

2.0 The Book of the [Prophet Amos](#)¹

2.1 Introduction

Amos was the first of the classical prophets. The book's title² states that he was from [Tekoa](#) in Judah, south of Jerusalem. Called to prophecy in Israel³ he worked at [Bethel](#)⁴ and perhaps also at Samaria. He lived during the reigns of [Uzziah](#) of Judah (783-742 BCE) and [Jeroboam II](#) of Israel (786-746 BCE). By trade he was a breeder of livestock.⁵ Amos lived during a period of great material prosperity and social corruption. Politically Assyria was still weak and Israel was independent. It was the calm before the storm.

2.2 Four Themes of Central Importance

2.2.1 Judgement

Amos proclaimed the total and inescapable destruction of [Northern State of Israel](#). YHWH had acknowledged Israel as his Covenant People⁶ but since Israel rejected it, YHWH decided to end the relationship. Amos directed harsh words against both political and religious leadership condemning moral failure at every level. These are the many condemnations: against the *king*;⁷ against *priests*;⁸ against the *upper classes of Samaria*⁹ and against the *sanctuaries of [Bethel](#) and [Gilgal](#)*.¹⁰ He proclaimed that the coming judgement of YHWH would affect all peoples.

2.2.2 Social Justice

Israelite religion demanded a link between one's relationship with YHWH and with one's neighbour. In Amos' time this link was ignored by the powerful and wealthy that treated the poor as they wished. Amos articulated YHWH's deep distress at the oppression of the poor and the desire for justice.¹¹

1 Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Period of Assyrian Expansion," in *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 82-97; John W. Miller, *Meet the Prophets: A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987) 39-64.

2 Amos 1:1.

3 Amos 7:14-15.

4 Amos 7:10-17.

5 Amos 1:1; 7:14.

6 Amos 3:1-2.

7 Amos 7:11.

8 Amos 7:16-17.

9 Amos 3:9; 4:1-3; 6:1; 8:14.

10 Amos 4:4-5; 5:5.

11 Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:7.11.24; 8:4-6.

2.2.3 Cult

Amos referred to the principle cult centres: *Bethel*;¹² *Gilgal*¹³ and *Dan*.¹⁴ He used the language of cult¹⁵ while denouncing religious hypocrisy.¹⁶

2.2.4 The Word of YHWH

Israel was strongly condemned for rejecting YHWH's word¹⁷ an action that causes YHWH to take away his word from Israel.¹⁸

2.3 An Outline of the Book

The movement of the book is from large-scale *condemnation of evil in the other nations* (Amos 1:1 – 2:5) through a *condemnation of evil in Israel* (Amos 2:6 – 6:14) to *visions of divine threat and promise* (Amos 7:1 – 9:15). The book ends on a note of hope (Amos 9:8b-15). The main elements of hope found here are: the restoration of David's Rule (Amos 9:11-12); paradisaical fertility (Amos 9:13) and the homecoming of the exiles (Amos 9:14-15). The structure of the book can be summarized as follows:

1. The Title (1:1)
2. A Detached Oracle (1:2)
3. Oracles Against the Nations (1:3 – 2:16)
4. The "Words of Amos" I (3:1 – 6:14)
5. The Visions of Amos (7:1 – 8:3; 9:1-6)
6. The Incident at Bethel (7:10-17)
7. The "Words of Amos" II (8:4-14; 9:7-10)
8. The Restoration (9:11-15)

This course will only study the following texts: Amos 1:1 – 2:16.

12 Amos 3:14; 4:4; 5:5-6; 7:10-13.

13 Amos 4:4; 5:5.

14 Amos 8:14.

15 Amos 4:4-5; 5:4 – 6:14.

16 Amos 4:4-5.

17 Amos 2:12; 7:12-13.

18 Amos 8:11-12.

2.4 Text #1: The Title (Amos 1:1)

Amos 1:1 The words of Amos, who was among the livestock breeders of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of [Joash](#) of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

Words: The book is composed of sayings. Other prophetic books begin in a similar manner.¹⁹ The use of the plural here suggests a title for a collection of sayings.²⁰ As such it is an accurate description of the book that is made up principally of Amos' speeches.

