

Lesson 26 Amos

Background material is in II Kings 14 which you may want to reread.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. *Who are the kings in Judah and Israel at the time of Amos? What country is Amos from and where did he prophesy?*
2. *The first two chapters name Israel's ancient foes and state God's judgment against them. They are familiar names by now. Place them on the map. Who are they, and what does Amos declare will happen to each?*
3. *What are the evils of Israel (also called Jacob and Samaria) that God will punish? How is this prophecy relevant to our day?*
4. *What does Amos mean by "justice" and "righteousness?" What is his relationship to the high priest at Bethel? Why? He is the first to preach the Day of the Lord. What does this term mean? What may be his weakness?*

Psalm 27 and prayer.

What kind of king? One day in Jerusalem an itinerant preacher, a sometime teacher, a carpenter of no means was proclaimed to be king. The civil and religious powers of that day would soon show what kind of a powerless king He was by immolating Him upon a cross. In the upside-down order of this world, so out of kilter with real values, the powerful and rich seem always to have victory over the weak and powerless. Power corrupts the human heart. This is the Word of the Lord through Amos. No matter a person's intent to be just, power brings out the worst in human nature. Yet, it is power for which we humans strive - to have both the prestige and influence that riches provide. Never mind that it is often had at the cost of the poor. God came into this world to turn over this false value; at Golgotha it looked like He failed, and that power had won out after all. The Cross would have been the end of the story, but it was not! Death was conquered in Resurrection. We are called to follow Him to victory by being as powerless as he was and by denying all of our desires to be among the rich and powerful.

Power is our temptation. The Lord, God of the Universe, demonstrates the way to a life compatible to union with Him. We find it hard believe his values and harder to make them our own. We think that if only we had power, position and money, we would use it beneficently. We do not realize that we would have to be in league with Satan and that his values would necessarily rule. Jesus rejected power when Satan offered it. He said that the rich would have as hard a time entering the kingdom of God as a camel through the eye of a needle. Yet, he allowed that some rich men might refuse power and prestige, and use their riches humbly - with God all things are possible.

Our time line keeps us focused on the journey, the spiritual journey of the people of God. We have come from Abraham at about 1900 B.C., through the Exodus and Moses at about 1250, through King David at 1000, to the building of the Temple in 940. We have read through the history that is packed into II Kings, seeing the fall of the kingdoms in both north (721 B.C.) and south (587B.C.). And now we are looking more closely through the eyes of the prophets at the events that brought judgment upon both kingdoms, hearing the words they spoke calling for repentance and a return to God so that judgment be turned away. At the time of Amos, the rich and powerful are responsible for the injustices that come with a complacent society. Amos is sent by God with a message that is meant to shake this complacency.

Amos lives during the rule of Jeroboam II of Israel. This king held sway for forty-one years during which time Azariah (Uzziah) ruled Judah for fifty-five years. Assyria, like a storm to the north, has reached down into Israel and Judah previously, but by this time has receded again to take care of border difficulties and internal problems. Egypt is also quiet. The threat to the peace of Israel and Judah has abated for the time being. The trade routes through Israel and Judah are very active, and middle class rises as many people become merchants. In a time comparable to Solomon's reign, the borders are secure; even Syria who has been such a prickly enemy has been chastened and is quiet. A generation grows up who does not remember the days when the Syrians successfully besieged Samaria. In comparative tranquility, religion becomes ritualized pomp and display, a show case of national patriotism.

