** Amos’s audience might have thought that his message was complete when he’d come to an apparent climax with Judah, especially if they noticed that he had covered seven nations. In reality, “up to now the prophet has been digressing,” giving a prelude. “Now he begins the real prophecy,”[[74]](#footnote-74) as he “puts here the Israelites in the same bundle with the Moabites, the Idumeans, and other heathen nations.”[[75]](#footnote-75) It is the climax to which the rhetoric has been heading since 1:3, though Amos’s audience will hardly have realized it. The judgment they are prepared to applaud upon the other nations, including Judah, is also the judgment Yahweh makes on them. Verses 6-8 affirm that Yahweh will no longer tolerate Ephraim’s rebellion and give reasons; they follow the form of the affirmation in the earlier subsections, though they are longer. Verses 9-12 will develop the affirmation, adding an extra element that was not present in the earlier statements, concerning what Yahweh had done for Ephraim and how Ephraim had responded. Verses 13-16 will comprise the declaration about the calamity that Yahweh intends therefore to bring; it corresponds to the declaration in the earlier subsections, though it’s longer and takes a different form. As a whole, then, verses 6-16 parallels the earlier subsections but constitutes a considerable elaboration in light of being Amos’s real point. As usual Amos speaks of “Israel,” a term which possesses a useful ambiguity. It’s his regular term for the northern kingdom, and following on the reference to Judah it would imply Ephraim here. Yet Amos’s account of what Yahweh had done in vv. 9-11 applies to the people of Yahweh as a whole, and Judahites who knew that they belonged to Israel would be wise to ask themselves whether vv. 6-8 and 12 were also true of them, and therefore whether vv. 13-16 apply to them; and of course the answer at all points is that they do.

In vv. 6-8, after the standard opening, as usual Yahweh itemizes the nature of the nation’s rebellion. But whereas the earlier critiques basically involved one act of rebellion, in keeping with the implications of the three and four formula, the critique of Ephraim names a series of acts. Further, whereas the first six critiques concerned national acts of the kind that are involved in war-making against other nations and the seventh focused on unfaithfulness to Yahweh in worship, these acts of rebellion are undertaken by Ephraimites against one another. These actions sometimes have direct implications for people’s attitude to Yahweh, which makes for a comparison with the critique of Judah. Nevertheless the first surprise, that Amos turns from a critique of Ephraim’s neighbors to a critique of Ephraim itself, is succeeded by a second surprise, that Amos does not critique Ephraim either for the nature of its war-making or directly for its unfaithfulness to Yahweh in worship. He surely could have done so. It’s doubtful whether kings such as Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash and Jeroboam could or would have won their wars in ways that left them invulnerable to the critique Amos has been voicing (see 2 Kings 9—14). And 2 Kings is explicit on Ephraim’s faithlessness in relationship to Yahweh during this period, as is Hosea.

But Amos initially focuses elsewhere (v. 6). He talks first about actions that could be undertaken by people who could make ends meet (middle-class people, if you like), who were taking advantage of people who had got into difficulties.[[76]](#footnote-76) These victims might be families who’ve been unlucky or inept in going about their work over the year and have ended up not harvesting enough crops for their food and/or for sowing for the next year. They then depend on other families making loans to them to tide them over until they can pay them back. If they don’t manage to pay them back, they may have to let themselves become the servants of the family that’s lent them necessities. Amos implies that the families who are doing okay have insisted on turning them into servants, even though the victims are faithful people; the parallelism adds “needy” to the scandal of “faithful.” So their neediness didn’t issue from their being faithless (e.g., being lazy or serving other gods or themselves behaving oppressively). They’ve lost their freedom because that’s the only basis upon which a family that was doing okay would lend them the silver they needed (money has not been invented, so silver is the medium of exchange). The parallelism also adds the scandalous specificity of “a pair of shoes” to “silver.” If the cola interweave in meaning, they suggest selling a faithful needy person for silver that would only buy the shoes they need in order to be able to go out and work. The synagogue lectionary links 2:6—3:8 with the story of Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers (Gen. 37), and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Zebulun 3:2) then has the brothers buying shoes for their families with the proceeds.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Metaphorically, then (v. 7a), the people who are doing okay trample the heads of poor people into the dirt instead of helping them. The parallel expression “turning aside [*nāṭāh* hiphil] the path” comes only here in the First Testament[[78]](#footnote-78) but elsewhere similar phrases mean “turn aside/pervert the process of decision-making” for such people (see especially Prov. 17:23; also e.g., Exod. 23:6; Deut. 16:19; and Tg here). The meeting of the elders at the town gate was supposed to protect the interests of lowly people, or at least try to find a compromise between their rights and the rights of people who have made loans to them, but the elders are simply ignoring the rights of the lowly as they “turn needy people aside in the gate” (5:12, using the same verb; cf. also Isa. 10:2; 29:21). Needy, poor, and lowly are three key First Testament words in this connection. The words eventually come to denote an attitude of spirit, an attitude of meekness, but here lowly indicates the political position of people who are in difficulties: they have no power. Poor indicates their economic position: they have no assets. Needy indicates their practical position: they have no resources.

The action of the man and his father (v. 7b) presumably involves sex with the girl, though the expression is not the usual one in this connection (usually the verb is “come”; here it is “go”). Their action would be at odds with rules such as the prohibition on a man marrying his father’s widow or his son’s widow (e.g., Lev. 18:8, 15), which puts son and father into too close a sexual relationship. In the present context, Amos may refer to a girl who becomes a family servant and could become the wife of son and father or both (see the case discussed in Exod. 23:7-9)—with the same implication of this action setting up too close a sexual relationship. Such relationships compromise the people’s distinctiveness and sacredness and also compromise the sacredness of Yahweh’s name (cf. Lev. 20:3)—they make it ordinary. Amos’s next two lines will make clearer how that compromise happens, as they refer to altars and to God’s house. People who engage in defiling acts outside the sanctuary carry their defilement with them when they come into the sanctuary and engage in worship; they thereby de-sanctify Yahweh’s name. That is the effect of alien religious acts (e.g., Lev. 18:21) but also of alien acts in everyday life (e.g., Jer. 34:16, which significantly concerns relations between masters and servants, as Amos’s message likely does).

Amos (v. 8a) itemizes two ways in which people ignore the clash between the tough way they are treating people who have become impoverished and the way they commit themselves to worship. Anything of value could be treated as collateral in connection with a debt, but there were constraints in connection with necessities of life (e.g., Deut. 24:6). Clothing was supposed to be returned at sundown because people’s coats were also their blankets (Exod. 22:25-27; Deut. 24:12-13); it could not be taken at all from a widow (Deut 24:17; see also Job 22:6). Ignoring such principles, these wrongdoers are people who are “turning aside” (cf. v. 7) in another sense, more comparable to the English expression “turn in.” The verb (*nāṭāh*) also denotes spreading out, and it generates the word for a bed or couch (*miṭṭāh*). These rebels are stretching out by the altars in the shrines for a festive meal; hence their need of things to recline on.[[79]](#footnote-79) In principle they might be there in the sanctuary to seek God’s help with some need or problem, but the parallel colon with its reference to drinking wine may suggest rather the context of one of the annual praise festivals (Pesah, Shavuot, or Sukkot).

Further (v. 8b), when people commit an offence against someone else, they have to make compensation to the person. The reparation is like a fine, but it’s paid to the other person, not to the state (e.g., Exod. 21:22; Deut. 22:19). The obligation is one of the contexts in which the principle of “an eye for an eye” operates; the compensation is to be equivalent but not excessive. Evidently it might be made in kind rather than in silver, and thus (for instance) in one of the staples of Israelite life such as wine, wheat, and oil. In the context, the critique here presupposes that people have been required by the elders to make compensation when they hadn’t committed any offence (cf. v. 7a, and Prov. 17:26). The recipients are in their God’s house worshiping and praying and sacrificing and celebrating—and using their wrongfully-obtained wine in this connection. That indignant phrase “their God’s house” does not imply it’s not also Amos’s God’s house or that their worship is inherently improper. The problem lies in those garments they are lying on and the ill-gotten wine they are drinking. But the phrase may suggest that a particular reference to the actions of priests.

The critique that began by focusing simply on wrong that Ephraimites were doing to one another has thus come to combine that focus with wrongdoing in connection with the name of God, the altars of God, and the house of God. While some of the deeds would be the wrongdoing of ordinary families, some would be the deeds of the elders at the gate, while some might be the deeds of priests. But they are only samples of the kind of thing that could be said. “The descriptions of those being wronged are… quite general and non-specific…. Deliberate *ambiguity and openness* appears to have been built into the text.”[[80]](#footnote-80)

**Amos 2:9-12.** After the critique we expect the declaration about punishment, but instead we get an elaboration of the critique, heightening the suspense. It has that effect by means of a series of concessive temporal clauses in vv. 9-10 before we get to the actual critique in vv. 11-12.

First, Yahweh had given the people this land (v. 9). “Amorite” is an occasional alternative for “Canaanite” as a term for the previous inhabitants of the land (cf. crucially Gen. 15:16). Yahweh speaks of “destroying” them rather than of “devoting them”; devoting is more often what Israel was to do. The verb especially recurs in Deuteronomy, where worryingly it refers both to what Yahweh will do to the Canaanites and to what Yahweh will do to the Israelites if they don’t follow Yahweh’s way (e.g., Deut. 4:26; 6:15; 7:4, 23). In two connections Amos uses the image of a tree to emphasize the magnitude of what Yahweh did. First there was the size of those guys, in height and in girth, which in different words was the report of the people whom Israel sent to reconnoiter the country (Num. 13). Then there was the thoroughness with which Yahweh nevertheless disposed of them, “root and branch”: he dealt with what you could see and what you couldn’t see, with fruit and root (implying bough and trunk), with top and bottom (and by implication everything in between), so they are never going to grow again. Like Joshua’s account of the Israelites’ taking the country, Yahweh’s account is hyperbolic.

The concessive temporal clauses continue (v. 10) as Yahweh looks behind his disposing of the occupiers of Canaan to his bringing of Israel there. Yahweh recalls the exodus (and makes a transition to addressing the people rather than talking about them) and his bringing them through the wilderness to take possession of the Amorites’ country—which takes us back to where vv. 9-10 started. The point about the retrospect is not yet explicit (there is no indication that the point is that Israel’s conduct contrasts with Yahweh’s conduct).

Yahweh continues to speak of the background to the further critique which is coming (v. 11a). He had caused people like Amos himself to emerge as his special servants. He had set them up or established them in the way you set up a pillar or a building. Applied to people, the verb indicates Yahweh’s sovereignty in their appearing. Yahweh had “set up” the leaders whose exploits are described in Judges, and the later line of priests and kings in Jerusalem who were his appointment; they did not make themselves kings or priests, and the people did not appoint them. So it was with prophets. Presumably Amos refers to people such as Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, and Jonah. Yahweh had also set up “dedicated people,” *nəzirîm*, individuals who are set apart for Yahweh. We don’t know what would be the purpose or object of the *nazîr*’s vow (Tg turns them into “teachers”), but the accounts of it (see Num. 6; Judg. 13) indicate that the vow involved abstaining from drink, avoiding anything taboo (e.g., taboo food and contact with a corpse), and letting one’s hair grow long.

Now comes the point of the critique (vv. 11b-12). The Ephraimites can hardly dispute the acts related in vv. 9-11a, and Amos declares that there are some other things that they also can hardly dispute. “I dare you deny them,” the reminder “Yahweh’s proclamation” adds. Dealing with prophets and *nəzirîm* in reverse order so that vv. 11-12 work abb’a’, Amos first accuses the Ephraimites of getting the *nəzirîm* to break their vows. Drinking wine in itself was not wrong, but they were leading astray people who had made this commitment to Yahweh, and had done so in some sense on their people’s behalf. And they had told the prophets not to do the thing Yahweh had set them up to do. They did it to people such as Elijah, Elisha, and Micaiah, and Judahites did it to Micah and Isaiah. It will be illustrated by the later account of Amos’s own experience (Amos 7:10-17). Possibly the present confrontation refers to that incident, given there’s no reason to think that the Amos scroll is arranged chronologically. While Amos may thus refer especially to people’s reaction to Amos himself, he may also presuppose that critiquing the kind of acts described in vv. 6-8 was the sort of thing other prophets did.

The accusation about the treatment of prophets is the climax to the accusation against Ephraim. Whereas Yahweh’s relationship with Ephraim has been a story of acts of faithfulness (“salvation history”), Ephraim’s relationship with Yahweh has been a story of faithlessness (“rebellion history”).

**2:13-16.** Yahwehgoes on to spell out the implications of Ephraim’s acts of rebellion, first in terms of what they do to him (v. 13). They are a burden that makes him groan—his point being not so much an emotional or psychological point as a moral one.

He must therefore take some action (vv. 14-16). The story of acts of faithfulness has to become a story of acts of judgment,[[81]](#footnote-81) “a history from salvation to ruin”[[82]](#footnote-82) that will consume Ephraim as a fighting force. The content of the judgment will not be so different from the judgments of the other nations. If anything the punishment is greater, even though the offenses might be described as small-scale.[[83]](#footnote-83) Neither swiftness of foot, nor forcefulness, nor physical strength, nor skill with weapons, nor the possession of a horse to ride off on, will help anyone. There will be no escape, no laying hold on energy, no saving one’s life. The most firm-minded will be reduced to abandoning their armor and running away in the shame of nakedness. Amos builds up a sense of the nature of the cataclysm by reusing a limited number of words (flight, swift, save, vigor, firm, strong man) in different combinations, interwoven as appropriate by the word “not,” so as to convey and deepen the impression of Ephraim’s helplessness. He gives no indication of how the calamity will happen or who will be its agent. He just knows it will happen, and that this is the important point. By implication, it is the Yahweh who has been speaking throughout, and who in particular was speaking in v. 13, who will make it happen. He will act as warrior Yahweh, and it is for this reason that the Ephraimite fighting force is doomed to defeat. The expression “on that day” need not suggest a reference to Yahweh’s day, but an audience could quite appropriately be made to think of that day at this point. Amos’s own closing reminder that it is “Yahweh’s proclamation” buttresses the force of all that he has reported Yahweh saying. He does not add “So you had better repent,” but he does not thereby rule out the idea that his aim is for people to repent and open up the possibility that the certain judgment fails to become actual.

**Amos 3:1-2.** By way of conclusion, two verses comprise a brief encapsulation of the message of 1:3—2:16, as is suggested not least by the closely-related occurrences of “I got up from the country of Egypt” (cf. 2:10; the expression recurs again in 9:7). It will emerge that 3:3-8 in turn takes up from 1:2, so that 1:2—3:8 works abb’a’. It would have been more logical to locate 3:1-2 at the head of 1:3—2:16, but that introduction would then have been a spoiler that emasculated the rhetoric of 1:3—2:16.

“Listen!” (v. 1) would be a natural beginning to a message, though actually in Amos it is usually the beginning of a subsection (cf. 3:13; 4:1; 5:1; 7:16; 8:4). In what follows, as usual Amos operates with rhetorical subtlety. It will become clear that “for you” really means “against you,” but the preposition (*‘al*) commonly denotes speaking “to” someone without negative connotation (e.g., Hos. 12:10 [11]). It would be natural to translate it “to” here, but the translation “for” makes the link with the preposition threefold recurrence with the meaning “for” at the beginning of the subunits in 1:3—2:3. The “Israelites” are literally the “children of Israel” and they are thus a family, a vast extended family. The reference to “family” rather than nation or people is distinctive; it recalls Genesis 12:3 and 28:14 (and Zech. 14:18, which refers specifically to Egypt in these terms).[[84]](#footnote-84) Amos’s continuing to refer to and address Israel continues to make it hard for Judah to escape looking at itself in light of his message.

What follows (v. 2) “could have served as a motto for the entire book, because Amos here summarizes briefly the entire contents of his prophecy. Everything he otherwise says is a commentary on these words.”[[85]](#footnote-85) The idea of Yahweh “acknowledging” his people (*yāda’*)is a distinctive way of referring to Yahweh’s committing himself to them (cf. Gen. 18:19; Hos. 13:5; and see the note). We may appreciate the nuance of the word if we consider its much more frequent occurrence to signify people’s acknowledgment of Yahweh and of his word, which implies an unqualified practical commitment (see Hos. 2:8 [10]; 4:1, 6; 5:4; 6:2, 6; and the comments). Some of Amos’s listeners might also be aware that “acknowledging” was a way great powers and their underlings could speak of their mutual commitment.[[86]](#footnote-86) In itself acknowledgment does not suggest election in the sense of an action that applies to some people and not to others; Amos makes it refer to election by declaring that Yahweh has acknowledged Israel alone out of all earthly families. Once more this comment links back to 1:3—2:3 which listed all the earthly families in Israel’s immediate world which Yahweh did not acknowledge in the same way. Further, Yahweh attends to Israel, which might be good news if it followed the pattern of Yahweh’s attending to Sarah and to Israel after Yahweh’s comment about acknowledging Abraham (Gen. 21:1; 50:24-25; Exod. 3:16; 4:31; 13:19). But Amos is again using his “entrapment technique.”[[87]](#footnote-87) His “therefore” resembles the “therefore” in Hosea 2:14 [16][[88]](#footnote-88) in making logic work by inversion, but this time not in a good way. This short subsection’s final colon makes explicit that this attentiveness is the bad kind that the Prophets especially talk about (e.g., Hos. 1:4; 4:9; Amos 3:14). The verse “thrives on the contrast between the first and second verse halves…. If v. 2 were ever an oral saying, one would have seen all the listeners nodding assent”[[89]](#footnote-89) to the first half, before being confronted by the second. Whereas Yahweh’s acknowledgment should be good news, then, it isn’t. It makes demands that Israel has not fulfilled, and therefore everything collapses. Yahweh here reformulates the nature of Israel’s wrongdoing. Here (alone) he speaks not of rebellion (against him) but of deviation from the proper way, and of Israel’s many such deviations. “Other nations are indicted for grave atrocities and barbaric actions, but only Israel is taken to task for *every one* of its moral-ethical infractions.”[[90]](#footnote-90)

## Theological Implications

1. Words carefully composed by a prophet can also be Yahweh’s words.
2. “God does not make history…. However, he is free to intervene in it.”[[91]](#footnote-91) Yahweh is sovereign over all the peoples over which he cares to exercise sovereignty. There is no question of deities that other peoples worship having any capacity to protect their peoples. Nations in general are Yahweh’s underlings, beneficiaries of his goodness, but responsible to live in light of his expectations. We might add more specifically that “the real reason for Yahweh’s authority over the other nations is suggested in Amos 9:7.” Yahweh has shown grace to them as to Israel and he has the right to have expectations of them.[[92]](#footnote-92)
3. It is explicit that one or two of the outrages Amos mentions are committed against Israel and that one or two against other peoples, while the others may be committed against either. The implication is that Yahweh is committed to taking redress against nations who wrong his people but also that he is committed to taking redress against nations who wrong other nations.
4. Nations are thus under obligation to Yahweh to behave in a proper way to other peoples, who are also his underlings. Amos “was appealing to a kind of conventional or customary law about international conduct which he at least believed to be self-evidently right.” He must have had the following beliefs about his audience:
5. That they thought manifest evil-doing both deserved and would receive divine punishment.
6. That they regarded the nations condemned as moral agents, i.e. as responsible for their actions, particularly in the conduct of war.
7. That they thought Israel had a specially privileged position which indemnified her against divine judgment.
8. That they do not expect prophets to proclaim judgment on Israel.
9. That they did not regard the kind of sins of which Amos accuses Israel as at all comparable in gravity with atrocities in war.
10. That it was more obvious to them that the nations had moral obligations toward each other than that Israelites had moral obligations among themselves.[[93]](#footnote-93)
11. The nations are rebelling against Yahweh in ignoring these aspects of customary law or natural theology, so the rules which Amos treats as self-evidently right are ones that are divinely laid down, whether or not the nations recognize the fact. They are rebelling against God whether or not they recognize the fact.
12. The wrongdoings include cruelty to land or people, transporting a community, ignoring brotherly commitments (both those that arise from natural kinship and that issue from treaties people enter into). They involve outrages against unborn life and against one who is dead (1:13; 2:1).[[94]](#footnote-94) The First Testament refers often to atrocities against the potential bearers of life, which links with the prevalence of rape in war. “Amos 1.13 portrays a violent attempt to not only change borders but change cultural and sexual identities.”[[95]](#footnote-95)
13. While Yahweh critiques barbarisms involved in war-making, in another sense these outrages are simply aspects of what war-making regularly involves. There has never been war-making without them. Yahweh is hardly pointing towards the compiling of a list of war crimes that must be avoided if a nation is then to make war. He is rather implying that making war inevitably involves them, so a nation would be wise not to make war—certainly not in order to expand its territory or add to its wealth.
14. “With his back turned, God does not seem to see people’s sins,” but now he is going to turn and look.[[96]](#footnote-96) The rabbis have said:

Do not be surprised if a thief goes unhanged for two or three thefts; he will be caught in the end. Samuel said to Rab Judah: This is alluded to in the verse: *Thus saith the Lord: for three transgressions of Judah, but for four I will not reverse it*” (b. Sanhedrin 7a).

And:

If a man commits a transgression, the first, second and third time he is forgiven, the fourth time he is not forgiven, as it is said: Thus saith the Lord. For three transgressions of Israel, Yea for four, I will not reverse it” (b. Yoma 86b).

Yahweh gives nations many chances to turn from their waywardness (which was the reason why he so long delayed giving the land of Canaan to Israel), but eventually he declares that their waywardness is full up (Gen. 15:16).

1. Yet Yahweh’s “I will not reverse it” is notoriously ambiguous in meaning. The nature of the statement is to keep people guessing, which prepares readers for the way the entire scroll is ambiguous about whether final judgment must come.[[97]](#footnote-97)
2. God’s judgment comes on dynasties, rulers, towns, and peoples. When one nation takes action against another action, it may be acting as Yahweh’s agent in bringing that judgment, even if it doesn’t realize. But it takes a prophet to identify that this is happening, and a prophet is someone who speaks of events ahead of time, not merely with hindsight. Amos emphasizes “the untidiness of history, its problematic cruelty and the knotty issues of knowing how to understand its flow and direction when the people of God are immersed in its turbulence.”[[98]](#footnote-98)
3. Special considerations apply to the people of God, who face the face the frightening implications of being given Yahweh’s instruction and decrees but are subject to the temptation of letting lies lead them astray.
4. God wants to protect us from *Schadenfreude*; the waywardness and peril of other nations needs rather to alert us to our own. That desire of God’s applies to nations but also to the people of God, which has to live by the principle that judgment begins with God’s household (1 Peter 4:17; cf. Ezek. 9:6).[[99]](#footnote-99)
5. Rebellion against God can take the form of relations between nations that ignore human rights; it can also take the form of relations within communities that ignore human rights.
6. Israel’s being an extended family is one reason why the behavior described in 2:6-8 is outrageous; Deuteronomy frequently appeals to the fact that one’s fellow Israelites are one’s brothers (and sisters; e.g., Deut. 15). We are especially to treat well the fellow-members of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).
7. When families are doing well, their vocation is to support families that are not doing well rather than taking advantage of them. They have to be wary of worship that depends on or makes use of the proceeds that come from taking advantage of people who are less well off, given that such worship takes away from God’s glory rather than enhancing it.
8. The story of the people of God is one in which God has done great things for his people but they have responded with rebellion. God’s story is a story of acts of faithfulness. Its story is a story of faithlessness. Particular danger attaches to the situation where God calls individuals to a lifestyle that involves a special discipline to which God doesn’t call everyone, because the people of God may try to persuade these individuals out of their dedication. And danger attaches to the situation where God sets up prophets who confront his people, whom they may inclined to invite to shut up.
9. The wrongdoing of his people is a burden that presses God down and the people of God thus risks the story of God’s acts of faithfulness becoming a story of God’s acts of judgment. None of the ways that might seem to offer escape will then be of any use. Responding now is the only option.
10. Amos 3:2 is “one of the most important and original statements in Scripture.”[[100]](#footnote-100) The idea it expresses is not a welcome one; Christians prefer to believe in a God who is simply understanding, patient, and forgiving.[[101]](#footnote-101) “It is no treat to be this elect nation.” It makes you especially open to God’s chastisement (Prov. 1:12; Heb. 12:6).[[102]](#footnote-102) But it’s problematic if applied retrospectively as an all-purpose explanation of why something bad has happened to someone, as if it were the master key to theodicy.[[103]](#footnote-103) Its function is to draw people to repentance so that bad things don’t happen. Indeed, it also implies the good news that Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners.[[104]](#footnote-104)

# Amos 3:3-8—The Lion Has Roared

## Translation

3Do two go together,

except they’ve agreed?[[105]](#footnote-105)

4Does a lion roar in the forest,

when it has no prey?

Does a cougar[[106]](#footnote-106) give voice from its refuge,

except it’s made a capture?

5Does a bird hurl[[107]](#footnote-107) onto a trap on the ground,

when there’s no bait for it?

Does a trap go up from the ground,

when it doesn’t actually make a capture?[[108]](#footnote-108)

6If a horn sounds in a town,

doesn’t the people tremble?

If something bad happens in a town,

hasn’t Yahweh done it?

7Because[[109]](#footnote-109) the Lord Yahweh

doesn’t do a thing,

Unless he’s revealed his plan

to his servants the prophets.

8When a lion has roared,[[110]](#footnote-110)

who would not be afraid?

When the Lord Yahweh has spoken,

who would not prophesy?

## Interpretation

Unlike 1:3—2:16 and 3:1-2 this section has nothing that directly points to a beginning or that explicitly signifies an ending, but it doesn’t simply continue from 3:1-2 (which did come to an end) nor does it continue in 3:9-15 (which does have something that could constitute a beginning). Neither MT nor the medieval chapter divisions mark it as a unit, but in form and content it is distinguishable from what precedes and follows. One might see the it as an account of the prophet’s call, even though it takes a different form from other accounts of prophetic calls.[[111]](#footnote-111) But it has a more subtle effect than simply provide a defense of Amos’s claim to be a prophet. His more basic concern continues to be Israel’s recognition that the lion has roared. The moral basis for that claim came in 1:3—2:16. What comes here is a concomitant piece of logic. It’s not surprising that Yahweh has roared, and it’s not surprising that he should have sent someone to explicate that roar.

It’s dominated by series of nine questions, with v. 7 the only statement (and it is grammatically subordinate to one of the questions). The predominance of questions makes the unit comparable to something from Job, designed to make people think, while the stress on the link of cause and effect and the appeal to the animal world makes its reasoning comparable with that of Proverbs. Amos 1:3—2:5 had the same aim of making people think; here the aim is more overt. Yet the questions are not difficult, as the declarations in 1:3—2:5 were not hard to understand. What is difficult is discerning the point of the questions (at least the first five). But eventually the reference to Yahweh the lion roaring indicates that 3:3-8 links back with 1:2 as 3:1-2 linked back with 1:3—2:16. This subsection completes the abb’a’ sequence in 1:2—3:8. Whereas 3:1-2 was then much briefer than the unit it pairs with, 3:3-8 is much longer.

**Amos 3:3-5.** The answer to the first five questions is “Yes, obviously.” In each case the listeners are invited to work back from an event which must have a cause. While there are no doubt exceptions to the rule, generally it works. Two people walking together probably arranged to meet (v. 3). When a lion roars, it’s probably caught something, and the same applies to a cougar or young lion (v. 4). When a bird dives into a trap, it’s probably been lured by some bait, and if a trap goes off, it’s probably caught something (v. 5). Events have causes. Okay, Amos, so what? In light of v. 2, are the two walkers Yahweh and Israel (cf. LXX’s assimilation of v. 3 to v. 2)? Or are they you and Yahweh? Is Yahweh the lion, as 1:2 might imply? Is the bird Israel?