Shepherds: Both the NRSV and NJB translate the Hebrew word *noqēdīm* (נֹקְדִים) as *shepherds*. A more accurate translation would be *owner and breeder of livestock*. This means that Amos was among the notable and wealthy of his community. He was a *noqēd* by profession and not a prophet until called by YHWH (Amos 7:14).

Tekoa: This was a small village located 19 km directly south of Jerusalem. Amos 7:12 confirms that Amos was Judahite.

He saw: To “see words” is a conventional way of saying that Amos received a revelation from YHWH before he spoke any words.²¹ Amos received five visions (Amos 7:1 – 8:3; 9:1-6) by which he received his message. On this basis a better translation of “he saw” is: “which he saw in a vision.”

Uzziah ... Jeroboam: The reigns of these [kings](#) spanned the mid-eighth century BCE. Most scholars date Amos' ministry to about 750 BCE.

Earthquake:²² According to archaeological excavations possible dates for the earthquake have been set at 760, 759, 756, and 750 BCE. The editors of the Book of Amos obviously regarded the earthquake as a divine manifestation confirming Amos' prophecy. The title to the book functions in *three* ways:

- First it serves to introduce the book as the sayings of a man who is identified by name, home, vocation and time.
- Secondly the divine origin of the words is underlined by the fact that Amos “saw words.”

19 Ezek 1:3; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jer 1:1; Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1.

20 See also Prov 31:1; Neh 1:1 and Job 31:40.

21 See also Isa 1:1; 2:1 and Mic 1:1.

22 Zech 14:4-5.

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- Finally the title points to an important principle of interpretation. The sayings are to be read and interpreted as words for a particular time and place, communicated through one man.

2.5 Text #2: A Detached Oracle (Amos 1:2)

Amos 1:2 And he said: YHWH roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds wither, and the top of Carmel dries up.

This oracle acts as an introduction to the whole book. It describes the *qôl* (קוֹל) - Hebrew: *noise = voice*) of YHWH and its resultant devastation. YHWH does not speak in the first person. His voice is portrayed as a devastating phenomenon.

And he said: A better translation from the Hebrew is *and he used to say*. The reference is to Amos, not YHWH. This suggests that Amos repeatedly proclaimed immanent destruction by YHWH. The verse was put here by the editors of the book to serve as a keynote to the book and probably was not the original words of Amos.

Utters his voice: Variations of this appear in other prophetic books,²³ and refer to the dwelling place of YHWH's voice and the destructive power of its manifestation. In all cases the motif is used to illustrate YHWH's action *against his enemies* as a *herem* (חֵרֶם) - Hebrew: *holy war*). Amos speaks here of a *herem* in reverse! YHWH is not going to act against the enemies of his people, but *against his own people*.

Roars: The idea of YHWH roaring is a metaphor based on the noise of thunder. Canaanite religion (based on Ba'al, the storm god) understood thunder as the voice of the deity. The Book of Amos reflects a similar understanding here.

Wither ... dries up: The Hebrew verbs are best translated as *wither ... dries up*, as in the NRSV. The effect of YHWH's voice is depicted as very serious drought. The idea of drought as a manifestation of YHWH's wrath is a frequent motif in the prophets.²⁴ There seems to be a contradiction in having thunder (which is associated with rain) produce drought. However the force of the metaphor lies in its paradox. Rain was traditionally understood as a divine gift and a sign of YHWH's favour. In Amos 1:2 the rain announced by the thundering of YHWH's voice is the rain of YHWH's wrath that will lead to drought and withering. The meaning here is that just as YHWH's roaring produces catastrophic results in nature, so too the prophetic word of judgement will achieve its fearful purpose. Amos 1:2 is a case of *synonymous or semantic parallelism*.

²³ Isa 66:6; Jer 25:30; Joel 3:16.