Luxury breeds complacency. The people believe that they are set apart and special; they pride themselves that their prosperity displays the favor of God. Amos has a different message. He proclaims the Lord is sickened with luxury-loving, and neglect of the poor. The gorgeous buildings that rise in the major cities, the homes made of choice cut stone, the decorations, the ivory furniture, are all in their places because of oppression. The rising middle class, no longer tied to the simplicity of life on the land, is so enamored with wealth it has lost its morality. Morality was easier and came more naturally when the people were living simple lives. Luxuries have seduced them. They have grown cold in matters of the heart. Amos looks back on the time when they followed God in the desert as the most holy time of their existence. Then things were uncomplicated. Everyone was poor and depended solely on God for sustenance. God had written into their Law that they should take care of each other, that none should fall into poverty, that fields should not be gleaned thoroughly so that food would be left for the unfortunate. All this social kindness has been forgotten. The land which had been given in perpetuity, never to be taken from families, has been taken. There is no Year of Jubilee when everything leased or sold goes back to the original owner. Instead, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Amos speaks not just to his own time, but to ours as well, because the spiritual laxity he condemns is timeless.

Amos himself is from the old simple life. He comes from Tekoa (see map B15) south of Jerusalem. On the map the area looks green, but in reality it is only scarcely green, mostly brown. It is land where sheep can graze because they require very little. It is on the outskirts of the barren lands in the Judean desert where David hid from Saul. One can see for miles over and across the nude hills. Even the word used to describe Amos as a shepherd tells us that he was the kind of shepherd who cared for stunted sheep, and the sycamore trees he dressed were the poor man's fig tree. A small watery fruit developed only when it was pricked or pruned. He was accustomed to a life style not different from his far distant ancestors as they trekked through the desert to the Promised Land. His eyes looked out day after day on those barren hills where wild animals roamed. If he saw two men walking together, he knew they had

planned to meet. Under those starry skies he heard nothing but the distant roar of a lion who had found prey. He felt the closeness of God and the ancient truth of what it meant to His People, to be dependent upon Him and close to His heart. In the wilderness, conducive to it, he meditated upon God's Law.

In the north, religion is all show. What a different life Amos saw when he went north to trade his wool and meat in the commercial centers. How disgusted it made him! There religion had grown soft; full of sound and pomp but signifying nothing. People clothed in soft garments, reclining on ivory couches thought only of monetary gain and their own comforts. He saw the poor on the outskirts of the city with nothing. Back at home with his flocks, God spoke to him commissioning him to go up to Israel to prophesy - to speak for God. How did those people take a common shepherd, from the south at that, telling them that God was displeased with their evil ways? How did they like to hear that disaster was coming because a righteous God would no longer tolerate their immorality. Of course, they hated to hear his words. When told that their impressive houses would come tumbling down in the Day of the Wrath of God, their summer and their winter house, they told Amos to stop prophesying! (5:10)

Threatened, he wouldn't stop preaching. He was not silenced, instead he took on the holy places. Bethel would be destroyed, King Jeroboam would perish by the sword! These words were intolerable! The high priest of the temple worship at Bethel commanded him to go home, accusing him of being a hireling. To this accusation Amos replied that he had never belonged to any band of prophets, that he was neither a liar nor a hireling, but that he was just a lone man whom God had told "go and prophesy." (7:14) After preaching some years against the practices of the people, warning them to return to God before the Day of Judgment, Amos does return to his home and writes down these prophecies. He is the first to put prophecies in writing.

The enemies of Judah and Israel will be punished. The first two chapters show how Amos caught the attention of those to whom he preached. His earliest prophecies line out the dire things coming to all of Israel's traditional enemies. Certainly this found sympathetic ears.

Yes! all those traditional foes deserved judgment. When the Day of the Lord came they would get their just desserts. Syria, Philistia, Phoenicia had it coming! Then Amos came closer to home; Edom, Ammon, and Moab. Here the prophecies should have stopped if Amos had cared about the sensibilities of the hearers, but he continues. Judah will be punished! Well, yes, sister Judah deserved it too; but the most condemning words were still to come. They were reserved for Israel. Completely unexpected! Israel considered itself to be on God's side. (Peculiar to us, the worship of the golden calves at Dan and Bethel were considered Yahwehistic). They were proud of their designation as People of God. Many believed that the current years of peace and prosperity were God's blessing upon His favorites. And this poor prophet (where is from again?) dares to place them in the same bag with their foes! Israel - in line for judgment?