**Amos 3:6-8**. The form of the questions then changes to “if” and things get more complex. The question about the horn (v. 6) goes from cause to likely result, not from result to likely cause. If a town’s lookouts blow the horn that advertises the approach of an enemy (see Joel 2:1-2a and the comments), then people will quake. But it is still the kind of rhetorical question to which the answer is an obvious “yes.” The companion question, about what lies behind such trouble, reverts to the move from result to likely cause, but people might not think its answer is so self-evident. They might want to question its premise. The Ephraimites don’t believe that anything so bad will happen to their towns (see 9:10), because Yahweh wouldn’t do such things to them, would he? If incidents such as those related in 4:6-11 have already happened, perhaps they have ways of explaining them. But Amos surely implies that the answer is indeed again “Yes.”[[112]](#footnote-112)

With the section’s sole statement (v. 7) things also get subtle. The listeners have to fit the verse into the gap(s) in the previous verse. Is something bad about to happen that Yahweh is doing and that should make people tremble, and if so, what does the blowing of a horn refer to? The means by which Yahweh gets a horn blown is by sending a prophet; prophets are a town’s lookouts (see Joel 2:1-2a again, and Hos. 9:8). He is “the Lord Yahweh” (so also in v. 8) and they are this master’s servants, to whom he thus reveals his intentions. The word for “plan” (*sôd*) can refer both to Yahweh’s council or cabinet (Jer. 23:18, 22) and to his counsel, its decisions, as here. Presumably Amos knows what the counsel is because he was present in the council meeting that discussed it and decided it.

And the Lord Yahweh’s servants pass on the information about the intentions (v. 8), though that formulation puts the point too gently. The president of the council is also a lion who roars. Once again the form of the question changes as two “if” questions are followed by two “who” questions, and again they are assumed to have an obvious answer: “Anyone.” Here Amos effectively makes explicit that the lion is indeed Yahweh. The reference to his roaring may then recall v. 3, but more certainly 1:2. There Amos said that Yahweh roars (or will roar). Here the verb is past. The parallel reference to speaking also makes the line link with 3:1. The parallelism between the two lines in v. 8 perhaps suggests that as the lion is the Lord Yahweh, so Amos is the one who is afraid as well as the one who prophesies. People may tell prophets not to prophesy (2:12); but Yahweh is scarier. “In light of the preceding verses, the climax at v. 8 is strange, yet at once menacing.”[[113]](#footnote-113)

## Theological Implications

1. If something bad happens to a town, God has done it. This declaration justifies a robust doctrine of the sovereignty of God. “Whatever happens, the world usually ascribes it to fortune. But the Prophet here shows that the government of this world is administered by God, and that nothing happens except through his power.”[[114]](#footnote-114) Seeing a calamity as “just one of those things” sidesteps some of the problems of theodicy, but it makes it impossible to learn from the calamity in the way that Jesus urges (Luke 13:1-5). But having said that, we note that the preceding six questions deserve a qualified answer (“not usually” or “yes, usually”) not an unqualified one. They are like the aphorisms in Proverbs which give general rules not invariable ones. Further, “the government of this world is administered by God” in varying ways. Some things that happen because God directly makes them happen; some happen because God made the world to work in a certain way; some happen because he gives his servants the power to act as his agents, but they do so in ways they determine. Further, Amos is concerned with things that are going on and are about to go on in a town such as Beth-el or Samaria at the moment, not with everything that has ever happened in any town. He is concerned with calamities God makes happen because of people’s wrongdoing, but some things that God makes happen need not be punishment for wrongdoing. Something else may be going on whose rationale we do not know—as was the case with the calamities that came to Job.
2. Amos’s other big theological statement is that God doesn’t do anything without revealing it ahead of time. It’s one of the ways he shows he is God. He has the capacity to say what he intends to make happen, then to see it happens, then to say, “You see, it happened as I said.” In Isaiah 40—48 it is a key argument for the recognition that Yahweh is God. It’s also an expression of his compassion, because part of the point about the revelation is to get his people to turn back to him so that he doesn’t need to implement his plan when it’s negative. Yet it’s possible to turn his saying upside down and show from much of the scriptural story that Yahweh does most things without revealing his plan to prophets. Here too we have to avoid inferring that Amos is making a more universal statement than he is making in the context. Jonathan tells David that Saul doesn’t do anything big or small without telling him (1 Sam 20:2).[[115]](#footnote-115) Of course Saul does. Likewise Amos is not talking universally but making a statement about Yahweh’s relationship with Israel and about what is going on in Jeroboam’s day.[[116]](#footnote-116) The preoccupation of people listening to Amos needs to be their reaction to what Yahweh does say. The same would apply when Revelation 10:7 takes up his phrase “his servants the prophets.”
3. In v. 8b, following up “When the Lord Yahweh has spoken,” Tg reads “Who will not accept the prophecy?” To which question the answer ought to be “No one,” but it isn’t.

# Part Two: Amos 3:9—6:14 Critiques, Warnings, Chastisements

Part Two of the scroll is mostly made up of short units that might have had their origin as brief but complete prophecies, but have been collected so as to comprise more or less coherent sequences:

3:9—4:3 Confrontation reversed

4:4—5:3 You wouldn’t turn back

5:4-27 Where to have recourse

6:1-14 The people who are relaxed

# Amos 3:9—4:3—Confrontation Reversed

## Translation

9Get them to listen on the citadels in Ašdôd,[[117]](#footnote-117)

and on the citadels in the country of Mișrayim, and say:

Gather on the highlands[[118]](#footnote-118) of Šōmərōn,

and look at the great tumults within it,

the people who are pressed[[119]](#footnote-119) inside it.

10They don’t acknowledge the doing of what is straight (Yahweh’s proclamation)—

people who store up violence and destruction in their citadels.

11Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this:

An adversary,[[120]](#footnote-120) and that[[121]](#footnote-121) all around the country—

he will take down your strength from you[[122]](#footnote-122)

and your citadels will be plundered.

12Yahweh has said this:

As the shepherd will rescue from the lion’s mouth

two shanks or a bit of an ear,

So the Yiśrā’ēlites will rescue themselves--

the people who sit[[123]](#footnote-123) in Šōmərōn

on[[124]](#footnote-124) the headrest[[125]](#footnote-125) of a bed and on the dəmesheq of a couch.

13Listen and testify against Jacob’s household

(the proclamation of the Lord Yahweh, the God of Armies):

14On the day of my attending to the rebellions of Yiśrā’ēl for it,

I will attend to the altars of Bȇt-’ēl.

The altar’s horns will be cut off,

and will fall to earth.

15I will strike down the winter house,

together with the summer house.

The ivoried houses will perish,

the great houses will come to an end (Yahweh’s proclamation).

4:1Listen to this message, you cows of the Bāšān,

who are on Mount Šōmərōn.

Who defraud poor people,

who harass needy people,

Who say to their lords,

“Bring,[[126]](#footnote-126) so we can drink!”

2The Lord Yahweh has sworn by his sacredness:

there, days are coming for you,

When someone will carry you off[[127]](#footnote-127) in baskets,[[128]](#footnote-128)

the last of you,[[129]](#footnote-129) in fishing pots.

3You’ll go out through breaches, each one straight ahead of her,

and be thrown out[[130]](#footnote-130) to Harmon (Yahweh’s proclamation).

## Interpretation

Yahweh returns to his earlier rhetorical strategy, which means for the most part not addressing the Ephraimites directly but getting them to overhear what he’s saying. His first proclamation (3:9-11) has the elements of a confrontation at the city gate: a summons to the equivalent of the elders to come to consider evidence, a description of someone’s wrongdoing, and a “therefore” indicating what must follow. The critique concerns people with the power to be oppressive, and the judgment comes on them with their assets and resources. His second proclamation (3:12) is a supplementary declaration of those consequences, vividly expressed. His third (3:13-14) resumes the summons and again restates the consequences. In the first, the subject of the “therefore” is an enemy and the action required, which the enemy will undertake. In the second it is the people and the consequences they will experience. In the third it is Yahweh himself speaking in the first person of what “I” will do. His fourth proclamation (4:1-3) once more resumes the summons, which takes a fuller form and has different addressees. MT thus locates a setumah or petuhah at 4:1 at the point where the English chapter division comes, and 4:1-3 could thus stand on its own, but in theme it belongs with 3:9-15 rather than with what follows:[[131]](#footnote-131) “He who divided the chapters seems not to have well considered the Prophet’s argument.”[[132]](#footnote-132) The fuller form of the summons restates the wrongdoing in terms that overlap with the first three proclamations, and the declaration of the consequences has a parallel vividness to that of the second.

**Amos 3:9-11.** If one can ask after the identity of the heralds who are told to get people to come and listen, perhaps it is Yahweh’s supernatural aides (the imperatives are plural, so it’s not Amos). Yahweh’s own rhetorical strategy thus contains a further menace, as he incidentally reminds the Ephraimites that they have got themselves in an altercation with the whole company of heaven, with the King of kings and his entourage.

With some irony, Yahweh commissions these aides (v. 9a) to address the Ashdodites and the Egyptians. In 1:3—2:16 Ashdod was mentioned incidentally in the Gaza subsection, and Egypt has been mentioned as the country from which Yahweh got Israel out, but neither has been directly the object of critique. Perhaps for that reason they can be commissioned here as people who might have the “international sense of justice” which the peoples listed earlier should have had but evidently didn’t, though they are also sample examples of a neighboring power and a regional power.[[133]](#footnote-133) Perhaps it is significant that there are two of them to examine the facts before judgment is declared (e.g., Deut. 17:6; 19:15).[[134]](#footnote-134) Yahweh’s bidding contrasts with David’s bidding to keep the death of Saul and Jonathan secret from the Philistines lest they rejoice (2 Sam. 2:20).[[135]](#footnote-135) The peoples are addressed on their citadels (a third of the First Testament references to citadels come in Amos 1—3). None of the peoples mentioned in 1:3—2:5 will have any citadels left when Yahweh has acted; Ephraim’s citadels will come up for consideration in a moment.

The aides are to bid these two peoples to gather on the highlands of Samaria (v. 9b). While Samaria is in origin the name of Ephraim’s capital, it later becomes the name of the region and of the Persian province, and this usage may occasionally appear in the monarchic period, as one can say “Moscow” and mean “Russia,” but here Samaria likely means the city itself. Like Jerusalem, it is not on the crest of a mountain chain. It is on a significant hill of its own, but there are further highlands surrounding its valley. The aides are to get the Ashdodites and the Egyptians to gather on those heights so they can look down on the city itself, a little like Ezekiel when he’s transported to Jerusalem. They will then be in a position to look from Yahweh’s angle and see what’s going on—though if we are strictly literal, they will be rather far away for this purpose. What they will see is disturbance, and people who are economically pressed or pressurized. The verb *‘āšaq* sometimes needs to be translated “oppress,” but this more specific meaning fits in the context. Amos is referring to the same dynamics as he critiqued in 2:6-8, though one could imagine that account in the context of a village, whereas here he speaks specifically of life in the town (where victims from the villages might well end up). The tumults will be the confusion, distraction and panic that issue from being pushed into an economic corner with no way out.

There is thus something wrong with Samaria’s knowledge (v. 10). Amos had implicitly talked about knowledge in 1:3—2:16—that is, he had presupposed that the different peoples knew what was right but took no notice of what they knew. They rebelled against Yahweh instead of acknowledging him; which in Israel’s case contrasted with his acknowledgment of them (3:2). Here he adds that they “don’t know acting straight.” In isolation this could mean “don’t know how to act straight”; Amos will later refer to people who know lamenting—they know how to do it (5:16).[[136]](#footnote-136) But it’s not so obvious what it means not to know how to act straight, and more likely *yāda’* refers to attitude and will, as it did in 3:2. They don’t acknowledge the doing of what is straight or straightforward—by implication, what is honest. They are crooked. Etymologically, not being straight is similar to being wayward, to which Amos referred in 3:2. After a reminder that this is Yahweh’s proclamation (Yahweh himself has looked into the town to see what is going on), Amos spells out what the failure of acknowledgment results in (v. 10b). There are several senses in which people in Samaria may be storing up violence and destruction—violence suggests action against people, destruction suggests action against things such as homes and land (see Joel 1:15; 3:19 [4:19], and the comments). First, they are accumulating it in those citadels; there’s lots of it. Second, we can suppose an ellipse: they’re storing up the proceeds of it. Third, they’re storing up violence and destruction that will be exercised against them when the people they’ve pushed into a corner decide they have nothing to lose by trying to fight their way out. And fourth, they’re storing up violence and destruction that will be exercised against them when the fire comes upon them that Amos has already hinted is destined for those citadels. “The book of Amos is a book of human violence.”[[137]](#footnote-137)

Yahweh’s “therefore” (v. 11) announces an event one might see as a variant on the last of these four. It actually announces a person, a mysterious unnamed adversary with a bewildering and frightening capacity to appear through the whole country and take Samaria down. The abstract “strength” is made concrete by the “citadels” in the parallel colon, which also confirms that “taking down” refers to the concrete act of demolition. In the parallelism it is accompanied by plundering, which is the eye-for-an-eye poetic justice demanded by the treatment that the city has given to its victims and by the way its citadels have become its self-storage. “Oppression within brings plundering from without.”[[138]](#footnote-138) The rhetorical force of Amos’s getting his listeners to imagine the Ashdodites and Egyptians to pass judgment on them is complemented by his then turning to address his listeners direct.[[139]](#footnote-139)

**Amos 3:12.** In Yahweh’s seconddeclaration, the lion reappears as Amos makes the point even more concrete. One could say that the image of the remnant begins here, though not in a good way.[[140]](#footnote-140) The devastation will be such that there remains only the equivalent of the evidence that there once was a sheep, which just proves that the shepherd hadn’t stolen it or sold it (cf. Exod. 22:13 [12]). Something similar will be the fate of people who are currently relaxing in their nice homes (cf. v. 15). We aren’t sure of the meaning of the word translated headrest, or the word transliterated demesheq which comes only here, but the latter makes for another nice link with the section about Ephraim’s neighbors, the first of which was Dammeśeq, Damascus (and for later readers, it makes one think of damask fabric). Only with irony can it be said that Amos describes the “rescue” of Samaria.[[141]](#footnote-141)

**Amos 3:13-15.** In Amos’s third declaration, Yahweh resumes his earlier commission to witnesses in v. 9a then jumps to a further nuancing of the “therefore” in v. 11 and the threat in v. 12.

So it is perhaps again the Ashdodites and Egyptians who are commissioned to listen (v. 13), as in v. 9a, and to give evidence of what they have seen.[[142]](#footnote-142) Although Yahweh here speaks in terms of “Jacob’s household,” which sounds like a term for Israel or Ephraim as a whole, his words will eventually imply that he continues to have Samaria especially in mind. Indeed, “household” seems sometimes to refer in particular to the royal household, to the administration (e.g., Hos. 5:1, and see the comments), and the closing lines of this subsection imply this reference here. But the good news is that testifying includes warning,[[143]](#footnote-143) and warning means that the right response opens up the possibility that the threat which follows can be cancelled. This third declaration is given extra gravity by Amos’s longest reminder about who is the proclaimer (the Syriac translation lengthens it even further).[[144]](#footnote-144) Here for the first of nine times Amos calls Yahweh “God of Armies” (see the comments on Hos. 12:5 [6]).

In the content of the proclamation (v. 14), Yahweh reverts to speaking of what “I” will do, as in 1:3—2:16, and takes up expressions that have become familiar: “on the day” (cf. 1:14), “attend” (with the gerund construction), “rebellions,” “for” (see the comments on 3:1). He moves in a different direction in referring to Beth-el’s altars. Even if there was some sort of shrine at Samaria, the main sanctuary for the region was Beth-el (see Hos. 4:15; 8:4; 10:5-8; and the comments), which was thus the state sanctuary (Amos 7:13), and the gold bullock was there. Plural “altars” might simply denote an incense altar and a sacrificial altar, but Hosea is inclined to be snide about multiplicity of altars (see Hos. 8:11-12) and Amos may likewise be suggestively juxtaposing plural altars and plural rebellions, though he is not focusing on the inherent wrong of the worship at Beth-el as Hosea does. Either way, the singular altar in the next line will be the main sacrificial altar, whose demolition would be especially devastating; cutting off its horns stands for its total demolition (cf. Hos. 10:2). Further, someone seeking refuge could lay hold of the altar’s horns (e.g., 1 Kings 1:50-51; 2:28). Cutting off the altar’s horns is a symbol of there being no place of refuge for Ephraim.

In a further poetic justice (v. 15), Yahweh will see that the homes built on economic oppression will all fall. Naturally, people in leadership live in nicer houses than the people who pay for them. Like Western retirees, they have somewhere warm for winter in Jezreel or in the Jordan Valley, and somewhere cool for summer in Samaria (at least, Ahab did: see 1 Kings 21:1, 18). These homes are tastefully decorated in ivory, well-known as an expensive and prestigious material for creative decorative work (e.g., 6:4; 1 Kings 10:18; 22:39).[[145]](#footnote-145) They are great houses, but they are built on great tumults (v. 9), and they are doomed.

**Amos 4:1-3.** The opening words are virtually the same as those at 3:1 (and 5:1) and might indicate that vv. 1-3 were once a separate message, but this exhortation follows closely on what proceeds, as did 3:1-2. It continues to refer to Samaria and to talk about people being put under pressure (cf. 3:9). Whereas most of the prophets’ critique implicitly confronts the men who generally hold public power in the community (e.g., 2:6-8; 3:10), prophets occasionally also turn to the womenfolk who share in the men’s guilt through the way they profit from their husbands’ action (cf. the sequence in Isa. 3). Their use of their position and power and their relationship with the needy are very different from the ideal portrayed in Proverbs 31.[[146]](#footnote-146) But a comparison with such a woman who embodies initiative and activity in the community suggests that they would have lots of opportunity to be directly involved in wrongdoing towards ordinary people; they need not simply be sheltering behind their husbands.[[147]](#footnote-147)

Bashan, the modern Golan (v. 1) is rich pastureland and Bashan cattle would be like grass-fed Aberdeen Angus cattle (see e.g., Deut. 32:14; Ps. 22:12 [13]; Ezek. 39:18). These fat cows live in Samaria on the hill that rises impressively from the valley floor. The problem is that their nice life comes from being implicated in putting pressure on poor people and defrauding them, harassing them, and crushing them (cf.2:6-7; 3:9; Hos. 5:11). As before, “Amos is concerned not with individual instances of injustice, but rather with the devastation of the existence of entire families.”[[148]](#footnote-148) What they themselves do is put pressure on their husbands (sardonic ally called their “lords”—not a usual word to describe husbands) so that the capital’s economic system keeps making people pay taxes in the form that works well for the women, and for the men (again cf. 2:8). Indeed, Tg assumes that Amos addresses men as much as women; as Hosea shows, prophets are quite capable of addressing men as if they are women with the worst qualities.[[149]](#footnote-149) This understanding is encouraged by the fact that “Listen,” and many other forms in vv. 1-3, are masculine. Amos’s alternating between feminine and masculine might at least remind his listeners that he continues to indict a wider group than simply well-to-do women,[[150]](#footnote-150) so that people who breathed a sigh of relief because he was not talking to them would “find out seconds later that the divine noose was tightening around them after all.”[[151]](#footnote-151)

Some irony attaches to Amos’s reminder about another “Lord” (v. 2), whom they are not taking into account. One might have thought that Yahweh would not swear, since his yes would be yes and his no would be no (Matt. 5:37), but he is not bound by his own rules. The talk of swearing doesn’t make his fulfillment of his word more certain, but it does underline it for his hearers. As the New Testament also notes, he can’t swear by anything bigger than himself (Heb. 6:13), so he does swear by his own sacredness, his essential distinctive divine nature as God. But whereas his making an oath usually underscores a promise, or a threat against Israel’s foes (e.g., Mic. 7:20; and Heb. 6:13 again), Amos jolts his hearers further by turning Yahweh’s oath into the backing for a threat (cf. 6:8; 8:7). To say that days are coming is to speak of a time that is on its way, which will bring something quite new (they may be bad news or good news: cf. 8:11; 9:13) and which is certain to arrive, without committing oneself to a time frame but with an implication that a response is needed now. Otherwise, the women’s fate will mirror an event they and Amos were evidently familiar with, the catching of fish in the Mediterranean or in Kinneret, or their arrival in a place such as Samaria.

More literally (v. 3) they will be taken out through the gaps in the city wall, when it has been broken through by an attacker. There will be no need to wait in line to get through the narrow city gate. They will be thrown out, and again no one will escape. Amos does not use the usual terminology for the transporting of a population or of the important and well-to-do people and their wives, and he could just be speaking of their being taken out to be dumped, though “throwing out” occasionally denotes exile (Deut. 29:28 [27]; 2 Chron. 7:20). Harmon might refer to Hermel in North Aram[[152]](#footnote-152) or to Mount Hermon, just beyond Bashan (so Aq, Vg),[[153]](#footnote-153) which are on the way to or in the land belonging to foreigners and enemies such as Aram and Assyria.

## Theological Implications

1. People who store up violence and destruction or its proceeds may be storing it up for themselves.
2. People who live in nice houses that are built on the work of people who are consequently in financial difficulties risk the destruction of their nice houses.
3. People who enjoy the benefits of oppressive structures and practices share in responsibility for them and thus may share in the judgment on them, even if they are not directly involved in their administration.
4. Amos is more concrete and specific in his description of the good life enjoyed by the well-to-do than he is in his description of the misery of the lowly people.

Apart from a few flagrant instances, the evils of the situation as Amos censured them were not perhaps quite so palpable and blatant as his actual words might seem to suggest…. But… in the historical reality around him he not only sees what is obvious and characterises it as any other critical and far-seeing observer might do. He is also given to see with the eyes of God, and he therefore sees to the bottom of things,… so that if they do not deserve the name according to human righteousness, they certainly do so according to the righteousness of God. It is for this reason that Amos stands under the compulsion, which is also as such his prophetic freedom, to foresee and proclaim their inevitable consequence—the judgment to which they irresistibly move. How could Amos have been a prophet (the prophet who did not wish to be a prophet) if his picture of the present and future had not stood in opposition to the more harmless or equivocal pictures which any acute contemporary might have painted of the same situation, or any pragmatic historian might still form of it. On the level of ordinary human perception and thought and speech (apart from the fact that he spoke the true Word of God), the truth of his vision was and is guaranteed only by the fulfilment of all that he had seen and said in the year 722.[[154]](#footnote-154)

1. The problem is that the people leading the worship of the people of God (worship of whose theological nature Amos offers little critique, compared with Hosea) colluded with the way their people combined their enjoyment of the good life at the expense of others with their enthusiastic faith. Thus “Amos is even more severe in his condemnation of Samarian religion than in that of Samarian worldliness, proclaiming the pitiless judgment of God which will overtake this society not although, but just because, it is so religious a society.”[[155]](#footnote-155)

# Amos 4:4—5:3—You Wouldn’t Turn Back

## Translation

4Come to Bȇt-’ēl and rebel,

to the Gilgal, do much rebelling.

Bring your sacrifices for the morning,[[156]](#footnote-156)

your tenths[[157]](#footnote-157) for the third day.[[158]](#footnote-158)

5Burn some leavened bread as a thank offering,

call out your voluntary offerings, make them heard,

because so you love, Yiśrā’ēlites (the Lord Yahweh’s proclamation).

6But on one hand, although[[159]](#footnote-159) I gave you

freedom for your teeth in all your towns,

And a shortage of bread[[160]](#footnote-160) in all your places,

you didn’t turn back to me (Yahweh’s proclamation).

7And further, although I held back the rain from you

when there were yet three months to harvest,

And I would make it rain on one town

and on another town I wouldn’t make it rain,

So one share had rain

and a share on which it wouldn’t rain would wither,

8And two or three towns would lurch

to one town to drink water,

And they wouldn’t be full,

you didn’t turn back to me (Yahweh’s proclamation)

9I struck you down with scorching and with mildew,

many times,[[161]](#footnote-161) your gardens and your vineyards,

While your fig trees and your olive trees the locust would consume,

but[[162]](#footnote-162) you didn’t turn back to me (Yahweh’s proclamation).

10I sent off an epidemic against you

in the manner of Mișrayim;

I killed your young men with the sword,

along with the capture of your horses,

And I made the smell in your camp rise, even into your nostrils,

but you didn’t turn back to me (Yahweh’s proclamation).

11I overthrew you[[163]](#footnote-163)

in the manner of God’s overthrowing Sədōm and ‘Ămōrāh,

And you became like a brand rescued from a flame,

but you didn’t turn back to me (Yahweh’s proclamation).

12Therefore, so I will do to you…:[[164]](#footnote-164)

as a consequence of the fact that I’ll do this to you,

be ready to meet your God, Yiśrā’ēl.

13Because there—one forming mountains,

creating wind,

telling a human being what is his thinking,[[165]](#footnote-165)

Is one making dawn into gloom,

making his way on earth’s heights:[[166]](#footnote-166)

Yahweh the God of Armies his name.[[167]](#footnote-167)

5:1Listen to this message which I’m raising over you people as a dirge, household of Yiśrā’ēl:

2She’s fallen, she won’t rise up again,

the maiden[[168]](#footnote-168) of[[169]](#footnote-169) Yiśrā’ēl.

She’s been left on her soil,

there’s no one standing her up.

3Because the Lord Yahweh has said this:

The town that goes out a thousand

will have a hundred remaining.

The one that goes out a hundred

will have ten remaining to Yiśrā’ēI’s household.

## Interpretation

A new form of bidding suggests a new beginning, backed up by another sort of argument running through 4:6-11 which 4:12-13 and 5:1-3 bring to a conclusion. The sequence of parallel declarations with similar introductions and conclusions but varying content and length, which forms the center of the section, compares with the sequence in 1:3—2:16. In 4:4-5, Amos invites people to worship, but he does so scornfully. In 4:6-11 he justifies the scorn. In 4:12-13 he presses the implications. In 5:1-3 as in 4:1-3 he issues a closing threat. MT(A) places a petuhah after 4:13; different MT codices place a setumah after 4:9, 10, 11, 13, and/or and after 5:3.

**4:4-5.** The exhortation “Come” (v. 4a) suggests an invitation to worship (Pss. 95:6; 100:2, 4) and the destination of Beth-el and Gilgal confirms this significance. The occasion will presumably be a pilgrim festival of the kind that people attended from time to time. The two sanctuaries appear together at Hosea 4:15 (see the comments) in the context of an exhortation not to go there because of the apostate nature of their worship. Here Amos positively exhorts them, but only with irony because he follows “come” with “rebel,” the term that recurred in 1:3—2:16. Once more, he is playing a trick on his audience, whom one might imagine being given this invitation in a non-snide way when they were on their way to the sanctuary. There is a sharpness about the verb “rebel,” since coming to worship implies the opposite. It’s also significant that the rebellion in 1:3—2:16 expressed itself in wrongful deeds towards other people. As was the case in 2:6-16, Amos is addressing Ephraim as a whole, not just the particularly well-off or the administration. In Hosea, Ephraim’s rebellion lies in its recognition of other deities or its treatment of Yahweh as if he were one of those other deities (7:13; 8:1; 9:15; 14:9). In Amos, it lies in its ignoring obligations towards other individuals or other nations. Coming to worship actually heightens the rebellion. As is the case with the forms of worship, perhaps one reason is that worshiping Yahweh as if he cared about offerings but not about moral relationships is to confine him to an image of deity that comes from human imagination. People are worshiping a different god and rebelling against the real God. Amos’s polemic matches the assumptions accepted by the people leading worship on a good day (e.g., the priests whose teaching comes in Leviticus and the musicians whose words come in the Psalms), though there were of course both ministers and prophets who paid only lip service to the fact that community worship and community life need to be in harmony.