²⁴ Isa 5:6; 11:15; 19:7; 42:15; Jer 12:4.

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In Hebrew poetry a line usually consists of balanced bi-cola. The term “colon” means a sentence. A “bi-colon” refers to two sentences or a double-sentence. Synonymous or semantic parallelism occurs when there is a balance of meaning between the members of the bi-cola. Amos 1:2 is a perfect example of this poetic characteristic:

| AMOS 1:2 | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Colon I | Colon II |
| YHWH roars | Utters his voice |
| From Zion | From Jerusalem |
| Colon III | Colon IV |
| Pastures of the shepherds | The top of Carmel |
| Withers | Dries up |

A balance of meter also characterizes Hebrew poetry. Scholars dispute on how the meter of Hebrew poetry is determined. Some maintain that Hebrew poetry has no meter. Others claim that the rhythm or meter is based on the number of syllables per colon. The majority of authors favour a system of meter based on the number of accented syllables per colon. Amos 1:2 has the following metric pattern of three accents per colon:

*"YáHWeH róars from Zíon,
and útters his voíce from Jerúsalem;
the pástures of the shépherds wíther,
and the tótop of Cármel dríes up."*

In technical terms, Amos 1:2 is described as two bi-cola in synonymous parallelism with 3+3 rhythm. There is a relationship between Amos 1:2 and Amos 1:3 – 2:16. In Amos 1:2 the prophet sets the stage, creates the emotion and introduces the deity and his actions. The text sees YHWH as roaring over the entire area. Since YHWH’s roar brings an effect on the whole area, no power can fail to be mentioned.

2.6 Text #3: Oracles Against the Nations (Amos 1:3 – 2:16)

This text can be divided as follows:

- Against [Damascus](#) (1:3-5)
- Against [Gaza](#) (1:6-8)
- Against [Tyre](#) (1:9-10)
- Against [Edom](#) (1:11-12)
- Against [Ammon](#) (1:13-15)
- Against [Moab](#) (2:1-3)
- Against [Judah](#) (2:4-5)
- Against [Israel](#) (2:6-16)

The first seven oracles are built around a basic pattern, which, as we will see, is broken and expanded in the case of the oracles against Israel. The four elements of this basic pattern are as follows:

- **The Messenger Formula:** “Thus says YHWH.”
- **The Indictment:** “For three transgressions of [*name specified*] and for four I will not revoke the punishment, because they have [*crime specified*]...”
- **The Announcement of Punishment:** “I will send a fire on [*name specified*] and it shall devour the strongholds of [*another name specified*]...”
- **The Concluding Messenger Formula:** “says YHWH” or the variant “says YHWH God.”

Scholars maintain that the sayings against Tyre, Edom and Judah are the work of editors who attempted to make the book relevant for use in Judah in the Exilic and post-Exilic periods. Consequently the sayings against Damascus, Gaza, Ammon, Moab and Israel are considered original to the prophet. The basic message underlying these oracles is that YHWH, as Lord of History, would bring sinful nations to punishment. Such nations belong to the list of condemned, as does Israel.

2.6.1 Against Damascus (Amos 1:3-5)

Amos 1:3 Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. 4 So I will send a fire on the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad. 5 I will break the gate bars of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven, and the one who holds the sceptre from Beth-eden; and the people of Aram shall go into exile to Kir, says YHWH.

The oracle opens with the messenger formula, “thus says YHWH.” Thus the oracle is the word of YHWH, of which the prophet is the intermediary. All the other elements of the basic pattern are also present.

Damascus (v.3): was the capital of [Aram](#), the principal enemy of Israel in the Ninth and Eighth Centuries BCE.

For three transgressions ... and for four (v.3): This numerical formula of the pattern (x, x+1) is simply a Hebrew poetic way of saying “innumerable.”²⁵

Threshed ... with threshing sledges of iron (v.3): The reference could be literal and refer to the torture of prisoners. More likely it refers to the total annihilation of a people.