One and one make two. Amos lines out some questions to which the answer is obvious. In common sense these things are like saying one and one is two. In just such a way nature and morality are one. In the irresistible way of God's moral law there will be an accounting. It is as plain that sin must be corrected as it is that a lion roars when it has prey. All the images Amos uses are from his desert life. Inevitably Assyria and Egypt will come up and be witness of the downfall of Israel. Israel's neglect of her responsibility feeds Amos' imagination: "the pampered bodies that loll upon couches - pieces will be left like the crumbs from a lion's meal, two legs and a bit of an ear." A gruesome thing to hear if you were addicted to lying around in comfort.

Women should be compassionate, not hard-hearted. Throughout his prophecy, Amos shows a countryman's abhorrence of cities and the civilization that has grown up in Israel. The "fat cows of Bashan" seem to deserve special blame. A society that neglects the cry of the poor points to callous women. The image of their end is terrifying. These pampered women will be led out through the fallen walls by fish hooks in the nose. Don't run to the sanctuaries for help in this distress, says Amos. Stay away from them. Don't think your sacrifices and festivals, tithes and offerings will help you. They can't. God is sick of all that. He

has warned you in a drought, a famine, a pestilence, and an earthquake to wake you up. He was hoping you'd take these things seriously and repent. Instead you just rebuilt the buildings more opulently, going on as before without a thought of turning back to God.

Punishment is inevitable. The Lord will send hosts, meaning the Assyrian hosts, who will come at God's command in the same way that He moves the wind and forms the mountains; it is inevitable. There will be a terrible war followed by exile of the people. The only possible thing to do is to "seek the Lord." If you seek God, no matter the judgment that must fall, you will live. He who puts the stars in their courses will and must send destruction. Fatness has earned this reward because it has been gained at the expense of the poor. Bribes have been given and taken in order for some to be rich. Repentance is called for, but none has come. Therefore, "woe!" First of all, woe to those who desire the Day of the Lord. That Day will not be a vindication for them as they expect. It will not bring light for Israel and darkness upon the traditional enemies. No, it will bring inevitable death for Israel. There will be no sweetness in watching vengeance upon their enemies, only bitterness in the judgment that will fall upon themselves. In the end, Amos foretells that their gods will soon be called by Assyrian names and they will be in exile beyond Damascus.

Amos does care for Israel. He has already turned away some of the possible woes to fall on Israel by his prayers for them. He has interceded against locusts, drought and fire. However, the plumb line shows the whole house of Israel remains crooked beyond correction and is, therefore, under an irrevocable decree of destruction.

Can religion be just empty show? That was Amos' condemnation of worship. These are not just his personal gripes, but the Word of the Lord through him. God hates a worship when it is all display and no heart. Where there is injustice how can God be praised with a mere facade of righteousness? We are blessed with the Eucharist, the very Body and Blood of Christ; but do we accept the gift with thanksgiving, and appropriate its power for love in our lives? Jesus comes to us body, blood, soul and divinity in the Mass, so our liturgy can never be empty show. But it is possible to sit through it with our hearts and minds far

away. God says, take away all the pretense of religion, accept me in your heart, and let justice flow like water and righteousness like an everlasting stream.

A glimmer of light is left to the end. The tirade continues; then suddenly at the very end, the prophecy breaks away from the theme of doom and allows in a few rays of hope. It is enough of a change to make some scholars think a second writer has lightened the prophecy. But it seems logical that the aging Amos did see that, in light of the promises, there would be a remnant and that God would one day restore His favor on the people.