Amos maintains the irony as he itemizes the worship that people are invited to offer (vv. 4b-5a). First there are the daily sacrifices, with perhaps the implication that they will offer them on the morning after arriving at the sanctuary the previous evening (the journey there might take the best part of a day). Second, there are tithes, which apparently they will offer on the next day. Third, there are thank-offerings, which people bring in gratitude for some blessing such as deliverance from a crisis or the birth of a child; leavened bread was entirely acceptable in this connection (Lev. 7:13). Then there were voluntary (freewill) offerings that people made simply out of a desire to make an offering to God when under no particular obligation to give something. Worshipers needed to make sure that people knew about these offerings because the offerings are designed to glorify Yahweh, and they need public proclamation to that end (“This offering is an expression of thanks to God because he has done such-and-such a thing for us/me”). So there is nothing snide about vv. 4b-5a in themselves.

But then (v. 5b) comes the value judgment to complete the sarcastic bracket around vv. 4-5. A regular invitation to come to worship could lead into a “because” about God (Pss. 95:7; 100:5). Amos concludes with a different kind of “because,” which talks about love in a different connection from the one that interests Yahweh (see 5:15; Mic. 6:8) and also contains yet another irony, because the word for “love” (*‘āhēb*) also means be loyal (see Hos. 3:1 and the comments).

**Amos 4:6-11.** There is another respect in which Ephraim has shown that it doesn’t understand its relationship with Yahweh. That relation is based on a principle of mutual commitment. As 2:9-11 has recalled, Yahweh has given himself to Ephraim in getting them out of Egypt, getting them through the wilderness, putting them in possession of the country of Canaan, and giving them prophets and dedicated people, and the theory was that they would respond to him by living in the proper way with one another. The strange thing now is that they seem not to have noticed that Yahweh has not been behaving in a way consistent with the beginning of the relationship. Yahweh’s account of how things have subsequently worked out overlaps with curses and threats detailed in Mesopotamian documents from pre-Israelite times and in the First Testament in later formulations in the Torah (Lev. 26; Deut. 28).[[170]](#footnote-170) It also overlaps with Solomon’s forebodings in his prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8), which additionally stress how acts of chastisement should lead to people turning back to Yahweh. But Amos is now talking about things that have happened rather than things that could happen. If Solomon suggests an encouragement regarding how people would need to pray or did pray in the exile in light of such chastisement, Amos indicates how in his context such encouragement has miscarried: chastisement has not had this effect.[[171]](#footnote-171) While the chastisements may be recent events, he may just as easily be reviewing how things have been over a longer period. The rejoicing of the festival described in vv. 4-5 implies that things are going well at the moment, but apparently people have failed to reflect on the significance of how things have previously been, a failure for which Isaiah 22:1-14 later critiques Judah.

For instance (v. 6), Yahweh had spoken about blessing their bread (Exod. 23:25) but he hadn’t been doing so. With “gallows humor”[[172]](#footnote-172) Amos comments that people everywhere had clean teeth because they lacked bread, presumably because the barley and/or wheat harvest had failed. Such an experience would surely make them turn back to Yahweh, even though turning back wouldn’t necessarily imply they needed to repent of wrongdoing (see Joel 2:12-14 and the comments). Yahweh’s comment implies that their careful, assiduous and costly worship described in vv. 4-5 didn’t count as turning back to him. There’s something lament-like about the conclusion to this verse, which will be repeated five times; “this God is one whose grief over Israel’s prospects is profound.”[[173]](#footnote-173)

Yahweh had said he would bless their water (Exod. 23:25); that blessing had also failed (vv. 7-8). Initially Yahweh is restating the previous point; the barley and wheat harvest comes in May-June and depends on the spring rains, which have failed. But verses 7aγδb add something. Drought and food shortage are sometimes just one of those things; they need not imply divine purposefulness. But there is something odd about rain falling unevenly over different towns so as to fill their wells, and for their people to drink and to store in their cisterns, as well as over different shares of the land, and it ought to have made people ask what was going on, but it didn’t.

Scorching and mildew (v. 9) also affect barley and wheat, but the parallelism within v. 9a indicates that they are more broadly problematic. Scorching comes from the khamsin, while mildew refers to a fungal growth; as a pair they are proverbial scourges (Deut. 28:22; 1 Kings 8:37; 2 Chron. 6:28; Hagg. 2:17). In addition, Ephraim’s orchards were afflicted by a locust epidemic (see Joel 1—2 and the comments). But still they asked no questions.

Epidemic and war (v. 10) are realities of life for animals and human beings. Epidemic is a peril threatened for rebellion (e.g., Deut 28:21; 1 Kings 8:37; 2 Chron. 6:28), grievously familiar from the exodus story: whereas it’s not supposed to affect the people of God, it is supposed to affect oppressors (Exod. 9:3, 10). For the account of slaughter in war Yahweh seeks out the strongest possible language and imagery (the smell is the smell of rotting unburied corpses) to underscore the strangeness of Ephraim’s not turning back.

Finally there is an event that one might call a natural disaster but also an act of God (v. 11), when towns or villages were overthrown as Sodom and Gomorrah were (!). The language parallels the account of that event. It was not described as an earthquake, but Amos’s words could easily be understood in that way, and earthquake commonly leads to fire. Ephraim was also like a community that had a narrow escape from that catastrophe, but it still didn’t turn back to Yahweh.

**Amos 4:12-13.** “Therefore” is one of Amos’s favorite words (3:11; 4:12; 5:11, 13, 16; 6:7; 7:17; also 3:2); here it indicates a recognition of how the sequence of attempts failed to draw Israel back, and a declaration that Israel’s refusal has consequences.

The threat (v. 12) is unspecific, though therefore perhaps more worrying, as if Yahweh said, “You ain’t seen nothing yet.”[[174]](#footnote-174) The disturbing nature of this unspecificity is underlined by the repetition in the second colon, which tells the listeners no more (there are other such repetitions which gain their impact through occurring in successive lines in Hos. 6:2; Isa. 26:3). The implication of Yahweh’s action is expressed in the declaration that God will insist on meeting personally with Ephraim, and not in the way implied by the opening invitation in v. 4. They had better get ready.

The seriousness of this prospect emerges from who this God is and what he intends (v. 13). Yes, Yahweh is the one who got Israel out of Egypt and uniquely acknowledged Israel, who took Israel through the wilderness, gave them their land, and thus showed (among other things) that he is sovereign over all the nations). But he is also the one who forms or shapes mountains (such as the ones around Samaria, and the one on which the town sits), like a potter. He is the one who creates wind (as his bringing of natural adversities has demonstrated)—or breath as the gift of life in connection with creation (Isa. 42:5). The sequence of mountains and wind suggests the strongest, most stable, and the most dynamic, most powerful. He is the one who tells a human being his thinking (a human being like Amos or other prophets). And he is the one who is now going to turn the brightness of dawn into darkness as he strides in his sovereignty on earth’s heights. The verse has the dynamic of a Hebrew noun clause in which (as is commonly the case) the predicate precedes the subject. Amos’s point is, “you need to remember that the one to whom you will not turn back, and who is set on treading earth’s heights to make dawn into gloom for you, is the one who formed the mountains, created the wind, and revealed his thinking.” Thus “that he might rouse careless men more effectually,” Amos “magnificently extols the power of God.”[[175]](#footnote-175) “The listing of achievements as a string of participles used as titles is tantamount to reciting the numerous names of God,” but “the climax is the declaration of *the* name.”[[176]](#footnote-176) They have to remember that Yahweh is also the God of Armies.

Amos will include further similar lines (5:8-9; 9:5-6), which might all be or include quotations from a hymn with which Ephraim should be familiar but from which it has not drawn the right inferences. It might even be a hymn the worshipers sang at Beth-el, which Amos can use against them.[[177]](#footnote-177) Certainly, if it started off life as a doxology, it functions differently here. Their God is a great God, but have they seen the implications?

**Amos 5:1-3.** People attending to Amos in the town square or sanctuary courtyard in Beth-el (or listening to his scroll read out, later) would not be surprised at his exhortation to listen to his message, which is the same as 3:1 and 4:1. But each time what follows brings a surprise; if Amos uses a conventional form of words, he uses it in an unconventional way.

Here (v. 1) he redefines his “message” as a “dirge” that he is “raising,” which is a standard way of referring to the loud chanting of a funeral dirge (e.g., Jer. 7:29; Ezek. 19:1). So who has died? The answer is that Israel’s household has. Amos might be referring to the royal household or to the nation as a whole; the elegy itself will clarify that “the prophet summons the members of the state to their own funeral.”[[178]](#footnote-178)

Amos’s loud chanting (v. 2) might attract the attention of people who might not otherwise be listening, who would then hear the actual dirge. They too would ask who has died, and would discover that it’s them. Specifically, it’s the capital city from which people went to Beth-el for the festival. As is often the case in more solemn verse, the second colon in each line is shorter than the first, which conveys a kind of halting, bringing-up-short effect. Although families often lose a son or daughter, the familiarity of the experience hardly removes its pain and grief, which also affects other people. In imagination, there is the dead young woman, laid out on the ground, “whom the tears and laments of the grieved parents and her betrothed can no longer revive.”[[179]](#footnote-179) “Fallen” is a common expression for dying, and a natural one for someone who’s died violently; it comes in Deborah’s song and in David’s elegy about Saul and Jonathan (Judg. 5:27; 2 Sam. 1:19, 25, 27). This is a final kind of falling—not one from which you can get yourself up or from which someone else can get you up. It’s worse if it’s the violent death in war that issues in your body being abandoned and left to rot. In this sense, too, there’s no one to lift you up and bury you (contrast 1 Sam. 31:11-13).

Amos goes on to give a more literal version of his message (v. 3), in case people don’t get the point about the dirge, or rather to underscore it. “Thousand” and “hundred” are terms for fighting units, and usually the number could not be pressed, and but here Amos takes their “decimation” literally as he speaks in terms of a “scanty residue” which is “meaningless for the future of the nation.”[[180]](#footnote-180)

## Theological Implications

1. Heart-felt, proper, sacrificial worship that follows all scriptural principles can be an expression of rebellion and can be undertaken because we like it. It’s possible for services to be occasions when we are serving ourselves.[[181]](#footnote-181) “Irony reigns, as cultic celebrations mask the harsh facts of national failures.”[[182]](#footnote-182)
2. Events such as famine, drought, abnormal weather, epidemic, carnage, and earthquake need not be divine chastisements but they always invite us to turn back to God and they always invite us to ask whether they are indeed chastisements. In this connection the people of God need to judge themselves (1 Cor. 11:31-32).[[183]](#footnote-183)
3. God’s chastisement is designed to draw people back. “As a physician of souls” God is involved in “cauterizing” us.[[184]](#footnote-184) But it doesn’t usually work and it is then succeeded by retribution. The history of the people of God is designed to be salvation history but it is inclined to turn into a history of disobedience, which leads God to turn it into disaster history.[[185]](#footnote-185) Therefore we pray,

Grant Almighty God, that since by thy word thou kindly invites us to thyself, we may not turn deaf ears to thee, but anticipate thy rod and scourges; and that when, for the stupidity and thoughtlessness by which we have become inebriated, thou attest those punishments by which thou sharply urgent us to repent, –O grant, that we may not continue wholly intractable, but at length turn our hearts to thy service and submit ourselves to the yoke of thy word, and that we may be so instructed by the punishments which thou hast inflicted on us and still inflictest, that we may truly and from the heart turn to thee, and offer ourselves to thee as a sacrifice, that thou mayest govern us according to thy will, and so rule all our affections by thy Spirit, that we may through the whole of our life strive to glorify thy name.[[186]](#footnote-186)

And “Let it therefore be clearly said by us as well to God,…: ‘You are fearsome, who will resist you in your wrath.’”[[187]](#footnote-187)

1. “The calling of the Jews to the Church is… to be understood as the plucking of a brand from the burning” (4:11). “How much more so, then, the calling of the Gentiles!”[[188]](#footnote-188)
2. Amos uses a niphal verb in 5:2 (“she’s been left”). Who did the leaving? Was it Yahweh? How would this statement relate to promises that Yahweh would never leave Israel (e.g., 1 Sam. 12:22; Ps. 94:14) and to prayers that he might not do so (Ps. 27:9) even though they are wayward (1 Kings 8:57)? Conversely, the observation that no one is standing the girl up sits alongside declarations that Yahweh is the one who stands people up (e.g., 1 Sam. 2:8 for the participle; Hos. 6:2).

# Amos 5:4-27—Where to Have Recourse

## Translation

4Because Yahweh has said this to Yiśrā’ēl’s household:

Have recourse to me and live,

5don’t have recourse to Bȇt-’ēl.

Don’t come to the Gilgāl,

don’t cross over to Bə’ēr Šeba’.

Because the Gilgāl will definitely go into exile,

Bȇt-’ēl will become trouble.[[189]](#footnote-189)

6Have recourse to Yahweh and live,

so that he doesn’t break in[[190]](#footnote-190) like fire on the household of Yôsēp,

and it consumes, and Bȇt-’ēl[[191]](#footnote-191) has no one to quench it,

7You who overturn decision-making into wormwood,[[192]](#footnote-192)

and put faithfulness to rest on the earth.

8One making Pleiades and Orion,

one overthrowing deep darkness[[193]](#footnote-193) into morning,

and darkening day into night,

The one calling to the water in the sea

and pouring it on the surface of the earth,

Yahweh his name,[[194]](#footnote-194)

9Is one making destruction burst onto the strong,

so that destruction[[195]](#footnote-195) comes[[196]](#footnote-196) on the fortress.[[197]](#footnote-197)

10People repudiate the reprover in the gate,

and at the one who speaks truly[[198]](#footnote-198) they take offense.

11Therefore, on account of your imposing a grain tax[[199]](#footnote-199) on the poor person,

and your taking a levy of wheat from him,

Whereas[[200]](#footnote-200) you’ve built stone houses,

you won’t live in them,

And whereas you’ve planted delightful vineyards,

you won’t drink their wine.

12Because I know how many are your rebellions,

how manifold[[201]](#footnote-201) your wrongdoings,

Adversaries of the faithful person, takers of a bribe,

people who turn aside[[202]](#footnote-202) the needy at the gate.

13Therefore the insightful person keeps quiet at that time,

because it’s a bad time.

14Have recourse to what is good not to what is bad,[[203]](#footnote-203)

in order that you may live,

And thus Yahweh the God of Armies may be with you,

as you’ve said.

15Repudiate what is bad and be loyal to what is good,

and establish decision-making in the gate.

Perhaps Yahweh the God of Armies may be gracious

to what remains of Yôsēp.

16Therefore Yahweh the God of Armies, the Lord, has said this:

In all the squares, lamenting,

and in all the streets they’ll say, “Oh, oh!”[[204]](#footnote-204)

They’ll call to the farmworker for mourning,[[205]](#footnote-205)

and for lamenting to people who know how to wail,

17And in all vineyards for lamenting,

when I pass among you, Yahweh has said.

18Oh, you who long for Yahweh’s day,

what indeed will it be for you?[[206]](#footnote-206)

Yahweh’s day—

it will be darkness not light,

19As when someone flees from before a lion,

and meets a bear,

Or comes home,

and leans his hand on a wall,

and a snake bites him.

20Yahweh’s day will be darkness not light, won’t it,

gloomy with no brightness to it.

21I repudiate, I reject your festivals,

I don’t savor your assemblies,

22Even though you offer up to me burnt offerings,

and your grain offerings, I don’t accept.

Your well-being sacrifice of fatlings

I don’t look at.

23Remove from me the clamor of your[[207]](#footnote-207) songs;

to the music of your mandolins I will not listen.

24But decision-making is to roll on[[208]](#footnote-208) like water,

faithfulness like a perennial wadi.

25Was it sacrifices and an offering that you presented to me in the wilderness

for forty years, household of Yiśrā’ēl?

26So you will carry[[209]](#footnote-209) the shelters (the abomination) of[[210]](#footnote-210) your king,[[211]](#footnote-211)

and Kȇwān[[212]](#footnote-212) (the abomination), your images,

Your divine star,

which you made for yourselves,

27And I will take you into exile,

beyond Dammeśeq

(said Yahweh: the God of Armies his name).

## Interpretation

The opening challenge in this section introduces its distinctive feature, its exhortations to have recourse to Yahweh and to what is good. The exhortations compare and contrast with the exhortation that opened 4:4—5:3, and their talk of life as the fruit of such recourse compares and contrasts with where that section ended. The exhortations are buttressed by warnings about the destruction of Ephraim that will follow from ignoring them, and by critiques of Ephraim’s life which contrast with what the exhortations look for. The section comprises two sequences of short prophecies. Many may have been separate in origin, but they are now set one after each other to form a longer compilation comprising two exhortations, two warnings, and two critiques:

1. Exhortations to have recourse to Yahweh vv. 4-7 vv. 14-15
2. Warnings of destruction vv. 8-9 vv. 16-20
3. Critiques of Ephraim’s life vv. 10-13 vv. 21-25

In each sequence Amos introduces the key twin ideas of *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqāh*, faithfulness in decision-making, in v. 7 near the beginning and in v. 24 near the end. In the second sequence the description of Yahweh as God of Armies (cf. 3:13; 4:13) becomes prominent, in vv. 14, 15, 16. It recurs again in the final threatening conclusion in vv. 26-27, after which MT appropriately places a petuhah before the new start at 6:1.[[213]](#footnote-213)

**Amos 5:4-7.** The “because” that opens the section (v. 4) is a “literary connective device”[[214]](#footnote-214) involving an ellipse. In effect, “have recourse to me and live” is the exhortation Yahweh has been giving Ephraim, but it has ignored it, which is what makes calamity and death inevitable unless at last *now* Ephraim responds and finds that life can continue and flourish. One question Yahweh and Amos face people with is, “Who do you have recourse to?”: see vv. 4, 5, 6. The implicit argument is the same as it was earlier. The combination of their way of life as a community and their showing up for worship and seeking Yahweh’s guidance indicates that they don’t understand who Yahweh is. It’s not really Yahweh they’re inquiring of. Yet initially Yahweh doesn’t put the emphasis on not having recourse to *me* (the “me” is simply a verbal suffix).[[215]](#footnote-215) If anything, the emphasis lies on their not *having recourse* to me. The verb (*dāraš*) denotes seeking to discover what is going to happen and what one should do, and thus seeking help (e.g., 1 Kings 14:5; 22:8; 2 Kings 1:3, 6, 16). The idea of such seeking is related to the idea of turning back to Yahweh (cf. 4:6-11). As Ephraimites would be surprised at the implication that they didn’t turn back to Yahweh, because it’s what they thought they were doing when they went to the sanctuaries, so they would be surprised at the suggestion that they were not inquiring of Yahweh, because that’s partly why they went there. Actually, they need to start again and really have recourse to the real Yahweh. The problem is partly not their fault if the sanctuary ministers were not fulfilling their responsibility to teach people about Yahweh and his expectations. It was this failure that made seeking the real Yahweh and seeking the so-called Yahweh at a sanctuary were two different things. Further, if people have recourse to a minister at one of the sanctuaries, the response they will get will not be a response from the real Yahweh, as the ministers will think and claim. So it’s no good inquiring of them. If people want to inquire of God, they need to listen to someone like Amos. “The sanctuary competes with the prophetic word of God.”[[216]](#footnote-216)

The point applies to Beth-el, Gilgal, and Be’er-sheba (v. 5). Beth-el is the sanctuary that counts most (see 3:14; 4:4, and the comments). It’s the national cathedral. But Beth-el going to become “trouble” (*‘āwen*), to become Beth-aven (see Hos. 4:15 and the comments). Amos can also do something with the name of Gilgal (which also featured in 4:4) because the Hebrew word for “exile” is conveniently similar, so that “the Gilgal will definitely go into exile” is *hagilgāl gālōh yigleh*; he extends the paronomasia by using an idiom which involves repeating the verb. For the first time Amos thus speaks of exile as not just a reality among other peoples (1:3, 6, 9, 15) but as Ephraim’s destiny. The very name of Gilgal points to the fate; it’s almost as if the name makes the fate appropriate, even inevitable. The mention of Be’er-sheba is more surprising, because people have to “cross over” the border to Judah to go there, but there is evidence of Ephraimite involvement in the Negeb along the trade routes to Egypt.[[217]](#footnote-217) Perhaps Ephraimites then went the sanctuary at Be’er-sheba (cf. 8:14) as a place linked with Abraham and Isaac and also with Elijah, whereas they could view Jerusalem as a Johnny-come-lately kind of sanctuary with no time-honored Israelite connections as well as a politically problematic place, as the capital of Judah. There’s no declaration of judgment on Be’er-sheba as a Judahite sanctuary that Ephraimites visited, rather than an Ephraimite sanctuary.

Amos goes on to reinforce and re-express Yahweh’s exhortation (v. 6). To describe the danger of ignoring it, he takes up the image of fire from 1:3—2:5: see especially 1:4 where the fire’s object is a household, but also 1:7, 10, 12, 14; 2:1, 5 (see the introductory comments to 1:3—2:16). Ephraim was the only nation that escaped talk of fire there, but now it’s to be consumed by fire. Yahweh intends to break into it or force himself on it like fire; the verb most often refers to a spirit forcing itself on someone and overwhelming him (e.g., 1 Sam. 16:13; 18:10). Calling the nation “Joseph” reflects Ephraim’s being Joseph’s son (along with Manasseh); loosely the nation could be called Joseph as naturally as Ephraim. The repeated reference to Beth-el again reflects its supreme importance as a national sanctuary and/or the site of Amos’s delivering the message.

In reformulating his account of the actions that make calamity inevitable (v. 7), Amos appeals to the key First Testament pairing *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqāh* (cf. v. 24; 6:12; Mic. 7:9); Hosea uses the rarer but closely related hendiadys *ṣedeq* and *mišpāt* in a promise about what Yahweh will do (2:19 [21]; see the comments). Amos can apparently assume that people know what he is talking about; the linked expressions feature prominently in Israelite proverbs and in Israelite psalms—which people sang in the festivals at Beth-el and at Gilgal? They expressions signify that people with power and authority ought to make decisions in a way that expresses faithfulness in relationships with God and with the community. In practice power tends to be exercised without faithfulness and thus to be overthrown and turned into something that tastes foul; wormwood is “the bitterest substance nameable… comparable only to the taste of poison.”[[218]](#footnote-218) Faithfulness has thus been thrown over and trampled in the dust. Amos’s assertion applies not just to the authority exercised by the administration but to the power exercised by all those who have it. And working against the faithful exercise of authority is contradictory to having recourse to Yahweh—because faithful exercise of authority is integral to who Yahweh is.

**Amos 5:8-9.** To put it at its lowest, people are being unwise. The Amos scroll breaks off from the syntactical formulation of the section (which will be resumed in v. 10) to add a parallel formulation to the one that closed chapter 4.

It repeats the word “overthrow” (v. 8). The Ephraimites’ transforming decision-making into something bitter forms a nasty contrast with Yahweh’s transforming night into day. It also forms a warning parallel with his turning day into night (see further vv. 18-20). Like 4:13, v. 8 begins with a description of who Yahweh is in his power, which then leads into a declaration that this is the God who is about to bring calamity on Ephraim. Like 4:13 it thus comprises a series of participles, with the first sequence referring to the past and the second sequence referring to the imminent future. The actual creation of the constellations belongs to the distant past, and in light of this reference to creation, people might understand Amos to be alluding next to God’s original orchestrating for darkness to give way to light and then for day to give way to night, and subsequently to God’s deluging the earth with a flood. But it would be natural also to think of the ongoing pattern of the movement of the stars, of darkness and light, of day and night, and of the way rain can overwhelm the earth. The entirety of these processes at the beginning of the cosmos’s story and in ongoing human life issues from the activity of the God whose name is Yahweh. Pleiades and Orion may appear simply because they are constellations that are particularly easy to see, or because they are associated with transitions between seasons. The creation’s responsiveness to Yahweh’s summons contrasts with Ephraim’s unresponsiveness.[[219]](#footnote-219)

The problem (v. 9) is that this God is the one who thus has the capacity to make destruction burst out on the strength built into a fortress such as the one at Beth-el or at Samaria, and who intends to do so. Amos’s talk of destruction and strength takes up expressions he used earlier (3:10-11), so if he is semi-quoting from a hymn, he has adapted it to his purposes from the hymn (see on 4:13). As at 4:13, the dynamics of vv. 8-9 are those of a Hebrew noun clause in which the predicate precedes the subject. Amos has in effect already been speaking about one who intends to make destruction burst out on Ephraim’s strong fortresses, and his comment here is that people need to see that the one who intends to do this is the God described in v. 8.

**Amos 5:10-13.** Amos resumes his critique and his warning, relating them to the process of justice that Amos has implicitly censured in 2:7 and 5:7.

The space in front of the town gate (v. 10) is where the elders administer justice, and it Having no professional judges or magistrates or advocates has its advantages, but its disadvantage is that the people who may profit most from the miscarriage of justice are the people responsible for the administration of justice. While the reprover might be a kind of president of the elders, most occurrences of the word (the participle from *yākaḥ* hiphil) suggest it could as easily refer to anyone who supports a case for or against someone, speaking on behalf of a third party who has been wronged. Although the reprover is speaking the truth, the people with power repudiate and renounce him. Both verbs combine emotion and action: repudiate (*śānē’*) also means “hate,” and “take offense” (*tā’ab*) also means loathe (the related noun is conventionally translated “abomination”).

“Therefore, on account of” (v. 11) is a unique expression in a prophetic message; the “therefore” indicates that a warning is coming, but Amos once more leaves his hearers in suspense for a moment before pronouncing it. In principle they couldn’t complain too much about being required to pay taxes; Samuel had pointed out that an administration costs money, and people had insisted that they still wanted one (1 Sam. 8:10-20). But the waywardness Amos denounces is twofold. On one hand the poor are the special victims of the taxation. The society’s development has generated a gap between the powerful and the middle class (who should be paying the taxes) and the poor (who are shouldering an unfair proportion of them). The other issue is that the taxes are calculated and used to enable the powerful to live well. It’s here that the “therefore” strikes its blow. Regular houses are built of mud brick; posh houses are built of stone. Everyone has some vines and drinks their wine; powerful people expect to drink good wines. They will be disappointed.

Amos returns to the conduct of affairs at the gate (v. 12) in censuring the decision-makers’ many and manifold rebellions (see 1:3—2:16; 3:14) and wrongdoings (see Hos. 4:8 and the comments). Unfair taxation and unfair legal procedures might be related, if the cases brought before the elders issued from people’s failure to pay their taxes. Either way, “faithful” here refers to someone who is “in the right” and ought to be found innocent (cf. Tg). But instead his adversaries and harassers (the verb *ṣārar* can carry both connotations) are people who accept a bribe to give false testimony, like the scoundrels in the story of Naboth (1 Kings 21). Maybe the elders are in the know and maybe they are the recipients of bribes. One way or the other, the adversaries subvert the innocent and needy person’s case (the same verb came in the critique in 2:7). They thus cause him to be found guilty, and to end up in a worse mess if (for instance) his land is confiscated and given to some false accuser (or to the administration, as in 1 Kings 21).