Gilead (v.3): refers to Israelite territory on the east of the Jordan touching Aram’s southern border. A fierce Aramean campaign against Israel for control of Gilead had taken place ca. 800 BCE. This means that the oracle against Damascus is not concerned with the current situation. Amos wants to portray YHWH’s destruction of the Aramean region, so he reaches back into history to find an illustrative event.

Hazael ... Ben-hadad (v.4): Ben-hadad was the throne name used by the kings of Aram in the same way as the monarchy in Britain uses the name Windsor. Hazael was an Aramean ruler in the period 842-806 BCE.

Valley of Aven ... Beth-eden (v.5): Aven means “evil” while Beth-eden means “house of pleasure.” They are probably symbolic names for Damascus.

And the people of Aram ... Kir (v.5): Kir, a country in Mesopotamia, was the original home of the Arameans (cf. Amos 9:7). YHWH’s punishment in bringing them back as exiles to Kir will be a reversal of history.²⁶ Again Amos stresses the YHWH as the One who has power over history. He can both make history and reverse it as a punishment on the rebellious. The oracle ends with the traditional concluding messenger formula.

25 See Meir Weiss, “The Pattern of Numerical Sequence in Amos 1-2,” *JBL* 86 (1967) 416-423. Weiss suggests another scholarly way of reading the pattern x, x+1 as “approximately three or four transgressions” (p. 416). However, he rejects both these explanations in favour of his own. He argues that “for three transgressions and for four” simply means “for seven transgressions,” which is Amos’ way of simply saying “for the complete sins” of particular nations.

26 2 Kgs 16,9.

2.6.2 Against Gaza (Amos 1:6-8)

Amos 1:6 Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they carried into exile entire communities, to hand them over to Edom. 7 So I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, fire that shall devour its strongholds. 8 I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod, and the one who holds the sceptre from Ashkelon; I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, says YHWH God.

This oracle contains all four elements of the basic pattern. The concluding messenger formula reads “YHWH God,” a variant typical in prophetic literature. The place-names mentioned here ([Gaza](#), [Ashdod](#), [Ashkelon](#), [Ekron](#)) are four of the cities of the Philistine Pentapolis (system of five city-states) of the period. ([Gath](#), the fifth is not mentioned). This oracle concentrates on a region to the southwest of Israel. The crime mentioned is the capture and deportation of an entire population to Edom. This was for the purposes of the international slave trade. The victims were in all likelihood Judahites and Israelites. For Israel such activity was a violation of the Covenant prohibition of kidnapping a person. Amos proclaims that the Philistine Pentapolis would be destroyed because of this crime.

2.6.3 Against Tyre (Amos 1:9-10)

Amos 1:9 Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they delivered entire communities over to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of kinship. 10 So I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre, fire that shall devour its strongholds.

The basic pattern of the oracle is maintained here with some notable differences when compared to the oracles against Damascus (Amos 1:3-5) and against the Gaza (Amos 1:6-8):

- The oracles against Damascus (Amos 1:3-5) and against Gaza (Amos 1:6-8) consist of five sentences, while that against Tyre (Amos 1:9-10) consists of only three sentences.
- The indictment (v.9) contains an expression explaining why the crime was wrong: “because ... delivered up entire communities ... did not remember the covenant of kinship.”

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- The announcement of punishment (v.10) is reduced to a basic formula.
- The concluding messenger formula is missing. It may have fallen out for textual reasons, as often happened in the transmission of the biblical text.

Tyre (v.9): was a famous and wealthy Phoenician city. The [Phoenicians](#) lived on the Mediterranean coast of Palestine, extending north from Mount Carmel to the borders of modern Lebanon. The people were called Phoenicians by the Greeks because they traded in *phoinix* (φοίνιξ - Greek: [purple dye](#)) made from snails. Most Semitic peoples in the area called them Sidonians after [Sidon](#), their major city.