Lesson 26 Amos

The shepherd from Tekoa
abhors cities and the life there
wrote down his prophecies

INTERCESSOR

VISIONS

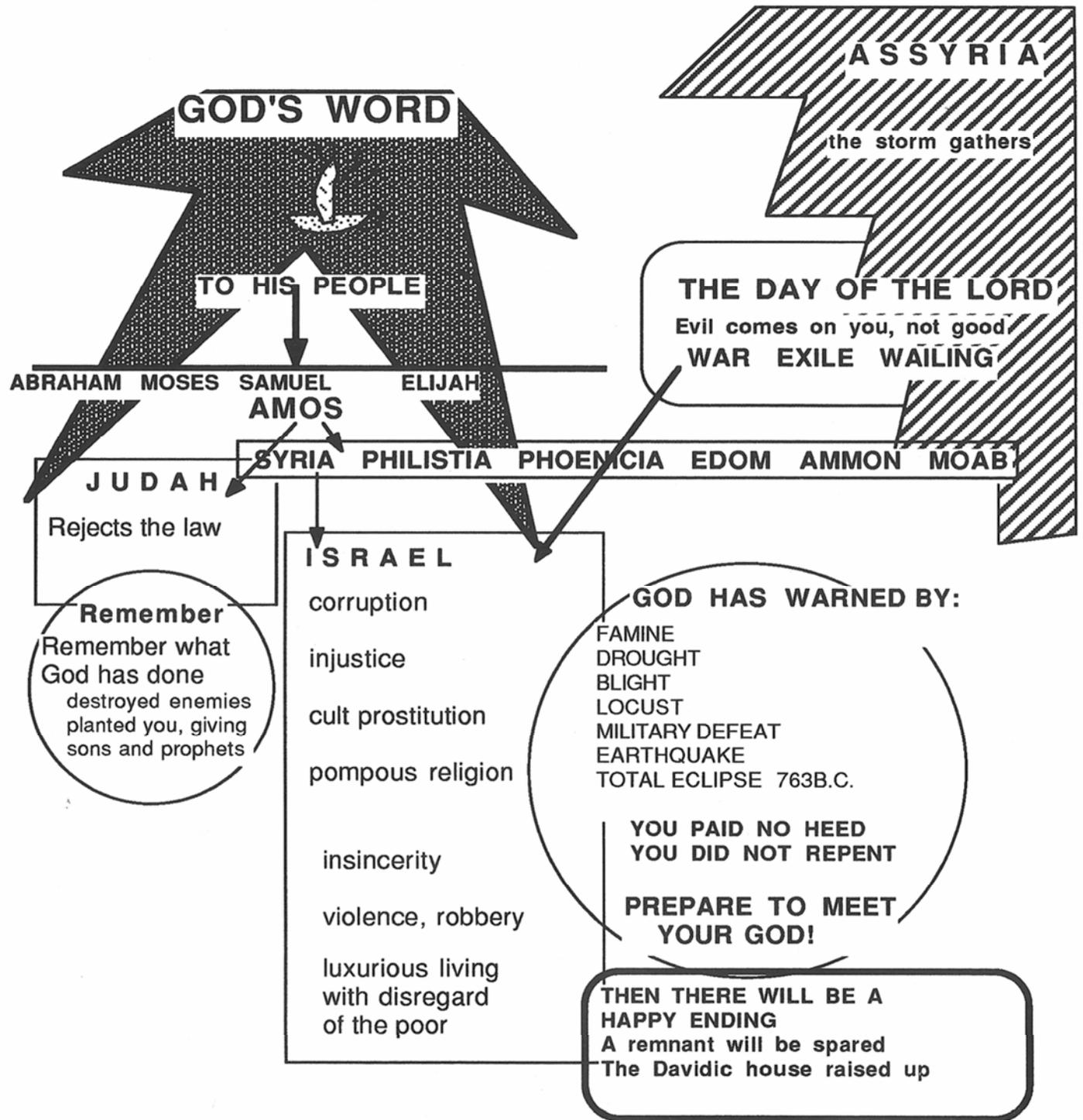
locusts 7:1

drought
fire

plumbline

summerfruit (kais)
(kes) the end 8:1

God at the altar 9:1



Lesson 26 Amos Synopsis

1. Amos, the prophet of Tekoa during the days of Uzziah king of Judah and Jeroboam king of Israel prophesies against Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom Ammon, Moab
2. against Moab, Judah, and Israel the Day of the Lord is coming
3. prophecies against Israel the family brought from Egypt just like a lion roars over prey a bird falls in a snare a city fears at the trumpet sound so Amos must prophesy Assyria and Egypt will witness Samaria's downfall punishment is coming because of oppression of the poor summer and winter house to end
4. women are like cows of Bashan because they crush the needy they will be taken away with fishhooks in their noses only transgressions are at Bethel and Gilgal too, where there is all that proclaiming and publishing they love outward observance warnings are already given by famine, thru nature, drought locusts, pestilence, sword yet there is no repentance you did not return to me so - Prepare to meet your God! He who forms the mountains and creates the wind

- the Lord, the God of hosts is His name
5. there will be lamentation Israel will be taken into exile seek Gad and you will live there is injustice everywhere don't go to Bethel, or Gilgal destruction shall flash forth they hate him who reproves I know your transgressions how great are your sins the evils of the time are flagrant seek good and not evil establish justice because The Day of the Lord is coming woe to those who desire the day there's a change in its meaning God hates outward observances He wants justice, righteousness
 6. woe to those who are at ease to those who are content and fat woe to those on beds of ivory who eat lambs from the flock who sing idle songs and drink wine in bowls they will be the first into exile God hates pride the Lord commands the house is shattered a nation is being raised up to oppress the house of Israel
 7. visions of a plague of locusts Amos pleads, it is lifted vision of devouring fire Amos pleads, it is averted how can Jacob stand? he is so small a plumb line shows warped house I will rise against the house of