Who then is the insightful person who is driven to keeping quiet (v. 13)? It might be the potential reprover of v. 10 who daren’t risk the cost of speaking out. It might be a prophet like Ezekiel whom Yahweh tells to maintain silence. The time is bad in the sense of being wicked but also in the sense of being disastrous, so that the quietness might be the quietness of shock and grief and horror (Lam. 2:10, 18; 3:28).[[220]](#footnote-220)

**Amos 5:14-15**. In these four central lines of the entire Amos scroll,[[221]](#footnote-221) Amos resumes his exhortation about who or what people should have recourse to, and plays further with the double meaning of bad and good.

People’s inclination to have recourse to what is bad instead of good in a moral sense (v. 14) means they are also having recourse to what is bad instead of good in that it will issue in disaster instead of blessing. The twin implication of having recourse goes along with the confusion about the kind of person Yahweh is and the kind of significance that attaches to a sanctuary such as Beth-el. Having recourse to Yahweh in worship involves having recourse to what is morally good in the rest of life and it issues in Yahweh’s blessing and in the nation’s life continuing. It means that the affirmations made in worship about the Lord being with us (e.g., Ps. 46) can come true. Having recourse to what is bad (to despoiling the needy and countenancing faithless decision-making) means people are not really having recourse to Yahweh even though they think they are, and it will issue in death: see vv. 16-17.

To put it in different words (v. 15a), they need to hate and repudiate what is bad, morally and thus experientially, rather than repudiating the reprover mentioned in v. 10. And they need to love and be loyal to what is good in both aspects, rather than just expressing the love for worship mentioned in 4:5. The concrete expression of that hatred/repudiation and love/loyalty will be to set up decision-making in the gate “so that all may see.”[[222]](#footnote-222) The reference to decision-making complements the reference to the faithful person in v. 12; elsewhere in Amos the two expressions always come together (5:7, 24; 6:12). Each needs the other: faithfulness needs to be embodied in decision-making; decision-making needs to be undertaken with faithfulness. The decision-making that needs publicly establishing is the kind whereby the faithful person is found to be in the right not falsely found guilty.

And then maybe… (v. 15b). “What remains of Joseph” might denote the cut-down state that results from the chastisements described in 4:6-11, or Amos might be speaking prospectively as he did in 5:1-3 and will in 6:6. Either way he is suggesting that even decimation or apparent death need not be the actual end; a change after the calamity might open up a future for what remains of Ephraim. But “what remains of Joseph” could be simply another way to speak of “the household of Joseph” (v. 6; cf. Gen. 45:7; 2 Sam. 14:7) and thus be a term that Ephraim used of itself. Amos might then be inviting them to reflect on the expression’s various nuances.

**Amos 5:16-20.** The further “therefore” (cf. vv. 11, 13) introduces more warnings by describing the consequences that will follow from the fire and the destruction.

They will issue in lamenting throughout the city (v. 16). The mourning will also involve the farmworker because of the devastation that has affected the farm (which in turn affects everyone because it’s where the town’s food comes from) and the people who are know the words and the chants to express grief.

The third reference to lamenting (v. 17) in the third successive line and the mention of a third location for lamenting completes the picture of its happening everywhere. And vineyards are supposed to be a great location of rejoicing (e.g., Judg. 9:27) in light of what their harvest will bring. The lamenting reflects how frightening it will be when Yahweh passes among the Ephraimites—ironically and terribly, just as when he once passed among the Egyptians (Exod. 12:12).

Amos then juxtaposes his own “Oh” (v. 18) to the similar (though not quite identical) “Oh” he envisages hearing from people’s lips in v. 16. In light of Yahweh’s coming, it will turn out to have been inadvisable to look forward to a day of Yahweh (see the comments on Joel 1:15 and the Introduction to Joel). People thought it would be a day of light—that is, of deliverance and blessing. It will actually be a day of darkness (cf. Joel 2:1-2)—that is, of defeat and calamity. Here and in 6:1 Amos’s “Oh” leads into a participial description of the activity Amos is lamenting, a form that appears in other Prophets when they say, “Oh” (e.g., Isa. 1:4; Mic. 2:1).

The little story about a shepherd’s apparent escape (v. 19) perhaps implies that hope for a day of Yahweh relates to the experience of reversals described in 4:6-11. There, people’s unwillingness to learn from the reversals meant they needed to be fearful of meeting Yahweh because he is the one who makes dawn into gloom. Here the man thinks he has evaded one animal, only to meet another. Perhaps the story continues: he escapes the second animal, closes the door, leans his hand on the wall with a sigh of relief, and gets bitten by a snake; or perhaps that vignette pictures something that happens on another occasion. Both pictures may owe more to the imagination than to real encounters at least with lions or bears, though this will not make them less powerful in connection with portraying the fearfulness of Yahweh’s day.[[223]](#footnote-223)

Either way it underlines the point (v. 20). The parallel colon underscores it further by its talk of gloom and of the absence of any ray of illumination.

**Amos 5:21-25**. Amos has urged people to have recourse to Yahweh, whereas they thought they were doing so when they gathered for the pilgrimage festivals (see e.g., Exod. 23:14-17). Here Yahweh more explicitly states the point he implied earlier.

He has no time for their assembling for communal worship at such festivals (v. 21). One can imagine Amos delivering this message to people assembled for such a festival at Beth-el.

His repudiation extends to a rejection of their offerings on those occasions (v. 22). It covers the various kind of regular sacrifice itemized in Leviticus 1—3, the burnt offering that involved giving a whole animal to Yahweh, the grain offering that accompanied it, and the well-being sacrifices that were shared between offerer and Yahweh and between the offerers themselves in a fellowship meal. Even though the beasts were ones that had been especially fattened up and could therefore be relied on to be rich and juicy, Yahweh doesn’t “accept” them—the term in Leviticus 1:3-4; 19:5-7. Ho doesn’t pay any regard to them. They resemble a bouquet of flowers offered by a husband to his wife when she knows he is having an affair. Whereas it might be a priest’s job to pass on Yahweh’s rejection of a single offering to its offerer for some reason, “Amos’s judgment in the name of God rejects Israel’s worship as a whole.”[[224]](#footnote-224)

He takes the same attitude to their worship songs with their accompanying instruments (v. 23). They are just noise, noise like the din of a crowd thronging around a town. The combination of reference to sacrifice and song presupposes that Leviticus and Psalms belong together in Israel’s worship. There would be no sacrifice without sung praise and prayer, and there would be no sung praise and prayer without sacrifice; with Amos’s critique which links the two, compare Isaiah 1:11-15.

Amos’s account of what rather interests Yahweh (v. 24) then compares with Isaiah 1:15-17. Yahweh comes back to *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqāh* (cf. v. 7), which need to flow like the water in a stream that gushes all year round. Such a stream is rare. A wadi is more or less by definition a stream bed through which water rushes only from time to time, especially in winter, after a storm. Yahweh’s expectation is a demanding and visionary one.

Yet the question that follows (v. 25) makes it less innovative. Sanctuary and manifold offerings and a book of worship songs do not go back to the beginnings of Israel’s story. While the Torah incorporates copious instructions for worship and for the rest of life, most of them relate to life in the land. One is hardly to imagine the Israelites wandering through the wilderness for a generation living by the complex rules in Leviticus. Such sacrifices and offerings were not intrinsic to Yahweh’s relationship with Israel. It’s easy to the people of God to think that worship is the thing that mainly matters.

**Amos 5:26-27**. In Yahweh’s concluding words, he goes back to warning of disaster but introduces a new note in the reference to a foreign deity and to the accoutrements of his worship.

Amos or his disciples replace the vowels of the word for shelters (*sukkôt*)(v. 26) by the vowels of the word *šiqquṣ* “abomination,” to pass judgment on the allusion; hence the combined translation “the shelters (the abomination).” The same fate befalls Kȇwān, a name for Saturn, who is “your king” on the assumption that he is the head of the pantheon, and he can naturally be described further as your divine star. Apparently the Ephraimites had made images of this god “for themselves”; that phrase is a snide one. This is the only First Testament reference to the worship of an astral god, but the widespread nature of this worship among Israel’s neighbors makes it entirely understandable.

Yahweh then resumes the talk of exile from v. 5 (v. 27). He has just spoken of the people carrying their images, and way beyond Damascus is where they will carry them as Yahweh takes the Ephraimites off there. There will be some appropriateness in the precise threat if worship of the astral gods came into Ephraim via Aram, and in the reminder in the additional comment that the one who issues this threat is the Lord of all the heavenly armies.[[225]](#footnote-225)

## Theological Implications

1. Amos continues to interweave declarations about inevitable judgement with exhortations whose heeding can make its cancellation possible. The first interweaving in this section implicitly makes clear the interrelationship of exhortation and declaration. On a superficial reading the exhortation is pointless if God has made a decision about what is to happen (note the “definitely”). But it’s never over until it’s over.
2. Going to worship and seeking God’s guidance and sustaining cannot work if the people of God are simultaneously letting judicial procedures treat people unfairly. It’s “wasted worship.”[[226]](#footnote-226) Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord,”….[[227]](#footnote-227)
3. The compound phrase *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqāh* can be seen as the First Testament equivalent to social justice, and it then offers us resources for thinking about what is a scriptural understanding of social justice. It means that anyone with power or authority in the nation, in the city, in the church, or in the family exercises their power or authority in a way that shows faithfulness to their people. In bed this morning my wife described government as a form of mental illness, which was too radical. Amos assumes that government or authority is important and needs to be properly buttressed and supported. Among other things, then, it means authority being exercised with faithfulness towards the governed and towards God. But people with power or authority are inclined to a self-imposed mental illness that turns government or power into poison—leadership becomes toxic.
4. Theodore of Mopsuestia comments on vv. 8-9 that God “is capable of transforming dangers involving death into joy unalloyed and enjoyable; those apparently enjoying serenity he is easily able to envelop in the gloom of disasters.” His translator, Robert C. Hill, comments that “Theodore is not tempted to give the verse an eschatological sense.”[[228]](#footnote-228)
5. While the prudent person may keep quiet when things are bad, “God… does not keep silence. God does not cringe…. God speaks and says what has to be said.” And he “is not afraid of being given notice.”[[229]](#footnote-229)
6. “Perhaps” (v. 15). Verse 15 comes in a list of Scriptures that made different rabbis weep (e.g., Gen. 45:3; Deut. 31:21; 1 Sam. 28:15; Prov. 13:23; Job 2:3; 15:15; Isa. 1:11; Mal. 3:5; b. Hagigah 4b-5a), and it provokes the observation that fulfilling v. 15a leads only into a “perhaps.” It thus compares with Joel 2:14 and Jonah 3:9. There is a sense in which the wrongdoer who repents and pleads for mercy from the one wronged, whom he or she knows to be merciful, can be confident of mercy. But there is a sense in which one must not take it for granted.
7. God’s passing through you may not be a comfortable experience.
8. “Those who long to see the fulfillment of prophecy… are no different from a man fleeing an attacking lion and after that running into a bear.”[[230]](#footnote-230)
9. Karl Barth takes up vv. 21-24:

I hate, I despise your lectures and seminars, your sermons, addresses, and Bible studies, and I take no delight in your discussions, meetings, and conventions. For when you display your hermeneutic, dogmatic, ethical, and pastoral bits of wisdom before one another and before me, I have no pleasure in them; I disdain these offerings of your fatted calves. Take away from me the hue and cry that you old men raise with your thick books and you young men with your dissertations ! I will not listen to the melody of your reviews that you compose in your theological magazines, monthlies, and quarterlies.[[231]](#footnote-231)

1. Does Amos simply reject acts of worship such as sacrifice and praise, and see the relationship between Israel and Yahweh as simply involving a commitment to *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqāh*? Certainly he has nothing positive to say about worship, but neither does he discuss the question of principle. Leviticus and the Psalms both make the assumption that worship and commitment to *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqāh* go together. But the idea that Amos simply rejects worship and says that only justice counts seems “intrinsically absurd.”[[232]](#footnote-232) The Amos scroll functions to reinforce one side of the message of Leviticus and Psalms and to make sure it doesn’t get lost in light of the nature of the other side of their message.
2. In what sense is the implication of vv. 21-24 that Amos “directs the text toward the New Testament renunciation of sacrifice as a human enterprise”?[[233]](#footnote-233) I cannot think of any New Testament writers who renounce sacrifice on this basis, though Hebrews does declare that for other reasons the time for the kind of sacrifice that the Torah requires is over. Hebrews and other parts of the New Testament expect demanding sacrifices of other kinds. Paul does critique people who want to add the observance of rules in the Torah to their or other people’s commitment to Jesus, and his argument against that idea compares interestingly with Amos’s next comment in v. 25—that is, God set up his relationship with Abraham independently of any rules in the Torah such as sacrifice. Theologically at least as important in vv. 21-24 is what one might call the renunciation of singing as a human enterprise; God may not like listening to hymns and songs as much as we like singing them.
3. The third-person form of v. 24 hints that Yahweh is not simply saying, “You’re to make faithful decision-making happen.” It could make one think of God acting in judgment,[[234]](#footnote-234) though that’s not otherwise the way Amos speaks of faithfulness in decision-making. But perhaps it hints that faithful decision-making will happen because it is not a behavioral goal but a gift from God which the community can indeed either allow to flourish or overthrow.[[235]](#footnote-235) Both the promise and the challenge were important to Martin Luther King, who often alluded to it.[[236]](#footnote-236)
4. The title of the Second Temple document the Damascus Rule or Damascus Document comes from v. 27. It may reflect its group’s fleeing for refuge to Damascus sometime in the century before Jesus, or it may refer allegorically to its setting up its community at Qumran. Either way, its adherents have concluded that vv. 21-23 apply to the sanctuary in their day and that they must leave Jerusalem, and the threat in v. 27 has thus become a promise for them.
5. Stephen takes up vv. 26-27 in Acts 7:42-45, following the LXX version which speaks of Israel worshiping astral deities instead of sacrificing to Yahweh in the wilderness. Amos himself simply notes that people were then not yet worshiping in the ways prescribed in the Torah, without implying that Israel’s wilderness years were the best years of its life. Stephen is able to use the LXX version of the text to be explicitly negative about those years, which suits his argument as a whole (with which Amos would not have disagreed).

# Amos 6:1-14—The People Who Are Relaxed

## Translation

1Oh, you people who are relaxed on Ṣiyyôn,

and who are relying on Mount Šōmərōn,

You notables of the preeminent among nations,

people to whom the household of Yiśrā’ēl comes.[[237]](#footnote-237)

2Cross over to Kalneh and look

and go from there to Great Ḥămat,

and go down to Gat of the Pəlištîm.

Are you better than these kingdoms,[[238]](#footnote-238)

or is their territory bigger than your territory?—[[239]](#footnote-239)

3You who thrust away the bad day

and bring near a seat[[240]](#footnote-240) of violence,

4Who lie on ivoried beds

and lounge on their couches,

Eat lambs from the flock

and calves from the middle of the stall,

5Who hum[[241]](#footnote-241) to the sound of the mandolin like David,

as they compose for themselves to[[242]](#footnote-242) instruments of song.

6Who drink from wine chalices

and anoint themselves with the preeminent of oils;

but haven’t got sick over the breaking of Yôsēp.

7Therefore now:

They will go into exile preeminent among the exiles;[[243]](#footnote-243)

the loungers’ banquet will cease.

8The Lord Yahweh has sworn by himself

(a proclamation of Yahweh the God of Armies):

I take offence[[244]](#footnote-244) at the majesty[[245]](#footnote-245) of Ya’ăqōb,

its citadels I repudiate,

I will hand over the city and what fills it.

9If ten people are left in one house, they will die. 10And when the person who is someone’s relative on his father’s side, with[[246]](#footnote-246) the one on his mother’s side,[[247]](#footnote-247) lifts him[[248]](#footnote-248) to take out his remains[[249]](#footnote-249) from the house, and says to one who is in the depths of the house, “Are there any more with you,” he’ll say, “None,” and say, “Ssh, because there’s to be no commemorating in Yahweh’s name.”

11Because there, Yahweh is ordering:

And he will strike down the big house, to pieces,

and the small house, to bits.[[250]](#footnote-250)

12Do horses run on a cliff,

or does one plow it with cattle?[[251]](#footnote-251)

But you have overthrown decision-making into poison,[[252]](#footnote-252)

the fruit of faithfulness to hemlock,

13You who rejoice at “No Thing,”

who say “It was by our strength

that we got ‘Horns’ for ourselves, wasn’t it.”

14Because here am I, getting up against you,

Yiśrā’ēI’s household

(a proclamation of Yahweh the God of Armies)

A nation, and they will beset you,

from Ləbô’ Ḥămat to the Wadi in the Steppe.

## Interpretation

Chapter 6 makes more explicit two aspects of critique concerning Ephraim which have been implicit so far in the Amos scroll. The Ephraimites are quite relaxed and cozy in the life they live in Samaria, and quite laid-back and confident about the future—at least, the middle-classes and leadership are. But there are two things wrong with that carefree and assured attitude: what it reflects about the nation’s internal life and what it reflects about their foreign policy assumptions. The chapter divides into two halves: critique (vv. 1-6) and threat (v. 7); then threat (vv. 8-11), more critique (vv. 12-13), and more threat (v. 14). Amos again speaks of exile (v. 7) and decimation (vv. 9-10), reminds people that Yahweh is God of Armies (vv. 8, 14), and asserts the importance of *mišpāṭ* and *ṣədāqāh* or faithfulness in decision-making (v. 12). MT (L) has a petuhah after v. 7, while MT (A) and MT (C) have a setumah after v. 10. MT (L) and MT (C) have a setumah where the English translation s surely rightly make a chapter break after v. 14, before the vision testimonies begin in chapter 7.

**Amos 6:1-6.** Amos’s critique begins in a startling way with its reference to Zion (v. 1). When the scroll was being read in Judah, the effect would be to remind Judahites against feeling superior in relation to Ephraim. Half the First Testament references to being “relaxed” (*ša’ănān*)refer to wise or unwise calm in Judah; references to reliance or trust occur in parallel with references to being relaxed (Isa. 32:9, 11), often denoting trust that has no basis. If Amos began a message in this way in Beth-el, then his words would have a similar converse effect to that of 2:4-5. The first colon would make people smirk; the second colon would then hit them with its parallel description of them as people with the same mistaken reliance on Samaria as the Judahites’ trust in Zion. Both Zion and Samaria were walled towns on defensible hills whose people thought they were pretty safe. The leaders who had responsibility for ensuring that Samaria’s inhabitants could see the city that way were the leaders of a nation that was a kingpin in its region. The entire household of Ephraim looked to them and acknowledged them; Amos may be quoting their self-perception, “probably sarcastically.”[[253]](#footnote-253)

Kalneh and Great Hamat (v. 2)—as opposed to another Hamat such as Hamat Zobah—were cities or kingdoms to the north, in Aram. They had been defeated by the Assyrians a century before Amos’s day, and they would shortly be defeated by the Assyrians again, but we don’t have hard information on their history in Amos’s time that would tell us why he refers to them. It seems likely that at this moment they are under Ephraimite control, so his point would be that their loss of self-determination might become Ephraim’s own. Ephraim needs to face facts. Contrary to what it might think, Ephraim is no more impressive (no stronger or no more honorable?) than the two northern towns. Their eventual fate when Assyria also begins to cut Ephraim down to size would add piquancy to Amos’s words for people then reading his scroll. We do know that Philistine Gat (as opposed to the other towns called Gat), which comes in the unexpected third colon, had been subjugated once or twice in recent history (see the comments on 1:7-8). Amos’s point about Gat, then, is that neither is Ephraim too insignificant for a conqueror to bother with, when compared with Gat and the other Philistine towns. There is some irony about this comparison when Ephraim may have thought itself more significant.

Amos provides a double illustration of Ephraim’s folly in this connection (v. 3). On one hand Ephraim persuades itself that there is no need to worry about a disaster happening in the near future. The best intelligence does not suggest that Assyria has aspirations to move westward. And on the other hand, the people with power in Samaria use their power in oppressive fashion. Amos’s assumption is that either they can rule well and assume that peace will continue, or they can rule oppressively and assume that trouble will come. The idea that they can misrule and assume that peace will continue is not realistic. The reference to a “bad day,” a day of calamity, gains extra resonance from following the talk about Yahweh’s day as one to be feared not anticipated, a day that will be pitch-dark (5:18-20).

Through ruling oppressively they can ensure that they live comfortably (vv. 4-5). They recline on their ivory-decorated seating in order to eat well. Generally people would eat lamb and beef only at great festivals of the kind that 5:21-22 critiqued; evidently these are not the only occasions when the well-to-do eat this way. And they eat the (best) lambs from the flock and calves that have been fattened in their stalls for the purpose. Meanwhile the diners hum along with their minstrels and make up songs. The talk of mandolin and song recurs from 5:23 and further draws attention to the comparison between their enjoyment of a festival at the sanctuary and their celebration of the good life in other contexts.

But Amos is not talking merely about a party (v. 6). Their enjoyment naturally includes drinking well and making sure their appearance is in keeping with who they are (cf. v. 1b). But the word “anoint” (*māšaḥ*)is most often used in a worship context, and “chalices” (*mizrāq*)otherwise appear only in that context, which begins to suggest a point about their enjoyment of life outside worship and within worship and about good and bad links and distinctions between worship and ordinary life. Another unexpected third colon brings this indictment to a close with a pained observation about their lack of pain at Ephraim’s pain, a lack of pain at the fracture that Amos knows is coming, foreshadowed by the bruising Ephraim has received already (4:6-11).

**Amos 6:7.** The subsection ends with another “therefore.” The leadership to whom ordinary Ephraimites have to look will maintain their position in the preeminent nation when they lead it into exile, as the banquet of the loungers (see v. 4) ceases. “The first shall be first.”[[254]](#footnote-254) A “banquet” (*marzēaḥ*) features in the First Testament only one other time (Jer. 16:5), where it denotes a funeral wake. Elsewhere the word recurs widely in related languages over many centuries, denoting a festival which might or might not be a wake, which did involve feasting and drinking, which was likely in some sense religious, but which need not take place in a sanctuary (and thus one could be held in Samaria, which had no sanctuary). Targum Jonathan to Numbers uses the word of the event in Numbers 25:2.[[255]](#footnote-255) There is some irony in Amos’s describing the Ephraimites indulging in a celebration of this kind when they should have been mourning but are not, and in his describing them as now having to abandon it when a real reason for mourning arrives.

**Amos 6:8-11**. With another solemn oath (cf. 4:2) Yahweh begins another declaration about bringing disaster, and Amos adds another affirmation that this is his proclamation.

Ephraim’s impressiveness is objectionable to Yahweh (v. 8), and he despises and rejects Ephraim’s citadels. His taking offense and his repudiation responds to the Ephraimite leaders’ own attitudes (5:10). It means the capital is doomed. Their majesty and their citadels will have been built in part off their exactions from needy people, so there is more than one level of poetic justice here.

Amos elaborates the consequences of Yahweh’s surrendering the city (vv. 9-10). Ten people in a household is actually quite a number, but his comment recalls his envisaging a town that fielded a fighting force of a hundred which is reduced to ten (5:3). Suppose these ten collect in a house. They will also die, maybe by epidemic, maybe because the enemy finds them. Amos imagines a person’s next-of-kin coming to collect his body later. He asks a question of someone who is still alive, who is perhaps hiding in the back of the house, or of the other relative he took with him who may have found another corpse there. We might ask whether there is anyone left to undertake the burial or to engage in this conversation, but that query would be too literalistic. Part of the point lies in the response: don’t speak Yahweh’s name, or we may provoke him to do more. *“*Thus does the last survivor of a city in ruin, through this very silence, testify to the judging God— and this after the reveling city itself previously had made continual and thoughtless use of this name” (5:21-23; 6:I-6).[[256]](#footnote-256) “Yahweh will have become foe, not friend. Survivors will want him to stay away, not come back.”[[257]](#footnote-257)

Amos returns to verse (v. 11) for a more literal description of the total devastation that faces Samaria. Big and small houses implies all of them. Perhaps Yahweh is commanding his supernatural executioners (cf. 3:9 and the comments), or perhaps it is a kind of self-command. Amos’s point is, the destruction is going to happen.

**Amos 6:12-14.** The section closes with a double summary critique in vv. 12-13 and another warning in v. 14.

Amos begins with another pair of puzzling but not-so-puzzling questions (v. 12) like the ones in 3:3-8. No, of course, horses do not run over craggy rocks; it’s not their terrain. Neither does one take one’s cattle over such terrain. Either practice is unnatural. So what? The point is that the practice of the administration in Samaria is just as unnatural. Amos rephrases his point in 5:7.

He adds a different aspect of his critique (v. 13) yet one that evidences the same arrogance. Ephraim has rejoiced in its capture of towns across the Jordan to the north, in Ammonite and/or Aramean territory. Amos counters the first rejoicing by a naughty respelling of the town’s name, which is Lodebar (e.g., 2 Sam 17:27); Amos calls it Lo Dabar, “No Thing.” That explicit built-in comment suggests that he also implicitly invites people to notice the meaning of the second town’s name, Qarnayim or “Horns,” which points to the idea that the Ephraimites have taken hold of their own strength and thus brought about their achievements,[[258]](#footnote-258) and he counters that second rejoicing by critiquing the their self-congratulation. Actually, their achievement was a fulfillment of a promise from Yahweh (see 2 Kings 14:25).

“Because here am I…” says Yahweh (v. 14): he will therefore take action in a different direction from the one he took in fulfilling that promise. He uses the demonstrative particle *hinnēh*, which is traditionally translated “behold” but which is not a verb, but is often followed by a verb. In Amos, *hinneh* “is always associated with Yahweh…. It calls attention exclusively to *God’s* action.”[[259]](#footnote-259) Applying to the future as here, “it serves to introduce a solemn or important declaration,”[[260]](#footnote-260) especially when used with a participle, which is literally referring to the present and thus speaks of action that is future as if it is already being undertaken, right now, for good or for ill (cf. 6:14; 7:8; Hos. 2:6, 12 [8, 14]; Joel 2:19; 3:7 [4:7]; Mic. 2:3). While Assyria was to be the main means of implementing Amos’s direst warnings, he never mentions Assyria, and only here does he refer to causing “a nation” to arise in this connection. We are so used to the assumption that prophets speak of using Assyria as Yahweh’s means of operating that it is easy to miss the failure of a prophet such as Amos to mention Assyria. In general he talks little of secondary causes. His rhetoric is significant in this connection; his verb “getting up” comes in the first colon, but its object waits until the fourth. In the suspense he first reminds Israel’s household that they will be the victims, then he adds the reminder about this being Yahweh’s proclamation. They may be preeminent among nations (v. 1); but a nation will beset or afflict them; Israel’s experience in Egypt (Exod. 3:9), which was supposed to be concluded forever, will be repeated. And it will happen from one end of Ephraim to the other, reversing the achievement of 2 Kings 14:25. It will thus reverse the fulfillment of Yahweh’s word: as the promise was fulfilled, so the warning will be. Lebo-hamat is at the far north of Aram near the border of modern Turkey, so that mention of it presupposes one of the most extravagant understandings of the bounds of the promised land (see e.g., Num 34:7). The “Wadi in the Steppe” (i.e., in the Arabah) comes only here; it must be a valley near the Dead Sea, presumably one marking the boundary between Ephraim and Judah, perhaps Wadi Qelt which reaches the Jordan near Jericho.