Delivered ... entire communities ... Edom (v.9): Collaboration in the international slave trade constitutes the basic crime of Tyre.²⁷

Covenant of brotherhood (v.9): The reference here is to an international treaty entered into by Tyre, but not honoured. At this time international relations established between nations by treaty were considered akin to family relationships. The meaning here is clear. A friendly relationship was established by treaty existed between Israel and Tyre, which was violated by Tyre. There is evidence that during the first years of the reign of [Jeroboam II](#) Tyre occupied parts of Israel on its own border, deporting the local population and selling them into slavery. Most authors maintain that this oracle did not belong to the original series. As we will see there is strong evidence to suggest that the oracles against Edom (Amos 1:11-12) and against Judah (Amos 2:4-5) are not original. Since, as we will see, the oracle against Tyre has formal similarity to these oracles, it is argued that it is not original.

2.6.4 Against Edom (Amos 1:11-12)

Amos 1:11 Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity; he maintained his anger perpetually, and kept his wrath forever. 12 So I will send a fire on Teman, and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah.

Edom was located to Israel's southeast. Her two most important cities were Teman (capital) and Bozrah. In mentioning these two cities, Amos implies the whole Edomite region.

He pursued his brother ... (v.11): The crime of which Edom is accused is the violation of the traditions of kinship obligations. Again Amos expands the account of the crime with "he maintained his anger perpetually, and kept his wrath forever." In the Hebrew

²⁷ Ezek 27:13; Joel 3:4-8.

Scriptures Edom is constantly referred to as Israel's brother.²⁸ The close kinship of Edomites and Israelites is reflected in the Ancestral Narratives of Genesis where Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) are described as twins.²⁹ The hostility between Israel and Edom is prefigured in the twins' prenatal struggle in their mother's womb.³⁰ Relations between Israel and Edom were always strained. During the reign of Jeroboam II Edom was brought under Judah's control. We must ask what precisely constitutes Edom's hostility against his brother. It may be that Amos draws on unknown traditions. On the other hand there are biblical texts that make the same complaint against Edom.³¹ Scholars argue that these texts date from a period after the fall of Jerusalem and so are Exilic or post-Exilic. Thus Amos' indictment probably fits better within this later period. On this basis scholars maintain that this oracle was not original to the series and that Amos' sayings were expanded to fit later times in which they were heard.

2.6.5 Against Ammon (Amos 1:13-15)

Amos 1:13 Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead in order to enlarge their territory. 14 So I will kindle a fire against the wall of Rabbah, fire that shall devour its strongholds, with shouting on the day of battle, with a storm on the day of the whirlwind; 15 then their king shall go into exile, he and his officials together, says YHWH.

Ammon lay to the east of Israel, across the Jordan, between Moab and Gilead. During David's reign Ammon was part of the United Kingdom, but seceded from it during the break-up of the Kingdom after Solomon's death. All four elements of the oracle pattern are found here.

Because they ripped open ... pregnant women in Gilead (v.13): constitutes the indictment. The border war referred to probably took place towards the end of the Ninth Century. Specifically Ammon is accused of cruelty in its desire to take Israelite territory. The practice of ripping open pregnant women was a feature of war at the time.³² By the time of Amos, Ammon had been brought under Israelite control by Jeroboam. This text is another case of Amos reaching back into history to find a crime to justify YHWH's wrath.

Rabbah (v.14): This was the old capital of Ammon. It lay on the site of modern Amman.

28 Num 20:14; Deut 2:4; 23:7; Obad 1:10.12.

29 Gen 25:19-34.

30 Gen 25:22-23.

31 Isa 34:5-7; Jer 49:7-9; Joel 3:19; Obad 1:10.12; Lam 4:21-23 and Ps 137:7.

32 2 Kgs 8:12; 15:16.

Shouting in the day of battle (v.14): YHWH's judgement is described in military terms.

Storm ... whirlwind (v.14): These are traditional biblical elements for describing a theophany of YHWH.³³ Behind the oracles against the nations, with their use of military terminology and with YHWH as the subject of the actions, lies the expectation of a specific historical intervention by YHWH which will bring destruction on the whole area of Syria-Palestine.

King ... exile ... officials together (v.15): As in the oracles against Damascus and Gaza, the chief feature of YHWH's judgement is the destruction of military defences and the destruction of royal power.

2.6.6 Against Moab (Amos 2:1-3)

Amos 2:1 Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom. 2 So I will send a fire on Moab, and it shall devour the strongholds of Kerioth, and Moab shall die amid uproar, amid shouting and the sound of the trumpet; 3 I will cut off the ruler from its midst, and will kill all its officials with him, says YHWH.

Moab to the south of Ammon was a vassal state in the period of the United Kingdom, but passed out of Israelite control with the break-up of the United Kingdom. According to the biblical record it seems Jeroboam II reclaimed this territory for Israel.³⁴ Again all four elements of the oracle pattern are present. The specific crime of which Moab is indicted is **... he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom (v.1)**. The historical circumstances cannot be determined. Yet to the Israelite way of thinking such a deed was an outrage reserved for the most hated of criminals.³⁵ The interesting thing here is that the crime did not involve Israel in any way. Yet for Amos it was still a crime against YHWH, to whom both Israel and the other nations were subject. The elements of military defeat (v.2) and the removal of royal power (v.3) are also found.

³³ On *tempest* see 2 Kgs 2:1.11; Job 38:1; 40:6; Ezek 1:4. On *whirlwind* see Isa 29:6; 40:24; 41:16; Jer 23:19; Ezek 13:13.

³⁴ 2 Kgs 14:25.

³⁵ Gen 38:24; Lev 20:14; 21:9.

2.6.7 Against Judah (Amos 2:4-5)

Amos 2:4 Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of YHWH, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked. 5 So I will send a fire on Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.

Amos now turns his attention to one of the two Hebrew States: [Judah](#). Three elements of the oracle pattern are found here: the messenger formula, the indictment and the announcement of punishment. There is no concluding messenger formula. Most scholars claim that this oracle was not original to the series. The vocabulary and the general conception of the indictment point to a period after that of Amos. The use of words in v.4 like “the law of YHWH,” “his statutes” belong to the language of the Deuteronomistic editor. In v.4 there is a reference to “lies” which have led people astray. The Hebrew word used for *lie* is *kāzāv* (כָּזַב), a word also used of false gods. Thus the basic preoccupation here is the abandoning of YHWH’s Law to follow false gods. This is a major preoccupation of the Deuteronomistic tradition, which is exilic and later than Amos. No specific crime is mentioned in the indictment against Judah. Rather there is a generalized statement of disobedience and apostasy. All this points to the fact that this oracle was not original, but the creation of the Deuteronomistic editor of Amos, in an effort to contemporize Amos’ prophecy for a later period.

An analysis of the oracles against Tyre, Edom and Judah reveal the following common features:

- All three oracles are formulated in the same way and consist of only three sentences.
- There is a brief announcement of punishment, with an expanded reproach.
- The concluding messenger formula is missing.

The oracle against Judah is most probably the result of Deuteronomistic editing and shares other formal features with the oracles against Tyre and Edom. This suggests that all three oracles are not original, but the work of the Deuteronomistic editor.

2.6.8 Against Israel (Amos 2:6-16)

Finally the oracle is proclaimed against [Israel](#), the actual audience of Amos. Up to this Amos had proclaimed what Israel longed to hear: a time of light for Israel, but of darkness for all Israel's enemies. With this oracle Israel is aligned with the guilty nations of history upon whom YHWH's wrath will fall. This oracle is much longer than the previous seven, yet contains only three elements of the basic pattern:

- The messenger formula (v.6).
- The indictment (v.6).
- The concluding messenger formula (v.16).