## Theological Implications

1. The people who are relaxing on their ivoried couches are the people with power and resources who as such are able to make money and increase their standard of living through reversals of the kind Amos has described in 4:6-11, because they can take advantage of the pressures such reversals bring to ordinary people.[[261]](#footnote-261) But it is “a truly dreadful thing for those appointed to govern countries or cities or peoples to succumb to bodily luxury.”[[262]](#footnote-262) Further, “that they do not trouble themselves over the ruin of Israel, and not to be conscious of the present or have a sense of the future, is the most serious charge that can be made about rulers and politicians.”[[263]](#footnote-263)
2. No powerful nation ever thinks it will go the way of other nations that get defeated or that it has itself defeated.
3. “Both religious and secular celebrations are abominable if morality is absent.”[[264]](#footnote-264) The celebration Amos describes is apparently “a kind of agape,”[[265]](#footnote-265) not exactly a worship occasion and not exactly a party pure and simple. As such it is subject to the kind of critique Paul will issue in 1 Corinthians 11.
4. When people finally recognize that God is “an enemy incensed against them” they recognize “that nothing would be better for them than to be hid from his presence. As it is said of the reprobate, ‘They will say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Bury us’” (Rev. 6:16).[[266]](#footnote-266)
5. Judgment will come on people will small houses as well as people with big houses. This is offensive in a modern context, when we expect each individual to be treated on the basis of their own deserve, and when the implication of Amos’s own account is that the big houses were built with the proceeds of unfairly treating the people with the small houses. Even if we are misreading the reference to big and small houses, in general the observation has force to it, in that Amos talks about devastation and exile that doesn’t distinguish between people who deserve it and people who do not. One significance of his doing so is that it forces modern readers to face facts. Wars and disasters do not so distinguish, as at one level blessing does not so distinguish. Of course well-to-do Samarians enjoyed the prosperity of Jeroboam’s reign to a greater extent than the less well-to-do; but even the latter enjoyed it. While God could choose to send a destroying angel simply to kill each individual wrongdoer in Ephraim and could ensure that each individual faithful person survived, he did not choose to do so. He made humanity to live by families and communities and nations, and we live and die, thrive and suffer, as families and communities and nations.
6. Verse 13 “presents the words of those confidently gloating in the nation’s military strength.” Amos “satirizes that pride by exposing its falsity: military propaganda cannot eliminate the humiliations of the past nor save the country from the devastation and exile that is soon coming.”[[267]](#footnote-267)
7. Augustine comments:

A number of other points bearing on the laws of eloquence could be found in this passage which I have chosen as an example. But an intelligent reader will not be so much instructed by carefully analysing it as kindled by reciting it with spirit. Nor was it composed by man’s art and care, but it flowed forth in wisdom and eloquence from the divine mind; wisdom not aiming at eloquence, yet eloquence not shrinking from wisdom…. But although I take some examples of eloquence from those writings of theirs which there is no difficulty in understanding, we are not by any means to suppose that it is our duty to imitate them in those passages where, with a view to exercise and train the minds of their readers, and to break in upon the satiety and stimulate the zeal of those who are willing to learn, and with a view also to throw a veil over the minds of the godless either that they may be converted to piety or shut out from a knowledge of the mysteries, from one or other of these reasons they have expressed themselves with a useful and wholesome obscurity…. The expositors of these writers, then, ought not to express themselves in the same way, as if putting forward their expositions as of the same authority; but they ought in all their deliverances to make it their first and chief aim to be understood, using as far as possible such clearness of speech that either he will be very dull who does not understand them, or that if what they say should not be very easily or quickly understood, the reason will lie not in their manner of expression, but in the difficulty and subtilty of the matter they are trying to explain.[[268]](#footnote-268)

# Part Three: Amos 7:1—9:15 The Visions and the Declarations They Frame

Five accounts by Amos of visions he receives play a dominant and framing role in the last part of the Amos scroll. The first four are similar in presentation, the last is different. The first four divide into two pairs, but the opening three lead into an account of a confrontation between Amos and Amaziah, the Beth-el priest, which thus causes the postponement of Amos’s report of the fourth vision. The MT codices provide division markers after the second vision report, after the third, after the account of the confrontation, and after the fourth vision report, though they vary each time over whether it is a petuhah or a setumah (MT codices are unusually inconsistent in recording division markers in Amos 6—9). In due course the fourth vision report leads into an extensive account of Yahweh’s critique of Ephraim and his coming judgment. The fifth vision report leads into further warnings and also into promises of restoration. The visions simply portray Yahweh bringing calamity on his people; any reasons appear in the material they lead into.

The Amos scroll gives no indication of whether the visions and the rest of the material come from early in Amos’s time or later, or whether the first four visions came to him together. The scroll as a whole is arranged so as to conclude with these final affirmations of cataclysmic disaster but also with some promise of the people’s survival and restoration. Thus Part Three begins and ends with the tension between the necessity of judgment but the possibility of mercy.[[269]](#footnote-269)

# Amos 7:1-17—Three Revelations and a Clash with a Priest

## Translation

1The Lord Yahweh showed me this: there, he was forming[[270]](#footnote-270) locust at the beginning of the growing of the late crop—there, it was the late crop, after the king’s cuttings, 2but[[271]](#footnote-271) when it finished consuming the country’s herbage, I said, “Lord Yahweh, please pardon, who is Ya’ăqōb that he will rise up,[[272]](#footnote-272) when he’s small?” 3Yahweh relented about this.[[273]](#footnote-273) “It won’t happen,” Yahweh said.

4The Lord Yahweh showed me this: there, the Lord Yahweh was calling for a confrontation[[274]](#footnote-274) by fire. It consumed the Great Deep and it was consuming the share.[[275]](#footnote-275) 5I said, “Lord Yahweh, please stop, who is Ya’ăqōb that he will rise up when he’s small?” 6Yahweh relented about this, too. “That won’t happen either,” the Lord Yahweh said.

7He showed me this: there, the Lord was standing on[[276]](#footnote-276) a painted wall,[[277]](#footnote-277) with pain in his hand. 8Yahweh said to me, “What are you looking at, ‘Āmôs?” I said, “Paint.” The Lord said, “Here am I, putting pain among my people Yiśrā’ēI. I will not any more continue passing by regarding it.

9Yiśḥāq’s[[278]](#footnote-278) shrines will be desolate

Yiśrā’ēl’s sanctuaries will be wasted,

and I will rise up[[279]](#footnote-279) against Yorbə’ām’s household with the sword.”

10’Ămaṣyāh the Bȇt-’ēl priest sent to Yorbə’ām the king of Yiśrā’ēI: “‘Āmôs has conspired against you within Yiśrā’ēI’s household. The country can’t sustain all his words. 11Because ‘Āmôs has said this: ‘Yorbə’ām will die by the sword, and Yiśrā’ēI will definitely go into exile, away from its land.’” 12’Ămaṣyāh said to ‘Āmôs, “Seer, go, flee for your life to the country of Yəhûdāh, eat bread there, and you can prophesy there. 13But you will not prophesy any more at Bȇt-’ēl, because it’s the king’s sanctuary, the kingdom’s house.”[[280]](#footnote-280)

14’Āmôs answered ‘Ămaṣyāh, “Not a prophet, I,[[281]](#footnote-281) and not a prophet’s disciple, I,[[282]](#footnote-282) but a cattleman[[283]](#footnote-283), I, and a tender[[284]](#footnote-284) of mulberry-figs,[[285]](#footnote-285) 15but Yahweh took me from following the flock, and Yahweh said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Yiśrā’ēI.’ 16So now listen to Yahweh’s message. You’re saying, ‘You will not prophesy against Yiśrā’ēI, you will not spout[[286]](#footnote-286) against Yiśḥāq’s household.’ 17Therefore Yahweh has said this: ‘Your wife—she’ll whore in the town. Your sons and your daughters—they’ll fall by the sword. Your land—it’ll be shared out by a line. You—you’ll die on taboo land. And Yiśrā’ēI—it will definitely go into exile, away from its land.

## Interpretation

The first half of the chapter comprises reports by Amos of three revelations from Yahweh concerning calamity he is bringing on Israel, and of resultant exchanges between Yahweh and Amos. The third vision ends with a message about the coming destruction of Ephraim’s worship places and about the execution of its royal household. The report of this message leads into a third-person account (presumably by a scribe/disciple of Amos) of the Beth-el priest’s passing on to the king information about Amos’s message, and of a related exchange between him and Amos. This account confirms the need for Yahweh’s action.

**Amos 7:1-3.** Amos’s introductory “the Lord Yahweh showed me this” (v. 1a) compares and contrasts with his “the Lord Yahweh has said this” (3:11; 5:3) and similar phrases. Both verbs are qatal; both expressions indicate that what people are about to hear is not something Amos devised; Yahweh revealed it. There is no need to assume that seeing something or sensing God saying something implies a mystical experience or a heightened sense of consciousness, though it might do. Even “prophesying” (*hitnabbē’*)needn’t have that implication, though dismissing it as craziness can suit other people. A prophet may simply just have an awareness of something. On the other hand, the language makes it unlikely that Amos was simply trying to think up an illustration or a message and that he attributes to God something he formulated, in the belief that God did give it to him. His language more likely implies that he had a sense of something coming to him. The difference between his earlier introductory phrase is that Amos is now talking about something Yahweh “showed” him. Whereas the “seeing” language in 1:1 may be more metaphorical (cf. Obad. 1; Mic. 1:1), like theology’s use of the language of “revelation,” Amos here speaks more literally in speaking of seeing something. And he says Yahweh showed “me” (he does not usually say “Yahweh said this *to me*”).Yahweh involves him personally in the revelatory event.

What he saw (v. 1b) was Yahweh bringing into being a locust swarm (see Joel 1 and the comments): that is, he sees a speeded-up version of the development of such a horde. The threat of a locust epidemic comes at the worst possible time, after the spring rains, when the grain crop is maturing and the vegetable and fruit crop is now growing. It thus imperils the entire harvest. And whereas in the old days the people might already have reaped hay for cattle fodder, now apparently the king claims the right to that early reaping and he has taken it, so the administration is okay, but the ordinary people will face disaster, a disaster like those noted in 4:6-11, but worse.

The locust consume the entire harvest of things that humans and animals might eat (v. 2). When Amos sees it, he cries out for “the Lord Yahweh” to pardon (*sālaḥ*). A prophet mediates between Yahweh and Israel, uttering protests to Israel on Yahweh’s behalf and also protests to Yahweh on Israel’s behalf. Both roles issue from his being admitted to meetings of the heavenly cabinet. Amos does not use the regular word for “forgive” (see Hos. 1:6 and the comments) but a word used only of God, one that suggests a royal pardon, given by someone who has the power to grant it. The visions are rather like curses, and Amos has the chance to pray against them.[[287]](#footnote-287) The plea implies that Amos recognizes that the visionary epidemic is a punishment, but the basis for his appeal is not that Ephraim doesn’t deserve it but that it is like a little child who will be knocked down by it and unable to get up again. Will Yahweh do that to *Jacob*, whom he chose over Esau and stayed involved with even though he was a rogue—and still is so involved?The language is striking in a context where Ephraim is actually a big power and sees itself thus (see the previous chapter).

Yahweh is convinced (v. 3; on Yahweh’s relenting, see Joel 2:13-14 and the comments, especially on the “Theological Implications”). But has he actually pardoned Israel or only cancelled the calamity, perhaps temporarily, to give Ephraim one more chance? Does God’s relenting mean Israel’s sin has ceased to exist and lost its power?[[288]](#footnote-288)

**Amos 7:4-6.** In his second revelation Yahweh moves one stage back in the process that leads to action.

It’s presumably Ephraim that he’s calling (v. 4), but initially he seems to be calling not for a judgment by fire in the sense of a punishment but for a disputation or fight (*rib*),a judgment in the sense of the resolution of an argument. But Yahweh intends to use all his firepower to this end. We already know that fire is key to Yahweh’s self-assertion in relation to wrongdoing (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5; 5:6); the sequence of locust and fire also compares with Joel 1:2-20. The Great Deep is the vast sea underneath the world’s land mass from which springs and rivers bubble up; the fire that can burn up such a sea is obviously quite a fire. This calamitous confrontation is thus more drastic than the epidemic in the first revelation: if Yahweh’s fire burns up the Great Deep, a total drought results, another disaster like one described in 4:6-11 but much worse. While land set over against Deep makes one think of the land mass as a whole (cf. Deut. 32:22), the word “share” (*ḥēleq*)suggests Ephraim’s particular allocation of land (cf. Josh. 18:5-10; Mic. 2:4); we are also already familiar with the idea of Yahweh taking action against Ephraim’s share (4:7).

Amos’s reaction (v. 5) may reflect the more far-reaching nature of the threatened disaster. This time Amos simply ask Yahweh to “stop,” though perhaps he makes his pleas less demanding in light of the shortfall in Yahweh’s response to the first plea. But Yahweh is again convinced (v. 6).

**Amos 7:7-9.** The third revelation involves a parabolic image and a paronomasia rather than a literal picture of calamity.Indeed, the revelation attaches no importance to what Amos actually sees; “the play on words is the real issue.”[[289]](#footnote-289)

Once again Yahweh moves back (v. 7). He’s now standing by a glazed or painted wall (or a tin wall). The idea of such a wall is odd, but then so is the idea of fire burning up water; these are visions. But the word for glaze or paint (or tin), *‘ănāk*, has a homonym meaning oppression or wrong or grief or pain. Yahweh looks at the one and also sees the other, and he holds one or the other or both in his hand. He intends to cover Israel in pain or grief in return for the pain or grief it is characterized by, in the way it treats people.

This time it’s Yahweh who speaks (v. 8), which may be natural because Amos doesn’t yet get the point of what he sees. He doesn’t see the link between paint and pain or know what the tin wall stands for, and therefore there isn’t something horrifying for him to respond to. The most we might expect is that he should ask what Yahweh is getting him to look at, but it’s common with parabolic visions for Yahweh to ask the questions (e.g., Jer. 1:11-19; 24:1-10; Zech. 4:1-14; 5:1-11). In this way, Yahweh causes Amos to pronounce the sentence on Ephraim (and he forestalls any interceding by Amos).[[290]](#footnote-290) “Amos has been vanquished by Yahweh.”[[291]](#footnote-291) In taking the initiative, Yahweh utilizes a third word as an alternative to (not) pardoning or (not) stopping: he will not again “pass by regarding it.” Micah’s expanded expression illumines this elliptical one: Yahweh “carries waywardness and passes by concerning rebellion” (Mic. 7:18; cf. Prov. 19:11). Now Yahweh will not do so.

The consequences (v. 9) will be ones we are familiar with, though Yahweh here gives them distinctive coloring. Only here and in v. 16 does the First Testament refer to the people of God as Isaac. Perhaps there is a link with the Ephraimites’ inclination to visit the sanctuary at Be’er-sheba (see 5:5 and the comments); v. 16 suggests that Isaac denotes Ephraim, like Jacob or Israel. Thus “Israel’s sanctuaries” in the parallel colon is another way of referring to “Isaac’s shrines [*bāmôt*].” Like Hosea, Amos seems never to refer to other shrines in Ephraim beyond the great sanctuaries, though there were many such shrines according to 2 Kings. The unexpected third colon which makes the line into a tricolon makes another point entirely. Except in the opening chronological notes to Hosea and Amos, vv. 9-11 are the only point where any Prophet refers to Jeroboam by name, though we’ve noted that some references to Ephraim’s household could be allusions to the king and his administration (see 3:13 and the comments). Here Yahweh tells it straight.

**Amos 7:10-13.** In a moment the scroll will present its account of Amos’s fourth revelation which completes the quartet, and maybe Amos originally delivered the four together, but meanwhile the scroll adds an incident that relates to the third revelation. Maybe Amaziah’s action was precipitated by Amos’s relating that third revelation, though it wouldn’t be surprising if Amos delivered this kind of message at Beth-el on a number of occasions.

Presumably Amaziah is the head priest at Beth-el (v. 10) though there are a number of priests there (see 4:4-5 and the comments). The sanctuary wasn’t founded by Jeroboam I; it had a history going back to Israel’s ancestors, and indeed it was a Canaanite shrine before their time. But Jeroboam made Beth-el and Dan the two state sanctuaries in Ephraim (1 Kings 12), and its priesthood serves at the king’s pleasure. In other Middle Eastern contexts it was a priest’s job to report prophecies to the king.[[292]](#footnote-292) Presumably Amaziah’s talk of conspiracy means he assumes Amos is involved in engineering a coup. It would be a reasonable assumption. Prophets were involved when Jeroboam I led the northern clans’ rebellion against Rehoboam and in a number of the dynastic changes in Ephraim, including the one that brought Jeroboam II’s great-grandfather to the throne—and he spoke of having thus “conspired” (2 Kings 10:9). And if you are identified with the establishment, you would be wise to suspect that Amos is a danger to the country. He might be a danger because a prophet’s words can be powerful, and/or because his words can be influential, and/or because people might already be coming to be persuaded by his account of the way Yahweh looks at their country.

Amaziah’s introduction to Amos’s message (v. 11) is “a parody of the normal prophetic utterance,”[[293]](#footnote-293) an implicit denial of Amos’s regular “Yahweh has said this” (e.g., 5:4), but the content of his account can hardly be faulted. The third revelation had said exactly what Amaziah says about Jeroboam, and Amos has spoken of Ephraim’s exile (e.g., 5:27; 6:7). Indeed, Amaziah could have quoted a number of further incriminating declarations (e.g., 6:14).

His words to Amos (v. 12) are then a surprise. Why does he send the report to the king if he is going to send Amos off? Shouldn’t he have Amos arrested? Is the story not told in chronological order—does the sending to the king happen after the altercation in vv. 12-17, which will indicate that Amos will not respond to Amaziah’s warning and instead insists on making things worse?[[294]](#footnote-294) Is he a man caught by the tension between his official position and what he suspects to be right? Is he afraid of the prophet’s power being exerted against him? If so, he is about to have his fear justified. Whatever the answer, the problem on which the narrative focuses is Amaziah’s assumptions about seers and prophets. One can imagine there being prophets at Beth-el involved in ministry to ordinary people with personal needs and questions. They might be supported by gifts, as Samuel was; he can be called either a “prophet” or a “seer” (see 1 Sam. 9:7-9), which incidentally warns us against making too much of the alternating between seer and prophet in this passage in Amos. So Amaziah suggests that like a pastor and like Amaziah himself, Amos can go and serve as a prophet and earn his living in his home state.

In particular (v. 13), talking in Amos’s fashion at Beth-el risks trouble because it’s one of those two sanctuaries set up by the administration. Again, as well as freelance prophets, there might also be prophets there who would be on the royal payroll, like “seers” such as Gad and “prophets” such as Nathan on David’s staff (the language again warns us against making too much of the alternating here), as there would be prophets in the king’s administration at Samaria. In both locations they would offer the king guidance about matters of policy (see the story in 1 Kings 22). A prophet can’t expect to be free to behave in Amos’s fashion at a state sanctuary, but again if Amos went back home, people would welcome words of judgment on Ephraim there.

**Amos 7:14-17.** In the way Amaziah has spoken of Amos as a seer or prophet, however, he has shown that he misunderstands who Amos is.

He’s not a prophet (v. 14) in either of the senses that Amaziah might assume (the personal counselor or the royal counselor). He isn’t someone who went to prophetic school; he didn’t belong to the “sons of the prophets,” to a prophetic community such as the one at Beth-el (!) with which Elijah and Elisha were involved (2 Kings 2:3). He wasn’t sent by a prophet mentor whom he might call “father,” like Elisha in relation to Elijah. He isn’t on the sanctuary payroll. He works as a cattleman, and as a dresser of the trees down in the Jordan Valley (or in the Shephelah, according to Tg) that produce mulberry-figs for human beings and/or cattle to eat.[[295]](#footnote-295) It sounds a much humbler roll than being a sheep farmer in Teqoa (1:1). If he is being ironically self-depreciative, this supports the suggestion that he is being ironic throughout v. 14.[[296]](#footnote-296)

But Yahweh took him from looking after sheep (v. 15), as he took Moses and David, and sent him to prophesy. Amaziah had said, “Go, flee,” but Yahweh had said, “Go, prophesy.”[[297]](#footnote-297) Amos was not sent to Judah, even though the Amos scroll indicates that it also needed his message, but to Ephraim, because they are still Yahweh’s people. He is criticizing them, yes, but that’s because they belong to Yahweh.

Amaziah has potentially got himself into a terrible mess (vv. 16-17), in telling Amos not to deliver Yahweh’s message when Amos comes as the messenger of the Great King not of king Jeroboam. Amaziah is saying ““You will not prophesy”; therefore Amos is saying, “Yahweh has said this….” He has a terrible message for Amaziah. Instead of fulfilling his vocation of making it possible for Ephraim to have recourse to Yahweh (even at Beth-el!) and to escape exile, he himself will share in Ephraim’s fate. Yahweh’s declaration puts the five subjects in the unusual prominent position at the beginning of the clauses. Amaziah’s wife will suffer the kind of fate that women suffer in war—maybe not so much engaging in fornication as being the victim of rape.[[298]](#footnote-298) His children will die. The family’s land will be allocated to new owners from among foreigners who will come to live there. Amaziah himself, who has the priest’s privilege of caring about the sanctuary’s purity and ensuring it isn’t affected by defilement so that Yahweh can stay in residence there, and the priest’s responsibility of staying pure to that same end: he will end up with everyone else in a country defiled by the service of other deities (cf. Hos. 9:3 and the comments). And he will never come back. With some irony Amos closes by repeating word for word Amaziah’s summary of Amos’s own message—see v. 11.

## Theological Implications

1. Amos’s testimony that “The Lord Yahweh showed me” points up the fact that Yahweh is giving Amos revelations; it is not just that Amos has visions. Further, the way the First Testament speaks of revelation focuses revelation on what God is intending to do.
2. God is the prophet’s “mentor, sponsor, and commander.” But God

not only spoke the words for Amos to hear and thus repeat, but he listened when Amos spoke. In fact the latter came first—the listening God before the speaking God…. And a God who could listen could also reflect and reconsider and change his mind… in response to human intercession…. Yahweh is revealed as the One who consults…. It is said that before the Day of Atonement Yahweh himself prays that his attribute of mercy will outweigh his attribute of judgment as decisions must be rendered for the coming year…. Amos prevailed over [the deity] in securing a decision for mercy.[[299]](#footnote-299)

1. It is worth distinguishing between forgiving (*nāśā’*, literally “carry”), which anyone can do for someone who has wronged them, and pardoning, which only someone such as “the Lord Yahweh” can do. Pardon means we need not fear the judging authority of the one who has the power to punish us. “Pass by” has with further resonances that overlap with Paul’s talk of God’s “passing over” sin (*paresis*) in his “restraint” or “holding back” (*anochē*) (Rom. 3:25).
2. The vocation of prophets (or pastors) is to represent God to their people in their preaching and to represent their people to God in their praying.

Let then all teachers in the Church learn to put on these two feelings –to be vehemently indignant whenever they see the worship of God profaned, to burn with zeal for God, and to show that severity which appeared in all the Prophets, whenever due order decays,—and at the same time to sympathize with miserable men, whom they see rushing headlong into destruction, and to bewail their madness, and to interpose with God as much as is in them; in such a way, however that their compassion render them not slothful or indifferent, so as to be indulgent to the sins of men. Indeed, the temper of mind which I have mentioned ought to be possessed, so that they may go forth as suppliants before God, and implore pardon for miserable and wretched men: but when they come to the people, in their new character, that they may be severe and rigid, let them remember by whom they are sent and with what commands, let them know that they are the ministers of God, who is the judge of the world, and ought not therefore to spare the people: this then is to be attended to by us.[[300]](#footnote-300)

1. Among the bases of our appeals to God in prayer are that the people of God is too small to get up if God knocks it down.
2. The fact that Yahweh can relent is a key truth underlying any understanding of prayer (see Joel 2:1-17 and the comments on “Theological Implications”). Our appeal to God in prayer involves boldness in urging God to act differently from the way he has said he intends to act. The point about prayer is not to conform our will to God’s but to try to get God to confirm his will to ours. We are like children for whom there are no limits to what they can ask of their parents. In the end the parents’ will has the final word, and in the end we have to conform our will to God’s. But that happens at the end of prayer, not at the beginning (cf. Mark 14:35-36).
3. The sequence of God’s revelations to Amos may link with this fact. Twice Amos prays; the third time he is not given scope to pray. By speaking first, God then does not give Amos chance to pray, as he explicitly forbids Jeremiah (Jer. 14:11-12; 15:1-6). Whereas previously Amos acted as intercessor, perhaps “Amos now moves completely to the side of Yahweh.”[[301]](#footnote-301) Yet a pastor who really cared about his people might be hesitant to assume that he must accede, as a child may not immediately accept a parent’s “No.” The Syro-Phoenician woman does not accept Jesus’s “No,” and she gets him to relent (Mark 7:24-30). The pastor would be wise not to allow for the possibility that God’s “No” is a test and not to give up too soon.
4. Amaziah “is completely unable to grasp the reality of Amos’ message or even the possibility that God could speak such a message through this man at all.”[[302]](#footnote-302) Pastors who support and are supported by an institution such as a church are always in a tricky position because they have conflicting loyalties. Paul deals with this dilemma by insisting that he has the right to being financially supported but by not exercising that right; being a tentmaker is like being a cattleman and tender of mulberry-fig trees. Corporately First Testament Prophets share his double commitment—some are state- supported, some are not. Amaziah’s words to Amos “were the communications of an ecclesiastic (not a heathen ecclesiastic, but a representative of the Church of Yahweh) who obviously regarded as self-evident the union not only of throne and altar (the altar of Yahweh) but also of mammon and altar.”[[303]](#footnote-303)Pastors who receive salaries from their churches have to assume that they are in danger of being Amaziah and have to cultivate Amos-figures who will stand up to them. Otherwise they and their people may pay a terrible price.
5. It would be nice to think that Amos jolted Amaziah to his senses and that he turned to Yahweh and found that Yahweh relented and pardoned and passed over, but typically the First Testament lets the story end without telling what happened next. The effect is also to challenge people hearing the story about their own response to the message Amos gives Amaziah. Nor do we hear of Jeroboam’s response to the intelligence from Amaziah. Nor do we know what subsequently happened to Amos—whether he simply carried on preaching at Beth-el, or did go to Judah, or was arrested. The Amos scroll is more interested in the bigger picture, that the prophet confronts the priest, that the word of Yahweh confronts the state, and that the resistance of the latter indeed means that Yahweh must bring about the calamity that he had shown Amos.

# Amos 8:1-14—A Fourth Revelation and a Series of Critiques

## Translation

1The Lord Yahweh showed me this: there, a basket of ripe fruit.[[304]](#footnote-304) 2He said, “What are you looking at, ‘Āmôs?” I said, “A basket of ripe fruit.” Yahweh said to me, “The time is ripe[[305]](#footnote-305) for my people Yiśrā’ēI. I will not any more continue passing by regarding it. 3The palace[[306]](#footnote-306) songs[[307]](#footnote-307) will howl on that day (a proclamation of the Lord Yahweh):

Many a corpse,

in every place someone has thrown them out, ssh!”

4Listen to this, you who trample on the needy person,

bringing the lowly people in the country to a stop,

5Saying, When will the new month pass,

so we can sell wheat,

And the Sabbath-stopping,[[308]](#footnote-308) so we can open up[[309]](#footnote-309) grain,

reducing the barrel,

Increasing the weight,

bending deceptive scales,[[310]](#footnote-310)

6Acquiring poor people for silver,

a needy person for a pair of shoes,

and sell sweepings as grain.[[311]](#footnote-311)

7Yahweh has sworn by the majesty of Ya’ăqōb,

if I ever put out of mind any of their actions….