Instead of continuing with the element of punishment, the crimes of Israel are elaborated in two bi-cola (vv.7-8). The punishment of YHWH only begins at v.13, where its consequences (vv.14-16) are portrayed in terms of military collapse. Vv.9-12 recite the central events of salvation-history (conquest-exodus-wilderness). V.12 turns the recitation of salvation-history into a reproach against Israel. This gives the oracle the following structure:

- The *Messenger Formula* (v.6).
- The *Indictment* (expanded) (vv.6-8).
- The *Recitation of Salvation-History* ending in accusation (vv.9-12).
- The *Punishment of YHWH and its Consequences* (vv.13-16).
- The *Concluding Messenger Formula* (vv.16).

(a) The Indictment (Amos 2:6-8)

Amos 2:6 Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals; 7 they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way; father and son go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; 8 they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink wine bought with fines they imposed.

Silver (v.6): The Hebrew text reads “the silver.” Israel is accused of selling people for “the silver” and the poor for “a pair of sandals.” “The silver” refers to a definite sum of money and is a reference to money paid for slaves. In the ANE people were sold for money or land. The reference to “a pair of sandals” is to a Semitic concept for the valid transfer of land or property.³⁶ Amos’ specific accusation (v.6) is that the *ṣaddiq* (צַדִּיק) - Hebrew: *righteous*) was being sold into slavery. Some scholars consider this word to mean the *just one*. Others claim that it refers to those allowed to enter the Temple/Community Assembly. Slaves and the poor were not allowed into these meetings since ownership of possessions was a requirement for entry. The rich expelled the poor from the land and so they were forced out of the community meetings. It may also mean the innocent party in a legal process. Amos thus condemns the situation whereby the legal process was used to exploit and enslave the righteous.

Push the afflicted out of the way (v.7): The Hebrew word for *way* is *derek* (דֶּרֶךְ) and is a synonym for *justice*. The accusation is that the courts are being used to oppress the poor instead of maintaining justice.

Father ... son ... same girl (v.7): The reference here is possibly to the violation of the rights of a female servant by making her a concubine, as prohibited in the Torah.³⁷ The reference to father *and* son highlights the promiscuity involved.

Garments taken in pledge (v.8): The Torah required that a pledged garment of a neighbour be returned before sundown.³⁸ Amos seems to condemn the violation of this commandment.

With fines they imposed (v.8): is a reference to payment in kind extracted for debts. The central issue in these condemnations is the way the poor suffer under the power of the rich who use the legal process to their own advantage.

Beside every altar ... in the house of their God (v.8): An ironic comment by Amos whereby the worshippers are portrayed as feeling no incongruity between what they do in the legal economic realm and the God they worship with cult.

The accusations made against Israel differ from those made against the other nations. In the oracles against foreign nations Amos used material, based on international relations, available through popular historical tradition. In the case of Israel, the material is based on the violation of the social order and on what he witnesses himself. Amos condemns Israel because the spirit of commercialism has replaced its concern for the poor and for justice. All the accusations made by Amos against Israel can be grouped together as a violation of the commandment: “You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits.”³⁹

36 Ruth 4:7.

37 Exod 21:8.

38 Exod 22:26-27.

39 Exod 23:6.

(b) The Recitation of Salvation-History (Amos 2:9-12)

Amos 2:9 Yet I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of cedars, and who was as strong as oaks; I destroyed his fruit above, and his roots beneath. 10 Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. 11 And I raised up some of your children to be prophets and some of your youths to be nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel? says YHWH. 12 But you made the nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, "You shall not prophesy."

At this point there is a shift from the description of what Israel is doing to *what YHWH has done for Israel*. The important stylistic element here is the recitation of first person pronouns and verbs: "...**yet I destroyed ... I destroyed ... also I brought ... led ... I raised ...**" The emphasis is on the contrast between what YHWH and Israel have done. In relating salvation-history YHWH uses a strange order: conquest-exodus-wilderness (vv.9-10). Amos wants to stress that Israel's existence in the land is YHWH's work. Thus he mentions it at the beginning and the end of the list.

Amorite (v.9): is the name given to the inhabitants of Canaan whose land Israel occupied in the thirteenth century BCE. The idea that these people were gigantic runs through other biblical literature.⁴⁰ Likewise the metaphors for great size⁴¹ and for total destruction⁴² are found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

Prophets ... Nazirites (v.11): A [nazirite](#) was one who was consecrated to YHWH by vows for a specific period of time.⁴³ During this period, the nazirite had to leave his hair uncut and refrain from the use of alcohol. We do not have sufficient information to speculate on whom Amos might have had in mind here.

Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel? (v.11): By use of this rhetorical question, Amos turns the recitation of salvation-history into an accusation. Salvation-history becomes "judgement-history" and Israel is found wanting.

Nazirites ... prophets (v.12): By corrupting the nazirites and by silencing the prophets, Israel has rejected the reality of salvation-history and set themselves against the power of YHWH. In this way Amos completes the indictment. Israel has disobeyed YHWH (vv.6-8) and set itself against his power and authority (vv.9-12).

40 Num 13:32-33; Deut 2:10,20.

41 For the metaphor of cedar/oak see 2 Kgs 14:9; Isa 2:13; Ps 80:10.

42 For the metaphor fruit/root see Ezek 17:9; Job 18:16.

43 Num 6:1-21.

(c) The Punishment of YHWH (Amos 2:13-16)

Amos 2:13 So, I will press you down in your place, just as a cart presses down when it is full of sheaves. 14 Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain their strength, nor shall the mighty save their lives; 15 those who handle the bow shall not stand, and those who are swift of foot shall not save themselves, nor shall those who ride horses save their lives; 16 and those who are stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, says YHWH.

The announcement of YHWH's action against Israel is in two movements:

- YHWH's action is described by the metaphor of the cart (v.13).
- The result of the action is described in terms of military disaster (vv.14-16).

Cart ... full of sheaves (v.13): in describing YHWH's action Amos uses the metaphor of a wagon overloaded with sheaves of grain. Just as such a wagon cleaves the soft earth, so too YHWH will cleave the earth under Israel. This oracle uses the motif of splitting earth, while the seven others used the motif of fire. In the Hebrew Scriptures, splitting earth (earthquake) was a common way to describe the intervention of YHWH.⁴⁴ Normally YHWH would intervene with an earthquake *on behalf of his people*. Here the intervention is *against his people*. Amos uses the language of the *herem* (הֵרֵם - Hebrew: *Holy War*) only to reverse the traditional roles. YHWH will no longer fight for Israel, but will act as Israel's enemy.

2.6.9 Conclusions

At the end of the oracles against the nations, we can state the following:

- Amos proclaims YHWH's wrath against all the guilty nations.
- Judah and Israel are to be reckoned among such nations.

⁴⁴ Judg 5:4b-5; Isa 6:14; Ezek 19:16-19; Ps 68,8a.

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- In Israel's case the punishment will be severe. Israel has let YHWH's Law become an instrument of corruption and oppression rather than of equity and justice. Because of this rejection of the Torah, all Israel's preceding history, all YHWH's intervention on its behalf, is now useless and void. Israel will feel YHWH's wrath in the harshness of a *herem* directed against it.

Amos' pessimism regarding Israel's future, graphically portrayed in the *Oracles against the Nations*, continues throughout the entire book. For Israel the time of salvation is over and the time of judgement begins. A catastrophe is coming on Israel. This catastrophe is sung in the funeral dirge of Amos 5:2-3. The judgement of YHWH is described with different imagery:

- Earthquake (Amos 9:1-3)
- War and defeat (Amos 5:3)
- The death of the king (Amos 7:11)
- The destruction of the great sanctuaries (Amos 5:5.27)
- The death of many (Amos 5:2-4; 6:9; 7:17; 8:3; 9:10)
- The occupation of Israelites' land by others (Amos 7:17)

Only in the very last verses of the book (Amos 9:11-15) does the prophet conclude on a note of hope. In spite of his wrath, YHWH does not want to obliterate his people. There will be a new planting of the Chosen People. It will be YHWH alone who will decide when to restore his people's fortunes.

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