8Because of this the country[[312]](#footnote-312) will shake, won’t it,

and everyone who lives in it will mourn.

All of it will go up like the ‘Ōr,[[313]](#footnote-313)

toss and sink like the Yə’ôr in Mișrayim.

9On that day

(a proclamation of the Lord Yahweh)

I will make the sun set at midday,

make the earth dark during daylight.

10I will overturn your festivals to mourning,

all your songs to a dirge.

I will put sack on all waists,

and on every head a tonsure.

I will make it[[314]](#footnote-314) like mourning for an only child,

and to its end[[315]](#footnote-315) a truly[[316]](#footnote-316) bitter day.

11There, days are coming

(a proclamation of the Lord Yahweh)

When I will send off[[317]](#footnote-317) a famine on the country,

not a famine of bread

Not a thirst for water,

rather for listening to Yahweh’s words.

12People will lurch from sea to sea,

from north to east.

They will go to and fro to seek Yahweh’s word,

but they won’t find.

13On that day the beautiful girls will faint,

and the young men, with thirst,

14People who swear by the offense of[[318]](#footnote-318) Šōmərōn,

and say, “By the life of your god, Dan,”

And “By the life of the way to Bə’ēr-šeba’“—

they will fall and not rise up again.

## Interpretation

Chapter 8 begins with another report by Amos of a revelation concerning Yahweh’s intention to bring disaster on Ephraim; this report, too, goes on to material that elaborates on the nature of the disaster and the reasons for it. Here the material comprises a series of sayings that once more take up themes and also phrases from earlier messages in the scroll. It thus both suggests that those earlier messages are finding fulfillment and also that the inevitability of the disaster can be understood in light of the earlier messages. The disaster will involve widespread death and grief; total gloom will settle on the country. People will then long to discover what Yahweh is saying to them, but they will not be able to find it. Even young people will faint and fall. And the necessity of the disaster derives from people’s focus on making money at the expense of ordinary people, and from their basing their commitments on a willfully false understanding of who Yahweh is and how he may be approached.

**Amos 8:1-3**. The report of the revelation has a similar format to those in 7:7-9; with them it completes a quartet of two pairs of twin reports of revelations. While the four may have belonged together before they became part of the Amos scroll with 7:10-17 inserted, one might reverse the logic and imagine Amos delivering this fourth report to Amaziah as part of his retort to him[[319]](#footnote-319) or imagine the fourth vision as confirming the third after their meeting.[[320]](#footnote-320)

Like 7:7-9, the vision’s message depends on a paronomasia (v. 1). Amos sees a basket of *qayiṣ*, the word for the time when summer heat reaches its peak and thus when produce (specifically fruit such as figs and pomegranates) comes to maturity. The produce should be a lovely sight, a cause of celebration.

As happened in 7:7-9, Yahweh asks Amos a question (v. 2). It might seem a dumb question (to us the question in 7:7-9 no longer seems dumb, but Amos and his audience likely knew what *‘ănāk* in someone’s hand was, so it too may have seemed a dumb question). Amos gives the dumb answer that provides Yahweh with an opportunity to point out how *qayiṣ* sounds more or less the same as *qēṣ*, which denotes the “end” of a period of time and is one way of referring to the end of the year, August-September, the month when the ripe fruit is harvested.[[321]](#footnote-321) The end is not merely coming; it has come. Yahweh’s affirmation about the end of a period of time then leads into his repeated declaration that he will not pass by Israel and its wrongdoing. He had once said that Israel’s possession of Canaan had to wait until the Amorites’ waywardness was full up (Gen.15:16), and in Joshua’s time that moment came. Ephraim itself has now reached that point. The logic is similar to the one involving talk of three or four acts of rebellion in 1:3—2:16. After that many acts of rebellion, “a stay of execution is no longer possible,… a last minute reprieve is not to be expected.”[[322]](#footnote-322) “When we take seriously the terror that lies in the word *end,* we see that it is not surprising that Old Testament authors did not use it very often.*”[[323]](#footnote-323)* At Qumran *qēṣ* frequently means a period of time or an appointed time rather than simply the end of a period of time, and in a First Testament passage like this one it may also carry this resonance: “the appointed time has come.”

Like its predecessor, this fourth vision closes (v. 3) with a concrete declaration about what the “not passing by” will result in. The event itself is left unstated; perhaps people are expected to recall what came in 7:9 and/or in 7:17. Amos speaks only of the aftermath when entertainment in the palace turns into screams and wails. The phrase “on that day” recurs from 2:16; once again, although in itself it needn’t refer to Yahweh’s day (with the bad associations Amos has attached to that expression), in the context it has that connotation. The howl that responds to events on that day is a response to the sight of the corpses that fill the “macabre” scene.[[324]](#footnote-324) Giving people a proper burial is an instinctive human priority; soldiers take their fallen comrades home. It is a sign of love and respect for them as people. Throwing out corpses is a sign that basic human commitments have collapsed under intolerable pressure. And being overwhelmed by death is a sign of being overwhelmed by God in a way that threatens more horror (cf.6:9-10, where the exclamation “Ssh!” also came).

**Amos 8:4-6**. By implication, the confrontation that follows explains what it is that Yahweh will no more pass by. Like each previous bidding to “Listen,” this exhortation introduces a new stage within a section of the scroll, not a new section. Perhaps (e.g.) 8:4-8 once formed a complete message that Amos delivered, but within the scroll it belongs with 8:1-3.

References to the needy and lowly and to trampling (v. 4) begin a restating of much of the original critique of Ephraim in 2:6-8, which will continue in references to selling or buying people for silver and “a needy person for a pair of shoes.” Bringing lowly people to a stop could simply mean eliminating them, but stopping is what people do on the Sabbath, the stopping day, which the next verse will refer to. This collocation raises the question whether people are being made to stop in the sense of put out of work on their own farms, because they’ve been dispossessed.

Pointedly (v. 5), reference to the Sabbath thus follows, along with reference to the observance of the first day of each month as a special day (see e.g., 1 Sam. 20:5; 2 Kings 4:23). As happens in Western culture, in Israel there are people who don’t have enough to do and there are people who enjoy having too much to do. The latter are impatient at the monthly and weekly observance because they can’t get on with their business—their crooked business. They don’t just want to offer wheat for sale, though that activity raises questions: people who have so much grain to sell didn’t grow it by their own hands, and many of the people who need to buy grain are people who have lost their land and are having to work as day-laborers. But further, the merchants want to be able to twist people in trading, by reducing the size of the barrels they use for measuring the grain or wheat, and/or by increasing the size of their weights so that balancing them requires the customer to lay out more silver (money has not yet been invented), and/or by making the actual scales crooked, perhaps by bending the crossbeam. These accusations accompany the apparently much more serious wrongdoings of v. 4. Is the implication that the same people are engaged in both activities? Or that people guilty of the lesser charge (small-time merchants) need to see themselves as just as much wrongdoers as people guilty of the worse charge (big landowners)? Or that their dishonest trading in the basics of life is what reduces to servitude the people they swindle?[[325]](#footnote-325) While v. 5a might be taken as the merchants’ actual words, v. 5b makes clear that Amos is making explicit the implications of what people would actually say, as prophets do (e.g., Isa. 28:14-15).

The accusation closes (v. 6) by resuming the two kinds of critique. First there is the more serious wrong involved in the treatment of needy and lowly to which v. 4 referred. Then there is a further aspect of the cheating, or a reference to selling for human consumption the sweepings that would usually be fed to chickens.[[326]](#footnote-326)

**Amos 8:7-8.** Amos goes on to aver what Yahweh will do in response to these wrongs. In a previous oath he took offense at the majesty of Jacob, at Ephraim in its impressiveness, and swore by himself that he would take action against it; once again he swears an oath about what he intends (cf. 6:8; also 4:2).

Here (v. 7) he swears by himself as the one who is himself the real majesty of Jacob. He speaks thus with some irony,[[327]](#footnote-327) because Ephraim is not really recognizing that majesty. The self-imprecation by Jacob’s majesty is unique, though the description of Yahweh as the majesty of Jacob compares with Samuel’s description of him as Israel’s eminence (1 Sam. 15:29). Its unusual nature will be further tempered by the occurrence of another but unique imprecation in v. 14, in the oath of the people who swear falsely. Yahweh’s choice of wording, then, is influenced by that contrasting description of the deity.[[328]](#footnote-328) The oath takes the common form of an “if” clause without a “then” clause—because fulfilling the “if” clause is really unthinkable. No, Yahweh will never put out of mind (the more forceful and deliberate version of never forgetting) any of Ephraim’s wrongdoings. It is the converse to Hosea’s declaration that Yahweh will keep them in mind (the more forceful and deliberate version of remembering; Hos. 7:2; 8:13; 9:9).

The result (v. 8) will be that the country will shake. While the declaration recalls the scroll’s opening reference to an earthquake (1:1), Amos uses a different word and he doesn’t describe the shaking as something Yahweh will make happen. The parallel colon indicates that he is rather speaking of the population of the country shaking (compare Joel 2:1 rather than 2:10). It would be nice to think of people shaking in response to the shaking of the moral and social order described in vv. 4-6, but in the context they are more likely shaking at the unspecified result of Yahweh’s keeping their own actions in mind. What Yahweh does will give them reason for mourning. The seasonal rising and subsiding of the Nile (which Amos can apparently assume they know about) provides an image for how their hearts will be. The line about the Nile will recur in 9:5-6 (where it does refer to a shaking of the earth that Yahweh will make happen), in the third of the passages where Amos may be picking up lines from a well-known hymn and using against the people truths about Yahweh with which they were familiar (see the comments on 4:13). If that hypothesis is right, it adds to the pointed nature of his using the line here. The dual reference to the Nile may allude to the Nile in general or the Nile as it runs through Kush (see the comments on 9:7-10) and then to the Nile in Egypt, and/or to the Blue Nile and the White Nile; Isaiah 18:1 refers to the Kush rivers (plural).

**Amos 8:9-10.**  In vv. 9-14 the scroll adds three further declarations about how things will be “on that day” (cf. v. 3 and the comments) or on the coming days.

Amos underlines the authority of the first declaration (v. 9) with a reminder that this message comes from Yahweh who is the sovereign Lord. In vv. 1-8 Yahweh spoke only of what he won’t do (pass by or put out of mind) and of the grimness of events. Now he speaks for the first time in the chapter about what he will do. He first announces action of a cosmic kind that will have devastating implications on earth. In isolation one would assume that he refers to an eclipse or some other form of preternatural darkness, but in 5:18-20 and in Joel 2:10 darkness over against light was a metaphor, with different implications each time, and what will follow here in v. 10 will suggest the same understanding but again with different implications. Darkness and gloom will overwhelm the community.

It will be Yahweh who brings about the tragedy (v. 10). The overturning will be poetic justice (see 5:7). The reference to festivals and songs (cf. 5:21-23) indicates that Amos continues to speak of a cataclysm coming to Ephraim; he is not concerned with the world as a whole. His reference to mourning picks up the reference in vv. 7-8 (also 5:16) while the reference to a dirge picks up the allusion in 5:1. That link perhaps indicates that Yahweh is not (or not only) speaking about the death of many individuals but about the death of the nation. Wearing in public one’s common everyday-work coarse cloth garments and cutting off one’s hair are signs of grief; they show one does not care what one looks like. The experience of losing a child has that effect, especially if it’s your only child (see Gen. 22:2, 12, 15; and Judg. 11:34 for a girl).

**Amos 8:11-12.** In the second supplementary declaration Yahweh speaks of a different kind of calamity. As well as making something happen and bringing about the presence of something (vv. 9-10), Yahweh is making nothing happen and bringing about the absence of something.

Talk in terms of days that are coming (v. 11) recalls 4:1-3, which also had Yahweh swearing and also referred to “the end of you.” The withdrawal of speaking by Yahweh recalls events in the time of Eli, Saul, and Ezekiel (1 Sam. 3:1; 14:37; 28:6; Lam. 2:9; Ezek. 3:26). Each time it implicitly or explicitly issues from people’s rebellion against the things Yahweh does say, and so it is here. It also parallels a threat by Micah (Mic. 3:4-7). This declaration by Amos, too, follows on 7:10-17 (with the implication that Amaziah represents the people as a whole in his response to Amos) but also on 2:11-12.

So people will be staggering about again (v. 12), but not this time for water (see 4:8). They will go to and fro like the Israelites looking for the manna, but they will be looking for a different kind of provision. They will be inquiring after a message from Yahweh, but will locate none. Or they will find Yahweh saying the same thing as he will say to Judahite leaders who come to Ezekiel on a particular occasion (Ezek. 20:1-2). From sea to sea can suggest one end of the earth to the other (Ps. 72:8), but here the second colon makes one think of the two seas as southward and westward, the Dead Sea or the Gulf of Eilat and the Mediterranean. The quest of which Amos speaks would not seem outrageous: he has already referred to people going to Gilgal, east of Beth-el, and to Be’er-sheba in the south, many Ephraimites would be used to going north to Dan, and he has also referred to Mount Carmel on the Mediterranean coast within Ephraim’s territory where Yahweh revealed himself in the time of Elijah. There are thus a number of sanctuaries or places where Ephraimites might go to ask Yahweh for guidance. But he won’t respond. There is a particular poignancy about this threat in light of Yahweh’s repeated exhortations to Ephraim to have recourse to him and to what is good (Amos 5:4, 5, 6, 11)—the verb here is *biqqēš* and the verb there (and in Ezekiel) is *dāraš*, but the words are virtually synonyms. Notwithstanding that exhortation, you can seek but not find (cf. Hos. 5:6, also using *biqqēš*). It will be an aspect of the calamity Yahweh will bring.

**Amos 8:13-14.** “On that day” as an opening expression (v. 13) can suggest the beginning of a new unit (e.g., 9:11; Isa. 12:1) but it can suggest the making of a new point within a unit (e.g., Isa. 2:20; 12:4). This final supplementary declaration also has a meaning when it is read on its own, but it is somewhat elliptical and it makes more sense when read in light of what precedes. As a self-contained message from Amos the reference to thirst makes one think of a drought (cf. 4:8) such as will affect even the nation’s young people, whom one would expect to be relating to one another with enthusiasm and liveliness as they pair off in marriage; perhaps Amos has in mind a festive matchmaking event of which a tainted version appears in Judges 21 (in a location near Beth-el).[[329]](#footnote-329) Even the young people will no longer be able to stand. In the context of vv. 11-12 the talk of thirst makes one think further in terms of a thirst for a message from Yahweh that cannot be sated: the beautiful and strong young people on whom the nation’s future depends and whom one expects to be more focused on worldly things than on seeking God’s word[[330]](#footnote-330) will seek one but will collapse because there’s no message from Yahweh to guide them.

The problem (v. 14) is that they are just as involved as anyone else in misguided recourse to the sanctuaries and in the assumptions about Yahweh that they hold. Their recourse to a sanctuary in connection with their matchmaking (and their hope for offspring?) involves them in praying and swearing oaths “by” the deity there. It implies treating this deity as the ultimate power and authority whose blessing they seek, to whom they commit their life, and whom they invite to act in judgment if they fail to keep their promises. Amos does not elsewhere critique Ephraim for serving other gods and he thus gives the impression that Jehu’s reform still means that Yahweh alone is worshipped in Ephraim’s sanctuaries and in the capital, but Jehu did not terminate worship by means of images of Yahweh at Beth-el and Dan. So Amos will be here referring to illicit worship of Yahweh. The offense of Samaria will be an image of Yahweh. There is still a “dark underside to Israel’s faith that contributes to its distorted views on God, life, and history.”[[331]](#footnote-331) If there was no sanctuary in Samaria itself, Samaria’s offense will be the bullock image at Beth-el, Samaria’s home sanctuary (cf. Hos. 8:6), which was also Samaria’s wrongdoing (Hos. 10:8). Likewise the god of Dan is the bullock image of Yahweh there; the expression “your god” points to the ambiguity of whether worshiping Yahweh in the form of an image is really worship of Yahweh at all. The “way to Be’er-sheba” apparently refers to the pilgrimage there presupposed by 5:4-5. In addition, Dan and Be’er-sheba are the two extremes of the land of Israel, and the reference constitutes another way of speaking of a search from the far north to the far south (cf. v. 12). The First Testament does not otherwise refer to swearing by anything other than a deity or a deity’s name, though the New Testament does (Matt. 5:34, 36; 23:16, 18). People who in their oaths treat as the real God anything other than Yahweh himself will fall and not get up (cf. 5:2; also 7:2, 5). It will be fate of the young generation, and thus of the nation.

## Theological Implications

1. The basket of fruit that turns into a panorama of corpses “signifies—at an extreme—the tyranny of a discourse that does not allow the audience to luxuriate in familiarity and stretch itself out in accepted meanings. It evokes a sense of the surreal or supernatural, so creating the rhetorical illusion of words that come from elsewhere. It performs the power of a God who can graft whatever meaning he pleases.” The prophetic text shatters logic, “sterilising the lyricism of our sentences.” And “it performs the horrors of an unpredictable deity who may, if he so chooses, give you corpses where you expect fruit, poison where you expect gifts, and scorpions where you expect bread.”[[332]](#footnote-332)
2. God may say that the end has come, but he may not mean it, or he may still postpone it. The end for Ephraim did not come for another two or three decades. Of course he may mean it, and we cannot take a chance on the possibility that he does not. Yet “when he states that the end is come, what he wants is not to frighten us or to drive us into a panic, but to give us a fatherly warning. ‘Be converted’, he says.”[[333]](#footnote-333) Walter Lüthi explains how God was issuing such an exhortation in the context in which he preaches on Amos, which was Basel between 1936 and 1938, when the Second World War really was imminent.
3. Attitudes to holidays and to stopping days provide indications of whether money is the only thing we want and whether we are prepared to trample on people in order to get it.
4. Unlike humanity, God has true control of his memory and of whether he remembers or forgets, keeps in mind or puts out of mind. He can deliberately forget and he can deliberately remember. This can be both good news and bad news.
5. We have to seek God while he is letting himself be found (Isa. 55:6). When God speaks of famine and thirst for words from him, “the intention… is towarn and to entice.”[[334]](#footnote-334) David Qimchi sees the threat of famine and thirst fulfilled “in all the days of the Second Temple and in all the days of this exile,” the exile in which he sees the Jewish people still living, as they seek a message from God but don’t find it.[[335]](#footnote-335) Martin Luther comments, “We must watch and pray lest that same famine be sent on us too.”[[336]](#footnote-336) Was Qimchi right? Has Luther’s fear been fulfilled? “When God no longer speaks, his silence reveals the sins of humanity.” And “when the Word of God has been rejected, God is silent, and the people have no other recourse than to go back to what leads to death,” such as the offense of Samaria and the god of Dan.[[337]](#footnote-337)
6. What are the equivalents to the offense of Samaria, the god of Dan, and the way to Be’er-sheba, ways of thinking about God that turn God into an idol, ways of imaging God and ways of seeking contact with God that turn our worship and our seeking into worship and seeking of a no-god? The mistaken Ephraimite theology fell foul of the First Testament conviction that images can only represent or give an impression of a deity that neither acts nor speaks. Assuming that Yahweh could be imaged turned him into such a deity. It was paradoxical, then, for Ephraimites to have recourse to such a deity in order to seek a message from him. Such a deity doesn’t speak. There is poetic appropriateness about finding that they hear nothing from a God so conceived.

# Amos 9:1-15—A Fifth Revelation and Some Good News

## Translation

1I saw the Lord standing on[[338]](#footnote-338) the altar, and he said:

Strike down the pillar-cap[[339]](#footnote-339)

so that the thresholds quake!

Cut off the people at the head of them all;[[340]](#footnote-340)

the last of them I will kill with the sword.

Not one escaper of them is to escape,

not one survivor of them is to survive.

2If they dig down into Šə’ôl,

from there my hand will take them.

If they go up to the heavens,

from there I will get them down.

3If they hide on the top of the Karmel,

from there I will search them out and take them.

If they conceal themselves from before my eyes

at the bottom of the sea,

From there[[341]](#footnote-341) I will order

the serpent so he bites them.

4If they go into captivity before their enemies,

from there I will order the sword so it kills them.

I will set my eye on them

for bad fortune not for good.[[342]](#footnote-342)

5The Lord Yahweh Armies,

the one who touches the earth and it melts,

and all who live in it will mourn.

And all of it will go up like the Yə’ōr ,

and sink like the Yə’ōr in Mișrayim,

6Is the one who builds his penthouse[[343]](#footnote-343) in the heavens,

and founds his vault on the earth.

Who calls to the water in the sea

and pours it over the surface of the earth:

Yahweh his name.[[344]](#footnote-344)

7You’re like the Kušiyyites to me,[[345]](#footnote-345)

Yiśrā’ēIites, aren’t you (Yahweh’s proclamation).

I got Yiśrā’ēI up

from the country of Mișrayim, didn’t I—

And the Pəlištites from Kaptôr,

and ’Ărām from Qîr.

8There, the Lord Yahweh’s eye

is on the kingdom[[346]](#footnote-346) that does wrong.

I destroy it

from upon the surface of the ground.

On the other hand[[347]](#footnote-347) I will not actually destroy

Ya’ăqōb’s household (Yahweh’s proclamation).

9Because there, I am going to order,

and I am going to shake Yiśrā’ēI’s household among all the nations,

As something shakes in a sieve,

and no pebble falls to the ground.

10By the sword they will die,

all the wrongdoers among my people,

The people who say, Bad fortune will not meet,

it will not approach in among us.[[348]](#footnote-348)

11On that day,

I will raise up David’s fallen shelter,

Repair their[[349]](#footnote-349) breaks and raise up his ruins,

and build it as in days of old,

12In order that they may possess what remains of ’Ĕdôm,

and all the nations over which my name was called

(an affirmation of Yahweh, who is going to do this).

13There, days are coming (Yahweh’s affirmation)

when the plowman will meet the reaper,

The treader of grapes

the one who trails with the seed.

The mountains will pour new wine,

and all the hills will melt.[[350]](#footnote-350)

14I will turn back my people Yiśrā’ēI’s fortunes;[[351]](#footnote-351)

they will build ruined towns and live [there].

They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;

they will make gardens and eat their fruit.

15I will plant them on their land,

and they will not be uprooted ever,

From upon the land

that I have given them (Yahweh your God has said).

## Interpretation

Once again the scroll reports a vision, though it is different in form from the previous four; there is no interaction between Yahweh and Amos and more prominence attaches to Yahweh’s words than in previous revelations. Indeed, by the end of Yahweh’s words (vv. 2-4) we have forgotten that they were part of a vision. They lead into a reminder of who Yahweh is (vv. 5-6) and a statement about Yahweh and Israel that is even more jaw-dropping than Amos has managed previously (vv. 7-8a). But with a speed of change that equals any change in direction in a thriller movie, Amos introduces an innovative vision of what Yahweh will do to Ephraim (vv. 8b-10). In its last verses, the scroll somersaults once more into promises about the restoration of David (vv. 11-12) and the restoration of the land (vv. 13-15).

**Amos 9:1-4.** The opening of this vision report immediately advertises its distinctiveness. It indeed reports a vision (that is, it speaks of something Amos saw) as opposed to reporting a revelation (speaking of Yahweh showing something).

Amos’s testimony that he had seen God (v. 1) is astonishing, given the First Testament’s reticence about the idea that a human being can see God and not be electrocuted. But Isaiah gives the same testimony; maybe it is significant that both Amos and Isaiah speak of seeing the Lord rather than of seeing Yahweh (though Isaiah goes on to testify to that seeing, too: Isa. 6:1, 5). Amos sees the Lord standing, in a position of authority, on the altar at the central, focal point in the sanctuary, presumably that at Beth-el (though Tg assumes Jerusalem). As the community is present, presumably the vision takes place during the offering of sacrifice at a festival (though this might or might not mean that Amos is physically there when having the vision). Israelites knew that Yahweh was present during their worship, but the congregation will assume that this is so in a good way. These worshipers are about to be disabused.

Once again Amos is not explicit on who Yahweh is addressing with his singular imperative. It might be Amos himself, who is thus a participant in the symbolic vision,[[352]](#footnote-352) though one might then expect a “to me” after “he said.” It might be a supernatural destroyer figure like Yahweh’s agent who kills the Egyptian firstborn (Exod. 12:23; cf. 2 Sam. 24:16). But once again the emphasis lies on the effect of what the Lord commissions rather than on the identity of his agents. While the vision differs from the first four, it turns out to relate to them in content. In fact, it is the climax of the sequence; here the “not passing by” is put into effect (this is still not to imply that the nation may not turn back and forestall the implementing of the vision—indeed, the vision is still designed to get them to do so). The sanctuary is to be smashed in a scene reminiscent of Judges 16:23-30, on a festival occasion as was the case there, and with the same aim. While it would declare judgment on the sanctuary’s religion, its aim was also to slaughter the people taking part in the worship. The altar would be in the courtyard in front of the sanctuary’s actual holy place, which would be only a small space. Most people would be outside in the courtyard. The people inside would be priests and members of the royal household and the administration (again as at Gaza in Judges 16:23-30). The holy place might have a pillar in its center like the ones in the Gaza temple or might have one in front like the Jerusalem temple. It is to be struck on its decorative top with a force that will shake up the holy place’s thresholds and thus open up access to the holy place for Yahweh to come in to act in judgment.[[353]](#footnote-353) Since “pillar-cap” is *kaphtor*, would Amos’s audience be initially enticed into thinking that he is striking down the Philistines (cf. v. 7—again as in Judges 16:23-30)? Rather by this action Yahweh’s agent is to cut off the Ephraimite leaders who are present; if necessary Yahweh himself will slaughter anyone who doesn’t die through the collapse of the pillars. No one is to escape.

Yahweh goes on to imagine people seeking to escape (v. 2). Perhaps they might dig down into She’ol (see the comments on Hos. 13:14), the abode of the dead just below the earth where we bury people? Generally Yahweh leaves She’ol to its own devices (e.g., Ps. 88), but he can reach into there if he chooses (cf. Prov. 15:11). Perhaps they might fly into the heavens? That’s his realm; obviously he can reach them there.

Perhaps (v. 3) they might try to hide in the impenetrable wooded heights of Mount Carmel or in its caves? Yahweh can find his way there. Perhaps they might hide at the bottom of the sea, which like She’ol is a realm that people often believed belonged to some other deity and was known to be resistant to Yahweh (e.g., Ps. 93:3)? But the serpent that had a reputation for resistance (Isa. 27:1) is subject to Yahweh’s orders regarding whom it bites.

In a last paradoxical thought (v. 4a), suppose their enemies take them off into captivity? Although captivity and exile may in effect be the same experience, the First Testament generally speaks of exile when it focuses on Yahweh bringing it about but speaks of captivity when human beings do it (though Amos spoke of exile in the latter connection in 1:3-15). So Yahweh here thinks not of exile that he will bring (as in 5:5, 27; 6:7; 7:11, 17) but of a captivity in which he is not directly involved. “It is as though those forced to leave… were trying by this means to escape the judgment of their God,” but they will find that they cannot. “Such a view seems to be in conflict with practically everything else we read about exile in the Bible.”[[354]](#footnote-354) To go into captivity might seem to mean they have escaped from the realm where Yahweh has any involvement. No, there is no such realm. Yahweh is lord of the entire universe. There is no place of escape. From the very realm of their captivity he will commission slaughter.

Thus Yahweh will keep his eye on them (v. 4b), not in the way Nebuzaradan was to keep his eye on Jeremiah (Jer. 39:12; 40:4) but to bring trouble rather than protection and blessing. “It is not Yahweh’s absence… but rather his presence that brings Israel to ruin (cf. 5:17b).”[[355]](#footnote-355)

**Amos 9:5-6.** The statement about Yahweh compares with 4:13; 5:8-9; once again the description comes in participles (or finite verbs following up the participles, in the usual fashion in Hebrew usage). In other respects the form of each of the three passages is different. In 4:13 none of the participles had the article; in 5:8-9 the description begins anarthrous and changes half way through; in 9:5-6 all the participles have the article. In 4:13 and 9:5-6 the declaration about Yahweh’s name comes at the end; in 5:8-9 it comes in the middle, and marks the move from predicate to subject, from description of Yahweh as creator to description of him as bringing disaster. This move happens without the same formal sign in 4:13, but the second part of that description embodies Amos’s threat and contrasts with the description of Yahweh’s power as creator in the first half. Distinctive to 9:5-6 is its opening with “the Lord Yahweh Armies,” a formula similar to one at the end in 4:13. It functions to announce that the element of threat in 9:5-6 comes first and the description of Yahweh as creator comes second. In other words, the noun clause comes in the reverse of the standard order, and thus draws frightening attention to the predicate. Yahweh has the power to be the destroyer by virtue of having the power to be the creator.

So first (v. 5) Yahweh is the one who has only to touch the earth to bring devastation (cf. Pss. 104:32; 144:5), like the dislocating effect of a touch on Jacob’s hip (Gen 32:25 [26]). Specifically, the earth melts: the word suggests both a physical dissolving (cf. v. 13, and Ps.65:11, in a good way) and an inner dissolution in terror (e.g., Ps. 107:26; Ezek. 21:20). That connotation leads neatly into the next colon and the line that follows, which repeat cola from 8:8 (see the comments) in a slightly different formulation. Here the analogy with the Nile applies to the up and down motion of the earth itself in an earthquake.

Who do you have to be to act in that way (v. 6)? The one who can act in that way is the great creator—so don’t have any doubt about it. He’s the one who has his own palace in the heavens, above the sky that we can see. This vault or “firmament” (KJV’s word for the dome in Gen. 1:6-8) is indeed firmly secured because (as one can see) it extends down to the earth on all sides. Verse 6b, with the ascription, repeats 5:8, but following on verse 6a it now has further resonance from the story of creation and flood that will eventually be told in Genesis. There God established the dome to keep the water under control and to stop it flooding the earth unless he opens its sluice gates. Here is a reminder that sometimes a flood means he has done exactly this.

**Amos 9:7-10.** The mention of Kush and Egypt follows on from vv. 5-6. The Kushites lived on the Nile at the confluence of the White Nile and the Blue Nile. Kush comprised the southern part of what is now Egypt and the northern part of Sudan (not Ethiopia [NRSV]). Further, the Kushites often ruled Egypt.[[356]](#footnote-356) After vv. 5-6, one might imagine Israelites remonstrating in the manner of a protest psalm, “Are you treating us the same as the Kushites who experience that overflowing of the Nile?”

In effect, initially Yahweh says, “Yes I am” (v. 7). Verses 5-6 have made it clear. One might imagine them asking further, “How can that be so when you’re the one who treated us in a special way in getting us up from Egypt?” Again, Yahweh says, “Yes I did,” but adds a jaw-dropping further statement about the Philistines and the Arameans, which takes us back to 1:3-8. There, they were the first two peoples against whom Yahweh declared that he would take action—on the way to declaring that he would also take action against Ephraim. He had said that Aram, Philistia, and Ephraim were in the same position as regards judgment. Near the end of the Amos scroll Yahweh now adds that they were in the same position as regards his more positive involvement with their historical destiny. As we don’t know where Qir was (see the comments on 1:5) and we don’t know where Kaphtor was, though it’s usually assumed to be somewhere across the Mediterranean such as Cyprus, Crete, or Cilicia in Turkey (LXX, Vg, Tg have Cappadocia). Yahweh’s point is that he was lord of their movements as well as lord of Israel’s.

He goes on (v. 8) to reaffirm the point from 1:3—2:16. The comment about sovereignty is also a comment about the way Yahweh’s eye (cf. v. 4) looks askance at nations in light of their moral life, and acts drastically. “Destroy” again picks up from 1:3—2:16, where Yahweh used the word in connection with the Amorites after referring to the fact that “I got you up from the country of Egypt” (2:9). But destroying won’t apply to Ephraim. It is the great exception. Yet the exception applies to the *household* of Jacob as opposed to the kingdom. Further, the word “kingdom” draws attention to the people’s particular royal administration (cf. 7:13; also 6:2). The royal household of Jeroboam I had indeed “done wrong,” wrong that would in due course “destroy it from upon the surface of the ground” (1 Kings 13:34). “Israel’s political future did not include the reconstitution of Jeroboam’s line (cf. 7:9-11).”[[357]](#footnote-357)

To underline the point (v. 9), Yahweh reaffirms that he is talking about the *household* of Israel, which will be shaken among the *nations.* So Ephraim is not simply going to get away with its wrongdoing; the point of Amos’s prophesying would then more or less disappear. But Yahweh is perhaps implicitly recognizing the force of possible objections to Amos’s message. Yahweh is not being faithful and not being fair! While it might be just as fair for Yahweh to destroy Ephraim as it is for Yahweh to destroy Kush or Aram or Philistia, the problem is that Yahweh would not be showing faithfulness to his commitment to Israel as “my people.” Yahweh cannot go back on that commitment. But further, the question about fairness also relates to relationships within Ephraim. With regard to peoples such as Philistia and Aram, Yahweh has spoken only of their relationships with other peoples, and his critique of them concerned their actions as peoples. But with respect to Ephraim Yahweh has spoken especially of relationships within the nation. It is groups within the nation that are at fault—the administration, the priesthood, the wealthy, the merchants, the elders, the professors. Yahweh has not directly critiqued the ordinary people, or groups such as the needy and the powerless who are more victims than perpetrators. So in order to be fair, Yahweh will need to implement a discriminating judgment. As usual, Amos’s description of this process is vague, and impossible to line up with events in his time or with how things will turn out. Amos doesn’t show any knowledge of (e.g.) the increasing encroachment of the Assyrians, the fall of Samaria, the transporting of the Ephraimites, and their effective disappearance, let alone the equivalent aspects of Judahite history. Yahweh speaks only of a flushing out of the community that will somehow happen by means of Ephraim’s involvement with the nations around. The image for that flushing out is sieving, which lets the good grain or the good soil fall into a heap and keeps hold of the rubbish and stones.

The stones and rubbish held in the sieve stand for the wrongdoers in Ephraim (v. 10), who will die. The sieve is not the place of safety and protection but the place of vulnerability to judgment. The sword is Yahweh’s (cf. 7:9; 9:10) and in Ephraim as elsewhere he is taking action against “the kingdom that does wrong,” which here can be equated with the “wrongdoers among my people.” He is wielding the sword against members of “my people” who are the dishonest and faithless government and the leaders who have led the nation astray.[[358]](#footnote-358) The only or the crucial act of waywardness that will commit them to the sword is the conviction that it will never happen, a refusal to believe what Yahweh said in v. 4 about ordering (compare v. 9) and about a sword and about bad fortune.

**Amos 9:11-12.** Yet further,Yahweh’s commitment to Israel means that he cannot stop at excusing Ephraim from total destruction. If it is shaken among the nations and cut down through the death of many, it must surely be restored.

Yahweh does not specify when “that day” (v. 11) will be, but at least he is saying that on “that day” a time of blessing will replace the time of destruction (contrast 2:16; 8:3, 9, 13). The First Testament refers a number of times to “David’s house[hold],” which is the phrase Tg has here; Yahweh’s reference to “David’s shelter/bivouac” is thus rather pointed, even though the noun is the one that gives its name to the Festival of Sukkot (Tabernacles or Booths). Understood in a later context, David’s fallen shelter might be the rule of David’s household in Judah, or the city of Jerusalem, or the temple in particular, but in Amos’s context it would mean the twelve clans he ruled. The establishing of Ephraim as a separate people from Judah meant the house became not much more than a bivouac, and a fallen bivouac at that (cf. 1 Kings 12:20). But Yahweh intends to set it up again—in other words, Ephraim will return to David and David’s line will rule over the whole of Israel once more (cf. Hos. 3:5). Could fallen Israel get up again or could anyone raise her up (5:2)? Only Yahweh himself, who put her down, could make it happen, and he will.

The result (v. 12) will be not only that Israel is one under David once more, but that the restored Davidic people rules over the entire area which Amos began by surveying (1:3—2:16). In a Second Temple context the mention of Edom would be apposite because of Edom’s occupation of much of Judah. In Amos’s context it would be apposite because Edom had been the recipient of a community taken captive by Gaza (1:6) and of more such communities from Tyre (1:9), and had engaged in violence and rage for itself (1:11). So David’s household will possess whatever remains of Edom after the action that Yahweh threatened against it (1:12). And it will possess the other nations mentioned in 1:3—2:3 (Aram, Philistia, Tyre, Ammon, Moab) over which Yahweh’s name was there called. In other words, these are peoples that belong to Yahweh, like the temple and like Israel itself, the entities to which that expression is commonly applied. Yahweh has been sovereign in their destinies, as in Israel’s; he has had expectations of them, as of Israel; he has declared the intention to act against them in light of their failure to fulfill his expectations, like Israel. So Israel will possess them, but in a way that matches their relationship with Yahweh.[[359]](#footnote-359)

It’s the empire that David once ruled. Heard in Ephraim from a Judahite prophet, Amos’s prophecy would arouse mixed feelings, or would be heard simply as a threat.[[360]](#footnote-360) Heard in Judah, it would seem extraordinary good news. If you find it hard to believe, believe it anyway (v. 12b).

**Amos 9:13-15.** The final promise is for Ephraim itself and thus it complements that promise to David, with “roses and lavender in place of blood and iron.”[[361]](#footnote-361)

Renewal of nature will accompany political renewal (v. 13). It’s a promise of extraordinary blessing on the farm: the harvest will be so plenteous that the man reaping one year’s crop and processing it will still be doing his work when the man plowing in preparation for next year and sowing the seed is trying to start his work (cf. Lev. 26:5). It’s a hyperbole, of course; the two men are the same man. To put it another way, it will be as if wine from those grapes is pouring down the mountain slopes so that the slopes themselves are melting (i.e., flowing) with it.

Thus (v. 14) Yahweh will restore his people’s fortunes (see Hos. 6:11 and the comments). Yes, Israel is still “my people.” The restoration will be seen in the town as well as in the country. The towns have seen or will see devastation (3:6; 5:3); they will be rebuilt. In the towns, too, people will plant their vineyards and drink the wine that comes from them, plant figs and apricots and pomegranates and eat their fruit.

It will require them to be insecure possession of the land (v. 15). Exile (5:5, 27; 6:7; 7:11, 17) will not be the end. They will be able to plant their plants because Yahweh has planted them and will not let them be uprooted from the land he gives them. The scroll ends by saying again, “If you find it hard to believe, believe it anyway.”

## Theological Implications

1. “Since the Prophet denounces such and so dreadful a destruction of an elect people, and since the vision was exhibited to him in the temple, there is no reason for us to trust in our outward profession, and to wait till God’s judgments come.”[[362]](#footnote-362)
2. It meet seem to be encouraging and reassuring that God knows everything about us and that God can be with us wherever we are. Psalm 139 might seem to indicate that it is so. Amos 9 uses the same language as the psalm to assert the opposite: it can be bad news not good news. Actually the psalm’s assertions are not necessarily good news, as its last section indicates. Only if you are seriously committed in your hostility to wrongdoing are they good news. Amos leaves no doubt about their being bad news.
3. God is the powerful creator and the guarantee of the cosmos’s stability but as the creator he is also the one with the capacity to destabilize creation. So don’t be any doubt that he can act to make the earth convulse.
4. Theology often involves holding together facts that are in tension. Amos 3:2 implied that there was something special about God’s bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, though it went on to draw an unexpected inference from the fact. Amos 9:7 denies that there was anything special about it—Yahweh did the equivalent for the Philistines and the Arameans. The synagogue lectionary sets Amos 9 alongside Leviticus 19—20, of which the next to last verse declares that Yahweh has set Israel apart from other peoples. It thereby puts together those two facts and lets the tension stand.
5. It isn’t just theology that has to live with this tension. God has to. Notwithstanding v. 7, he may destroy a nation that does wrong, yet not destroy Israel even though it is no better. In the context of Amos (and most of the Prophets), the reason is that he has made a commitment to Israel that he has not made to other peoples. The broader context of the First Testament indicates that God brought Israel in being for the sake of the nations as a whole, so that he keeps Israel in being for the nations as a whole. To put it in Christian terms, no Israel, no Jesus.
6. So God will not destroy his people, but he will purge it. The question of purging the other peoples apparently does not arise. One consideration here is that the wrongdoing of the other peoples is a corporate wrongdoing (see 1:3—2:3). The wrongdoing of Israel on which Amos focuses is a wrongdoing within Israel. The trouble is that purging Israel in such a way as to eliminate only all wrongdoers and no one else looks as logistically difficult as authorizing a drone strike that will affect no non-combatants. What God makes a commitment to is letting none of the wrongdoers escape. He may have to put up with some collateral damage.
7. Why really does he bother? Paradoxically, God’s judgment is an expression of his faithfulness.

According to Amos, God has no other answer to the inhumanity of man than that it can only be, and has already been, rejected like his stupidity. God would have to be unfaithful to Himself, and to the covenant with man which He has made in His covenant with Israel, if He were to withdraw or even weaken this answer. He maintains the covenant by placing the inhumanity of man under His merciless denunciation and the judgment which remorselessly engulfs it.[[363]](#footnote-363)

Further,

The intensity of Yahweh’s rage against “all the sinners of my people” does not arise from a detached and disinterested commitment to abstract principles of justice that are met when just penalties are fully applied, and when the total elimination of evil brings everything to a satisfactory conclusion. The simple solution, now that creation has been so hopelessly corrupted, is to annihilate the lot and revert once more to self-existent deity as the only reality, as it once was before God had the idea of creating a world distinct from himself. That simple but drastic remedy was tried once in the great Flood, though even then there was an exception; it was not tried again, and it is not contemplated as a possibility in the Bible. The driving will of God is to have a creation and to be related to his creatures. The intensity of his anger is a measure of that commitment.[[364]](#footnote-364)

Thus God’s “No”[[365]](#footnote-365) is ultimately set in the context of God’s “Yes.”

1. The promise about restoring David’s fallen shelter restores an aspect of a sad fact presupposed by 1:3—2:3. The peoples listed there were broadly part of the little empire ruled by David and Solomon. It was not simply a worldly empire but an implementing of God’s purpose to rule the world through his anointed. He has not given up on that project. They are the people over whom his name was called. Peoples who have lived with oppression have an opportunity to stand between vv. 10 and 11 and look back on past violence but also forward to the possibility of a different tomorrow.[[366]](#footnote-366)
2. For Israel in its own life, the “reaffirmation of divine hope at the end of the book” has a distinctly “primitive this-worldly character.”[[367]](#footnote-367) Amos’s ecology of goodness, rooted in God’s creation of a cosmos that is trustworthy, generous, and interconnected, has had to face an ecology of pain arising from the abuse of the land and its farmers by the elite of Israel and to warn of another ecology of pain in which the earth’s resources are withdrawn through natural disaster and foreign invasion, but here the scroll finally promises an ecology of goodness made new.[[368]](#footnote-368)
3. An anthology of First Testament texts from Qumran, 4QFlorilegium (4Q174),[[369]](#footnote-369) puts Amos 9:11 alongside passages such as Exodus 15:17-18 and 2 Samuel 7:11-14. It both implies reference to an expected Davidic Messiah and speaks of some fulfillment its own community as a “human sanctuary.” Both understandings may be implicit when James quotes Amos in Acts 15:16-18 (in a cross between MT and LXX). James may take David’s bivouac to be the Jerusalem temple,[[370]](#footnote-370) whose rebuilding comes through the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God.[[371]](#footnote-371) But Acts certainly sees Jesus himself as the fulfillment of God’s promises to David.[[372]](#footnote-372)
4. Amos would be the first to insist that God’s closing promise about the land does not trump any questions about the rights of the Palestinian people for whom it had also come to be their land. But God’s promise about being planted on their land does reaffirm his original promise to Abraham. It is intrinsic to the idea of there being a people Israel; the idea of land goes with the idea of peoplehood.
5. The Amos scroll has often attached phrases such as “Yahweh your God has said” to individual prophecies, but the example at the very end surely does double duty. As well as undergirding vv. 13-15, it pairs with the opening declarations in 1:1-2. In the Amos scroll the lion has been roaring. “Safe” isn’t quite the right word, but in the end “protective,” yes.[[373]](#footnote-373)

1. Barth, *CD* IV, 2:448. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Reed Lessing, “Upsetting the Status Quo,” *Concordia Journal* 33 (2007): 285-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Josephine Velasco-Recla takes reversal as a key rhetorical and theological motif in Amos (“Reversing the Reversal,” Diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. My threefold division of the book corresponds to that of one of my first Old Testament mentors, Alec Motyer (see *The Day of the Lion*), who died while I was writing this commentary and whose inspiration and encouragement I am glad to acknowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. LXX, Vg, Tg; “who saw” is jerkier (JPSV thus then omits the first *‘ăšer*) and leaves the verb with no object. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. David Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See e.g., Ben-Zion Rozenfeld, *Torah Centers and Rabbinic Activity in Palestine, 70-400 CE* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 140. David Qimchi assumes this reference (in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:148. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Philip R. Davies, “Why Do We Know about Amos?” in Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (eds.), *The Production of Prophecy* (London: Equinox, 2009), 55-72 (55). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. Yigael Yadin and others, *Hazor II* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), 24-26, 36-37.But the archaeologists seem to use Amos to provide this date, rather than being able independently to date the earthquake in 760 and provide that date as the clue to dating Amos. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. So Soggin, *Amos*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Katharine J. Dell, “Amos and the Earthquake,” in Hagedorn and Mein (eds.), *Aspects of Amos*, 1-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cf. Jeremias, *Amos,* 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Cf. Jack R. Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013], 202-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For the yiqtols, Vg, Aq, Sym have future tense in v. 2a; LXX has past tense, so that the verse becomes a summary “made after the fact” (Glenny, *Amos*, 42). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Vg “Beautiful things” derives *nə’ôt* from *nā’āh* instead of *nāwāh*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. As in Hos. 4:3, *HALOT*’s *‘ābal* II not *‘ābal* I “mourn” (against LXX, Vg; and cf. Katherine M. Hayes, “The Mourning Earth,” *Word & World* 28 [2008]: 141-49). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For the *waw* plus qatals, LXX, Vg have past tense in v. 2b; Aq, Sym have future. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos-Obadja-Jona*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Cf. Möller, *Prophet in Debate*, 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Soggin, *Amos*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:153. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Lüthi, *In the Time of Earthquake*, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Dell, “Amos and the Earthquake,” 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Vg has “says”; LXX rightly translates the qatal verb in the past tense, because it makes it continue from v. 2—it changes to present tense subsequently. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Not “transgression”; *peša’* is an offence against a person in authority, not against a law. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. 5QAmos has *hrw[t]* “[their threshing of] the pregnant women [of the Gilead]” (so also LXX: see Theocharous, *Lexical Dependence*, 109-22), assimilating to v. 13, but temptingly turning v. 3b into a bicolon. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. “Ḥăzā’ēl’s household” is spelled out by the reference to Ben-hadad; NRSV, TNIV have “house,” JPSV “palace.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Yôšēb* can mean “inhabitant” (e.g., Hos. 4:3) and LXX takes it as a collective for inhabitants (as e.g., Gen. 34:30), but the parallelism in the next colon suggests “one who sits [in a position of authority]” (e.g., Exod. 18:14). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Cf. Vg; if it “failed to recognize the place name Eden” (Gelston, BHQ, 78\*),it was a happy error. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. An abb’a’ quadricolon. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Here both LXX and Vg translate the qatal verb as present. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Literally, “exiling an entire exile.” [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. LXX lacks “the Lord.” On the form *‘ădōnāy*, frequent in Amos, see *IBHS* 7.4.3e. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. The finite verb continues the infinitival construction (GK 114r). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The finite verb again continues the infinitival construction. Here the *wəqātal* form suggests a repeated destroying, which leads into the next line with its description of an ongoing attitude, where the construction continues so that one could properly translate “and his anger tearing…” [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Raḥămîm*, the plural of the word for womb, usually denotes compassion, but “destroying compassion” is an implausible expression and I follow LXX (in Rahlfs’s edition) in assuming the more literal but metonymous meaning: see Jerome’s comments in *I*[*n Amos prophetam*](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0347-0420__Hieronymus__Commentariorum_In_Abdiam_Prophetam_Liber_Unus__MLT.pdf.html) (PL 25, column 1000d; and cf. Paul, *Amos*, 64-65, though he also notes that the next line’s reference to furious anger encourages one retrospectively to hear the more usual resonances of *raḥămîm* (and Glenny translates “mother” rather than “womb” [*Amos*, 50]). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. TNIV’s “flamed” presupposes *DCH*’s *šāmar* II. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Vg, Theod take Edom as the subject of both verbs and anger/fury as the object; LXX assumes the same construction. Aq, Sym have adverbial accusative, “in anger.” [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ernst Jenni cites this as a neat example of qal’s distinctiveness over against piel (for which see 2 Kings 8:12): qal draws attention to the subjects’ involvement in the action, piel draws attention to the result for the objects of the action (*Das hebräische Pi’el* [Zurich: EVZ, 1968], 142-43); cf. *IBHS* 24.3.3a. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. For *malkām* Vg, Aq, Sym imply Milkom, the Ammonites’ god, as in e.g., Jer. 49:1, 3 (see Jerome’s comments, in [*In Amos prophetam*](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0347-0420__Hieronymus__Commentariorum_In_Abdiam_Prophetam_Liber_Unus__MLT.pdf.html) (PL 25, column 1002b. While the parallelism supports MT, only here does Amos refer to the punishment of a “king,” and he will have been happy for people to hear a side-reference to Milkom. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. On LXX ‘their priests” see Theocharous, *Lexical Dependence*, 166-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. LXX, Tg take the word to denote “towns”: see the discussion in Paul, *Amos*, 73-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. On the construction, see the notes on 1:9 and 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. TNIV “innocent” takes the line to refer to bribing the elders who make decisions at the gate, but the parallelism makes this less likely (see more broadly Hamborg, *Still Selling the Righteous*, 202-7). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Tg “so that they might acquire an inheritance” understands the expression in light of Deut. 25:5-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. With LXX, Vg, I take the verb as BDB’s *šā’ap* II rather than its *šā’ap* I which would mean “long for [the dirt of the ground on the head of poor people],” which is grammatically easier but elliptical (long to see the dirt of mourning on their head, or long to get hold of this dirt as well as their land?). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The colon is very long and rather otiose and MT may preserve a double reading, but MT hyphenates the colon to make comprise just four stresses. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. “Sometimes the purpose seems to animate the action rather than the agent” (DG 127). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Grammatically, *‘Ĕlōhȇhem* could be plural, and Tg has “their idols” (and “their idolatrous altars” in the previous colon). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The semantically unnecessary pronoun preceding the verb suggests that v. 9 is a circumstantial clause; so also vv. 10-11a. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. By the negative *‘ȇn rather than lō’* “the existence of the subj. Is questioned” (DG 152d). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Cf. Vg, Aq for this meaning of *‘ûq* (inwardly transitive hiphil), which comes only in this verse. For LXX “hinder you” (cf. JPSV) see *HALOT*; TNIV “crush you” takes *‘ûq* as equivalent to *ṣûq*: Yahweh intends to squash Ephraim, push it down, bear down on it, in the way a cart presses down on the ground when it is full of grain, perhaps with an implicit analogy between the ill-gotten abundance of the people and the overloading of the cart which makes it come to a halt (cf. Paul, *Amos*, 95). But for both translations “you” is a questionable way to take *taḥtȇkem*; correlative difficulties arise with NRSV’s “I will press you down in your place.” [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Aq has “over” which gives a different slant to the preceding verb. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. More literally, “full for itself of sheaves”: *l* indicating advantage or disadvantage (cf. Jeremias*, Amos* 33) or“interest” (see *IBHS* 11.2.10d). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Understood from the parallel colon; LXX, Vg, Tg imply niphal *yimmālēṭ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. LXX “house of Israel” implies *bȇt* for *bənȇ*, assimilating to Amos’s more frequent usage. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Tg has *rə’ā’* itpeel, “delight in,” TNIV “chosen,” JPSV “singled out.” Common English Bible “loved so deeply.” [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Literally, “the families of the ground,” as in Gen. 12:3; 28:14; and cf. Deut. 14:2; Isa. 24:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See the note on Hos. 1:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. See Jeremy M. Hutton, “Amos 1:3–2:8 and the International Economy of Iron Age II Israel,” *Harvard Theological Review* 107 (2014): 81-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Fretheim, *Reading Hosea-Micah*, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. But this is not to question John L. McLaughlin’s negative answer to his question “Is Amos (Still) among the Wise?” (*JBL* 133 [2014]: 281-303. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Cf. Michael L. Barré, “The Meaning of l’ ‘šybnw in Amos 1:3—2:6,” *JBL* 105 (1986): 611-31. Perhaps compare Tg “I will not forgive them.” [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Cf. Nili **Wazana**, “‘War Crimes’ in the Oracles of Amos against the Nations,” in David S. Vanderhooft (ed.), *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature* (Peter Machinist Festschrift; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 479-501. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Hutton, “Amos 1:3—2:8,” 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Cf. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:161. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Cf. Jeremias, *Amos*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Cf. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Anselm C. Hagedorn quotes a curse on a tomb inscription and a claim by Asshurbanipal in this connection in “Edom in the Book of Edom and Beyond,” Hagedorn and Mein (eds.), *Aspects of Amos*, 41-57 (48-49). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Cf. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:139-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:156. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. See “Messages from God in a Religious and Societal Context” in the Introduction to this commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. See further Fishbane, *Haftarot*, 47-48. Avi Shenka (“‘For a Pair of Shoes’,” *VT* 62 [2012]: 95-114) notes a Hittite law requiring that the captor of a runaway slave be rewarded with a pair of shoes and suggests that Amos refers to such a practice (cf. Deut. 23:15). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. It comes at Qumran with the meaning “making someone turn aside from the path” (see *DCH*). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Cf. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Hamborg, *Still Selling the Righteous*, 217 (his italics; he is referring to an earlier version of the text than the final one, but the point still applies). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Cf. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 170-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Soggin, *Amos*, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Cf. Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Cf. David Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Wellhausen, *Kleinen Propheten*, 74; cf. Jeremias, *Amos*, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. See e.g., H. B. Huffmon, “The Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yāda’*,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 181 (1966): 31-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Though here it is *‘al-kēn*, there *lākēn*. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Jeremias, *Amos*, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Paul, *Amos*, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ellul, *On Being Rich and Poor*, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 352. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. John Barton, *Amos’s Oracles against the Nations* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), 2, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “Engendered Warfare and the Ammonites in Amos 1.13,” in Hagedorn and Mein (eds.), *Aspects of Amos*, 15-40 (40). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Theodoret, *Twelve Prophets*, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See James R. Linville, “What Does ‘It’ Mean?” *Biblical Interpretation* 8 (2000): 400-424. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. M. Daniel Carroll R., “God and His People in the Nations’ History: A Contextualised Reading of Amos 1—2,” *TynB* 47 (1996): 39-70 (68). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Cf. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:145. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 379. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Cf. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Lüthi, *In the Time of Earthquake*, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:221 (though he makes the comment in connection with v. 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:144. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. LXX has “knew each other,” implying *nôdā’û* for *nô’ādû*, assimilating to v. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Strictly (according to BDB) a lion that is not an adult but older than a whelp. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. See Joel 2:8 and the note. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. More literally, “but [in] capturing it does not capture.” [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. TNIV “surely” for *kî* loosens the tight links in the passage, [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Placing the subject before the verb here and in the next line suggests that each first clause is circumstantial, though surely not hypothetical (*TTH* 154) since the lion actually has roared—Yahweh has spoken. LXX, Vg have future tense, assimilating to the context and/or inviting people to see that God might still speak (Glenny, *Amos*, 67). [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. See Sara J. Milstein, “‘Who Would Not Write?’,” *CBQ* 75 (2013): 429-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Cf. the discussion in Fredrick Lindström, *God and the Origins of Evil* (Lund: Gleerup, 1983), 199-214. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos*, 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:209. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Cf. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 398-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:212. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. LXX implies *‘Aššûr*, a more expected pairing with Egypt, but *‘Ašdôd* will ring a bell when Amos mentions “destruction” (*šōd*), as will *Mișrayim* when he mentions storing up (*‘ôṣərîm*) and an “adversary” (*ṣar*)(vv. 10-11; Paul, *Amos*, 116). [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. LXX implies singular *har*, assimilating to 4:1; but the reference here is to the hills around the city, not the hill on which the city sits. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. LXX takes *‘ăšûqîm* is an abstract noun for oppression (cf. BDB), but it has the form of a qal passive participle, and this makes good sense each time the word comes. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. For *ṣar*, LXX and Aq nicely introduce *ṣōr* (Tyre) as in 1:10 (“we share the desire of the LXX translator to know who the agent of divine retribution will be”: Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 408). Sym and Theod have abstract nouns with a meaning such as “siege,” implying *ṣar* from BDB’s *ṣārar* I, but the context suggests the personal *ṣar* from BDB’s *ṣārar* III (cf. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 190-91). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. The *û* is “explanatory…, with a certain emphasis on the word it explains,” and a “specifying sense” (DG 37; cf. GK 154a). [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. “Your” and “you” are feminine singular, referring to Samaria which as a city is feminine. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. LXX, Vg translate *yāšab* “live,” but “sit” is more plausible as the line goes on to refer to couches. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. It’s questionable whether *bə* can mean “with” (so JPSV) in the sense required and it’s a less obvious meaning in the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. On *pə’at* (and on the rest of the colon) see Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle* 3:650-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. The imperative is singular—each wife is speaking to her husband. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Parsing *niśśā’* as piel, though it could be niphal, “when it will be carried off with regard to you” (cf. GK 121ab). [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Interpreting *ṣinnāh* in light of Aramaic *ṣinnā’* (*DTT*, 1277, 1290) rather than in light of a Hebrew word for “thorn” (BDB, 856). Aq, Tg assume the more common *ṣinnāh* which means shields. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Theod, Tg understand *‘aḥărîtkem* to mean “your offspring.” [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. While *hišlaktenāh* might be intransitive hiphil (Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 425), the puzzling pointing perhaps arose from a misunderstanding of *harmônāh* in light of Aramaic *harmānā’* “authority” (*TTH*, 368); we should then read hophal *hošlaktānāh* (cf. LXX, Vg; see Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle* 3:653-56). [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Cf. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos-Obadja-Jona*, 162-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:223. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Cf. Jeremias, *Amos*, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Cf. Paul, *Amos*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. David Qimchi In *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage, with Rosenberg’s comment, *Twelve Prophets* 1:128. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Cf. DG 105c. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. M. Daniel Carroll R., “Visions of Horror, Visions of Hope,” *Ex auditu* 29 (2013): 1-20 (10). [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Mays, *Amos*, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Cf. Möller, *Prophet in Debate*, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Paul R. Noble argues for a more positive view (“The Remnant in Amos 3—6,” *HBT* 19 (1997):122-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Cf. Weiser, *Kleinen Propheten* 1:127; Möller, *Prophet in Debate*, 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. But David E. Bokovoy (“*Šm’w wh’ydw bbyt y’qb*,” *JBL* 127 (2008): 37-51) suggests that Yahweh addresses his council here. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Cf. BDB on the denominative verb *‘ûd*. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. See BHQ, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. See Meindert Dijkstra, “The Ivory Beds and Houses of Samaria in Amos,” in Isaak J. de Hulster and Joel M. LeMon (eds.), *Image, Text, Exegesis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 178-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Cf. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 418. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Cf. Brian Irwin, “Amos 4:1 and the Cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria,” *CBQ* 74 (2012): 231-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Jeremias, *Amos*, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Cf. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:223. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Cf. Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, “A Fresh Look at Amos 4:1-3 and Its Imagery,” *VT* 59 (2009): 460-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Möller, *Prophet in Debate*, 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. So David Noel Freedman and Francis I. Andersen, “Harmon in Amos 4:3,” *BASOR* 198 (1970): 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. See Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle* 3:653 for a bewildering list of further possibilities. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Barth, *CD* IV, 2: 448-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Barth, *CD* IV, 2: 451. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. For *labbōqer* NRSV has “every morning,” but it is questionable whether the expression can have this meaning and there are other expressions that do signify “every morning” (see BDB, 134). [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. The word for tithes is simply the word for tenths. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. NRSV has “every three days,” which would be a nice hyperbole, but it’s a lot to read into the expression and it depends on NRSV’s understanding in the previous colon (see the note). “Days” sometimes means a year (cf. TNIV) but Amos is talking about worship that people engage in more often than triennally. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. The unnecessary pronoun before the verb suggests a concessive clause; so also v. 7, and the word order in v. 9b suggesting a circumstantial clause. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. By synecdoche *leḥem* can also denote food more generally, bread being the staple. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. TNIV “destroying” reads *heḥĕrabtî* for MT *harbôt*. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. On the assumption that vv. 9, 10, and 11 do not begin with concessive clauses, the *wə* is now represented in the translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. LXX, Vg rightly treat the preposition *bə* as simply marking the object, as happens after other verbs with meanings such as “strike” (see BDB, 89a). It doesn’t indicate that Yahweh overthrew only part of Ephraim (which would clash with the next colon) though v. 11b indicates that in a sense that was true. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Whereas “you” has been plural through vv. 1-11, in v. 12 “you” becomes singular, referring to the nation as one entity. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. LXX neatly reads *mah-šēḥô* as one word, “his anointed,” which (e.g.) Theodore (*Twelve Prophets*, 148) then refers to Cyrus in keeping with Isa. 45:1; cf. Glenny (*Amos*, 85-86) for further possibilities. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. On the structure of v. 13, see Möller, *Prophet in Debate*, 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. The word order would suggest “his name [is] Yahweh the God of Armies”; but see DG 49c, remark 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. “Virgin” is too specific or pointed for *bətûlāh* (see Joel 1:8 and the comments); the point is that we are to think of the sad event of a young unmarried girl losing her life. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. “Maiden Israel” (JPSV) takes the construct as defining, but “Israel” is usually masculine; more likely the “maiden of Israel” is the capital city, Samaria (cf. John J. Schmitt, “The Virgin of Israel,” *CBQ* 53 (1991): 365-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. See Paul, *Amos*, 141-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Cf. Jeremias, *Amos*, 70-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos-Obadja-Jona*, 178; cf. Carroll R., *Context for Amos*, 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Cf. Fretheim, *Hosea-Micah*, 133, 136. Jason H. Radine suggests there is something lament-like about Amos as a whole (“‘Hear This Word That I Take Up Over You in Lamentation,’” in Flesher and others (eds.), *Why?... How Long?* 1-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Cf. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 339. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:245. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 455. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:235. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Jeremias, *Amos*, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Soggin, *Amos*, 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Paul, *Amos*, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Cf. Jeremias, *Amos*, 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. M. Daniel Carroll R., “The Prophetic Text and the Literature of Dissent in Latin America,” *Biblical Interpretation* 4 (1996): 76-100 (92). [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:245. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Theodoret, *Twelve Prophets*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. See the comments on the Structure and Outline of Hosea. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:245-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Cyril, *Twelve Prophets* 2:67, quoting from Ps. 76:7 [8]. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Barth, *CD* II, 2:232. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. LXX has “not existing” (cf. NRSV), suggestively linking *‘āwen* with *‘āyin*; and perhaps implying an awareness that there was no sanctuary in Beth-el in its time (Glenny, *Amos*, 91). [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. I follow BDB in distinguishing *ṣālaḥ* I from the more common *ṣālaḥ* II, but I take the translation “break in” from the discussion of possible meanings of *ṣālaḥ* in *HALOT*. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. LXX implies *bȇt* *Yiśrā’ēl*, “Israel’s household,” which forms a good parallel with the preceding colon. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. For *ləla’ănāh* LXX implies *ləma’ănāh* “upwards,” down side up. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. While the original pointing of *ṣalmāwet* may have been *ṣalmût*, the pointing as “deathly shadow” is suggestive. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. See the note on 4:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. LXX and Vg’s different translation for the second occurrence of *šōd* avoids the repetition. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. LXX, Vg, Tg imply *yābî’* “he brings destruction,” an easier reading than MT *yābô’*. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Treating vv. 8-9 as a later addition to the text makes the sequence from vv. 7 to 10 smoother. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Literally, “speaks whole.” [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. On the verb, see *DCH* on *šābas.* [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. The word order suggests that this is a circumstantial clause; so also the next line. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. The adjective is masculine; the prophet hasn’t worked out in time that it needs to be feminine in light of the feminine noun that will follow. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. The qatal verb continues the participial construction. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. In *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage, Ibn Ezra nicely renders the “good person” and the “bad person.” [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Here spelled *hô* and thus (as the expression from ordinary life?) distinguished from *hôy*, the prophetic expression in v. 18 and elsewhere (see Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 242-43). [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. In the parallelism the “for” carries over into the second colon, and into v. 17a, while the “to” in the second colon also applies in the first. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. See Paul, *Amos*, 185, on this phrase. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. In vv. 21-22 “your” was plural (suggesting a collection of individuals), in v. 23 it is singular (suggesting the people as one unit). [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. *Yiggal*, which makes for another paronomasia with Gilgal (vv. 5, 27), with *gālāh* “reveal” (see Vg and Tg)—and with *gālāh* “exile” (see Theod). [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. LXX, Vg, Tg translate as past tense and thus link with v. 25 (cf. Glenny, *Amos*, 108-9), but the *waw*-consecutive would more usually have future reference and making that link with v. 25 raises difficult questions: would Amos think they worshiped these gods in the wilderness? But see “Theological Implications” on this verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. I follow LXX and Vg, which translate *sikkût* as if it were *sukkôt* “shelters of” (see Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle* 3:665-68, and the comments below). [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. LXX, Vg, Aq imply a reference to *the* King, Molok or Milkom (cf. Glenny, *Amos*, 107-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. See the comments below. TNIV “pedestal” takes MT *kiyyûn* as a noun from *kûn* (see *DCH*), which gives good parallelism. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. J. de Waard sees 5:1-17 as a chiasm: see “The Chiastic Structure of Amos v 1-17,” *VT* 27 (1977): 170-77; also Möller, *Prophet in Debate*, 68-69, with further references. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 230, 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Cf. Soggin, *Amos*, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. See King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah*, 104-6; cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:234. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Cf. Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics*, 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Cf. Matthew Goff, :Awe, Wordlessness and Calamity,” *VT* 58 (2008): 638-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. So Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 465. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. BDB on *yāṣag*. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. See Aulikki Nahkola, “Amos Animalizing,” in in Hagedorn and Mein (eds.), *Aspects of Amos*, 83-104. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Jeremias, *Amos,* 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Cf. Paul, *Amos*, 197-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Fretheim, *Reading Hosea-Micah*, 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Cf. Mays, *Amos,* 99*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Theodore, *Twelve Prophets*, 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Lüthi, *In the Time of Earthquake*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Theodoret, *Twelve Prophets*, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Soggin, *Amos*, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. So Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. E.g., Weiser, *Kleinen Propheten* 1:151. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. See the discussion in Jon L. Berquist, “Dangerous Waters of Justice and Righteousness,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 23 (1993): 54-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. See Susan Ackerman, “Amos 5:18-24,” *Interpretation* 53 (2003):190-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Tg suggestively has “leans” (*sāmak*). [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. The colon is slightly elliptical and TNIV understands the question the other way, “Are they better off than your two kingdoms,” which parallels the next colon. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. NRSV emends to read “your territory… their territory.” [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Literally a “sitting [on the throne].” [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. The verb comes only here and we are not sure of the precise meaning; *HALOT* lists possibilities. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. The preposition carries over from the parallel colon. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. *Bərō’š* *gōlîm* (literally “at the head of the exiles”) resonates with *rē’šît* *haggôyim* in v. 1 as well as with *rē’šît* in v. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. *Tā’ab* is apparently a variant on *tā’ab* (see 5:10 and the comments); it comes only here. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. LXX, Vg have “pride,” but Theod has “height” and the parallelism confirms this interpretation (see Hos. 5:5 and the note). [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. For this understanding of the *wə*, see Paul R. Noble, “A Note on *ûneśā’ô dôdô ûmeśārepô*, ZAW 111 (1999): 419-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Cf. Tg and *DCH* (which also notes that the word might refer to an embalmer). Vg assumes the word means his burner (the person who cremates him or who burns incense for him?) but the expression is then elliptical and the spelling *sārap* rather than *śārap* is otherwise uninstanced. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. For *nəśā’ô* LXX implies *nəśā’û* “they lift,” which would fit if there are two relatives; but “says” in the next clause is singular, which supports the idea that there is one person to refer to. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Literally, “his bones.” [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Tg interestingly understands these house(hold)s to be Ephraim and Judah. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. TNIV “plow the sea” emends *babbəqārîm* to *babbāqār yām* (cf. GK123a). [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. *Rō’š*, a homonym of the word for “head” in v. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Soggin, *Amos*, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 356. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Cf. Rashi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on this passage. See e.g., King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah*, 137-61; Barstad, *Religious Polemics of Amos*, 127-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Jeremias, *Amos*, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 364. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Cf. Tg, and David Qimchi In *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. BDB, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:300-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Cyril, *Twelve Prophets* 2:89. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Wellhausen, *Kleinen Propheten*, 84-85; cf. Soggin, *Amos*, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Paul, *Amos*, 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Soggin, *Amos*, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:319. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Carroll, “The Prophetic Text and the Literature of Dissent,” 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. *Christian Doctrine* IV 7-8 [21-22] (NPNF I, 2:581). [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Cf. Motyer, *The Day of the Lion*, 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. “He was forming” is *yôṣēr*;Tg “creation of,” LXX “offspring of” implies *yeṣer*. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. I take the anomalous *wəhāyāh* as adversative (JM 119z, 172a). [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. For the translation of the further unusual expression (also in v. 5), cf. *IBHS* 18.2d. For MT *yāqûm*, LXX, Vg imply the easier reading *yāqîm*, “Who will get Jacob up?” [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. LXX continues the imperative from v. 1, assimilating to Exod. 32:12; so also in vv. 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Tg has “judgment” (cf. LXX. Vg), but *rib* refers to the dispute or contention that precedes a judicial verdict.NRSV “shower of fire” reads *rəbib ‘ēš* for MT *rib bā’ēš*. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. LXX B poignantly calls it “the Lord’s share,” presumably Israel (Glenny, *Amos*, 124). [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. NRSV has “beside”; but “on” is the basic meaning of *al* and it fits the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. The word I translate “paint” (*‘ănāk*), to seek to convey the paronomasia with the word I translate “pain,” comes in the First Testament only in Amos 7:7-8, but in later Hebrew *‘ānāk* refers to alabaster or onyx used as a glaze (cf. Aq, Theod, Vg), while a homonym means oppression or wrong or grief (*DTT,* 85), which facilitates Yahweh’s point here (cf. the paronomasia in 8:1-3); Biblical Hebrew also has a verb *‘ānaq* meaning “groan.” The KJV translation “plumb line” comes in with Rashi and David Qimchi (see their commentaries in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage), who appeal to Arabic; more recently appeal has been made to an Akkadian word taken to mean “lead,” but which may rather mean “tin” (cf. *HALOT*; Benjamin J. Noonan, “There and Back Again,” *VT* 63 [2013]: 299-307, reasserts the argument for “lead). Perhaps Amos sees a tin wall (as opposed to a brass one: LXX had “hard metal”); cf. Paul, *Amos*, 233-35; Martha E. Campos, “Structure and Meaning In the Third Vision of Amos (7:7–17),” *JHS* 11/3 (2011). J. Ouellette (“Le mur d’étain dans Amos, vii, 7-9,” *Revue Biblique* 80 [1973]: 321-31) notes a parallel with a ritual use of tin in connection with the destruction of a temple, but Amos would likely still need to assume the word for oppression or wrong or grief to make the line work in communicating in Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. The name is unusually spelled *yiśḥāq*, which may have inveigled LXX into translating “altars of laughter,” which in turn encourages Cyril to think of the altars as laughable (*Twelve Prophets* 2:100). [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Yahweh picks up Amos’s word from vv. 2 and 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. JPSV has “a royal palace,” but more likely it is a parallel description of the Beth-el temple. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Hebrew has no word for “is” or “am”; Vg takes the whole of Amos’s words in v. 14 as a noun clause referring to the present, while LXX takes Amos to be saying “I wasn’t a prophet until Yahweh took me.” For my translation which avoids assimilating the Hebrew to European categories cf. Coggins, *Joel and* Amos, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Literally, “son.” [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Tg takes the participle from the denominative verb for cattle to refer to someone prominent, a cattle owner, so that it can be another way of describing himself as a sheep-farmer (cf. 1:1; *bāqār* might include sheep). But it might indicate that he was a herdsman at Beth-el. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. LXX, Vg take *bālas* to mean “nip,” which suggests an aspect of tending mulberry figs which hastens and improves their ripening, but it is a denominative verb from a word for figs, which suggests it means something more general (Tg, Theod take it to mean owner)—of which this nipping might be part; Aq “examiner” presupposes *bālaš* from later Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Tg’s addition “Because of my people’s wrongdoings, I am afflicting myself” is neat in light of Yahweh’s talk in v. 8 of bringing pain on Ephraim. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. *Nāṭap* means drop or drip or flow or pour (cf. 9:13), but it can be used of speech (Job 29:22) and thus of prophetic speech (cf. Mic. 2:6, 11), apparently as speech that flows or pours out. I adopt this translation from Cathcart/Gordon, *Targum of the Minor Prophets*, 92, though the word is not inherently pejorative (but LXX nicely has a word for being a rabble-rouser: see Glenny, *Amos*). [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. See Jason Radine, “Vision and Curse Aversion in the Book of Amos,” in Elizabeth R. Hayes and Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (eds.), *I Lifted My Eyes and Saw* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 85-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. See Jeremias’s comments, *Amos*, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 373. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Cf. Tzvi Novick, “Duping the Profit,” *JSOT* 33 (2008): 115-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Wolff, *Confrontations with Prophets*, 15 (though Wolff assumes the visions are the means of compelling Amos to act as a prophet, which seems more questionable). [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. See J. Blake Couey, “Amos vii 10-17 and Royal Attitudes toward Prophecy in the Ancient Near East,” *VT* 58 (2008): 300-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 768. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. See Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 762-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. See T. J. Wright, “Amos and the ‘Sycamore Fig,’” *VT* 26 (1976): 362-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. So Âke Viberg, “Amos 7:14,” *TynB* 47 (1996): 91-114. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Cf. Paul, *Amos*, 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Cf. Jerome, [*In Amos prophetam*](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0347-0420__Hieronymus__Commentariorum_In_Abdiam_Prophetam_Liber_Unus__MLT.pdf.html) (PL 25, column 1078a). [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos,* 735-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:329-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Jeremias, *Amos*, 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 738. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. Barth, *CD* IV, 2:450-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. “Ripe fruit” is *qayiṣ*, more literally “summer [produce].” [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Literally, “the end [*qēṣ*] has come.” I adopt TNIV’s translation to make the link with *qayiṣ* in v. 1. While in form *bā’* could be a participle and could signify that the end “is coming” (which would match 7:8), the word order suggests that the verb is qatal (contrast the word order in e.g., v. 11; Mal. 4:1 [3:19]; as well as 7:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. LXX, Vg have “temple” for *hȇkāl*, but in the preceding vision Amos used the words “sanctuary” or “shrine” to refer to a temple (7:9, 13), and “palace” fits the focus on the king (7:9, 11). [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. MT *šîrôt* (the feminine plural comes only here) implies a metonymy; “singing women” (JPSV) would imply *šārôt.* [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. The double translation of *šabbāt* makes the link with “stop,” the verb *šābat*, in v. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. That is, open up storehouses (cf. Tg, LXX) or sacks. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Literally “bending scales of deception”—bending scales so they become deceptive (cf. LXX). [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. In vv. 5-6 purpose is indicated by *waw* plus cohortative (v. 5a—cf. GK 108d), by *waw* plus infinitive construct with *lə* (vv. 5b-6a), and by the more common *waw* plus yiqtol (v. 6b). [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. JPSV has “the earth,” but vv. 3-7 rather point to a shaking of Ephraim. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. The word for Nile is oddly spelled *‘ōr* rather than *yə’ôr* (so in the next colon), perhaps to make a link with “light” (*‘ôr*) in v. 9 (see Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle* 3:686). [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. That is, the situation. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Literally simply “and its end.” [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. See the note on Hos. 5:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. The rare hiphil of *šālaḥ*, used only with God as subject. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. For MT *‘ašmat*, NRSV reads *‘ăšimat*, the name of a god worshipped in Samaria later according to 2 Kings 17:30 (see Barstad, *Religious Polemics of Amos*,157-81). [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. So Abarnabel as reported by Rosenberg, *Twelve Prophets* 1:158. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Cf. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 733. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. See the “Gezer Calendar,” a table listing the periods of the agricultural year, the last part of which goes, “a month reaping and measuring, two months pruning, a month *qṣ*,summer fruit” (cf. *ANET*, 320). [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 320. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Donald E. Gowan, “The Book of Amos,” *NIB* 7:414. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Cf. Rainer Kessler, “Die angeblichen Kornhändler von Amos viii 4-7,” *VT* 39 (1989): 13-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. So David Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Cf. Rudolph, *Joel-Amos-Obadja-Jona*, 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Cf. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 829-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:267. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Cf. David Qimchi in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos*, 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Yvonne Sherwood, “Of Fruit and Corpses and Wordplay Visions,” *JSOT* 92 (2001): 5-27 (15-16); the middle quotation she attributes to Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (48). [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Lüthi, *In the Time of Earthquake*, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Jeremias, *Amos*, 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. In *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:183. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Ellul, *On Being Rich and Poor*, 15; 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. NRSV has “beside”: see the note on 7:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. The collective singular refers to each pillar’s decorative top. For *kaptôr* LXX implies *kappōret* (the cover on the covenant chest)—a neat metathesis in the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. For this translation see Tchavdar Hadjiev, “‘Kill All Who Are in Front,’” *VT* 57 (2007): 386-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Having translated *miššām* “from there” in vv. 2-3a, for vv. 3b-4 LXX, Vg switch to simple “there.” *Min* can signify “off, on the side of” (BDB 578b) and then hardly need translating (cf. 5:27), but BDB gives no examples of this use with *šām* and explicitly translates *miššām* “from there” in these verses (BDB 1027b). Here the same meaning would indeed surely obtain through all four occurrences. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Verses 2-4 comprise a sequence of seven lines where the parallelism is between lines rather than between cola, with an ever increasing intensification and sense of inevitability (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* [New York: Basic, 1985], 75-76). [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. LXX, Vg have “ascent,” the usual meaning of *ma’ălôt*, but in the context it looks more like an alternative to *‘ăliyyôt* (Ps. 104:3, 13). [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. See the note on 4:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Tg “you’re regarded as beloved children with me*”* apparently reverses the shocking statement. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. The English translation of Theodore has “this kingdom” (*Twelve Prophets*, 171, but the Greek has no “this” [PG 66:301]), which changes the meaning in a tricky way. The point in v. 8a is the generalization to which v. 8b then cites the great exception. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. The occurrences of *‘epes* with this meaning are an extraordinary collection: Num. 13:28; Deut. 15:4; Judg. 4:9; 2 Sam. 12:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. On the use of the two hiphil verb forms, see Paul, *Amos*, 287, though the more obvious way to understand the hiphils is as second person singular and thus as addressed to God in a “more arrogant assertion” (Fishbane, *Haftarot*, 134)that “you won’t make the bad fortune meet or approach….” [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. The suffixes in the line raise eyebrows: “their” (feminine) are perhaps the towns in David’s realm, “his” is David, and “it” (feminine) is the shelter itself (cf. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle* 3:694-96). [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. JPSV has “wave”; but the evidence for this meaning is thin. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. TNIV has “bring back Israel from exile”: but see Hos. 6:11 and the comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. There is no problem about the idea of the prophet shattering the temple *in a vision* (against Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 334). [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. See Jean Ouellette, “The Shaking of the Thresholds in Amos 9:1,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 43 (1972): 23-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 840. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. See further Brent A. Strawn, “What is Cush Doing in Amos 9:7,” *VT* 63 (2013): 99-123. Some modern biblical study has noted that the Kushites would be black, but that possibility is not in focus in Amos; it reflects modern ways of looking at race (see Etienn Koffi, “Theologizing about Race in Study Bible Notes,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 57-58, 2/1-2 [2005] 157-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. Carroll, “Visions of Horror, Visions of Hope,” 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Cf. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 875, 882. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Cf. Daniel Timmer, “The Use and Abuse of Power in Amos,” *JSOT* 39 (2014): 101-18 (111-13). [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Cf. David G. Firth, “Promise as Polemic,” *OTE* 9 (1996): 372-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Wellhausen, *Kleinen Propheten*, 94; cf. Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:386-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Barth, *CD* IV, 2: 451-52. In preceding pages Barth has been emphasizing stupidity as an aspect of human sinfulness. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 864. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Cf. Rudolf Smend, “Das Nein des Amos,” *Evangelische Theologie* 23 (1963): 404-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. See M. Daniel Carroll R., “Living between the Lines,” *Religion and Theology* 6 (1999): 50-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Andersen/Freedman, *Amos*, 865. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Robert R. Ellis, “Amos Ecology,” *Review and Expositor* 112 (2015) 156-68: [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. See *DSS* 1:352-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. John A. Dunne argues for this understanding in Amos itself, and argues that the passage refers to the eschatological temple (“David’s Tent as Temple in Amos 9:11-15,” *WTJ* 73 (2011): 363-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. See e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2004), 232-44; and for a “democratized” understanding of Amos 9:11-12 itself, Greg Goswell, “David in the Prophecy of Amos,” *VT* 61 (2011): 243-57 (250-56). [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. See especially W. Edward Glenny, “The Septuagint and Apostolic Hermeneutics: Amos 9 in Acts 15,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 22 (2012): 1-26. On Jewish and Christian interpretation of Amos 9:11-15, see Sabine Nägele, *Laubhütte Davids und Wolkensohn* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. See the “Theological Implications” comments on Hos. 5:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)