- Jeroboam with the sword Amos is in conflict with Amaziah the priest at Bethel he accuses Amos of being paid but he is not a son of prophets only a simple herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees more dire predictions Amaziah's wife will be a harlot sons and daughters fall by sword Amaziah will die in a strange land Israel will go into exile
8. the vision of summer fruits overripe, they wait for destruction there are deceitful dealings and unfair practices to the poor bringing the poor to their end surely I will not forget their deeds on The Day of the Lord I'll make the sun go down at noon darken the earth in broad daylight turning feasts into mourning there will be a famine a famine of hearing God's words people who worship false gods will fall and never rise again
 9. the vision of shattering the Temple on the heads of worshippers not one of them shall escape those slain by the sword Sheol can't hide them there is no place to hide the Lord of nature and history The Lord (YHWH) His name has not so privileged other people yet, He will destroy Israel but not utterly on that Day, David's house will be restored

there is hope of restoration Israel will possess all nations called by God's name very good days are ahead the plowman will overtake the reaper and Israel will be planted on their land forever

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Lesson 26 Amos Outline

I. Background of Amos

A. Amos the man

1. he prophesied around 750 B.C.
 - a. during the reign of Uzziah (Azariah) in Judah 1:1
 - b. during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel
2. he was a shepherd and dresser of sycamores of Tekoa 1:1, 7:14
 - a. it lies south of Jerusalem 12 mi.
 - b. it is a poor area, semi-arid
 - c. here he raised "stunted" sheep
 - d. the "sycamore" is a poor fig that had to be pricked to develop
3. he believed the life of agriculture purer than city life
 - a. he had an abhorrence of cities and civilization 3:15
 - b. he knew city life of Israel first hand - where he sold wool and sheep?
 - c. he sees God in nature, in wilderness, in the skies 4:13, 5:8,9:5

B. The times (see outline 25) during which Amos lived

1. both Jeroboam and Uzziah secured the borders
2. a time without major wars
3. there was a growth of cities and commerce
4. both Israel and Judah were prosperous for about fifty years

II. Amos, Prophet of God

A. His message was strong and condemning

1. he "saw" (which is a word for the vision of the prophet) 1:1
2. God's voice roars from Zion (the city of David)
3. God brought Israel's traditional enemies into existence 9:7
 - a. Syria 1:3
 - 1) they have inflicted pain on Israel
 - 2) the house of Hazael and Benhadad will fall
 - 3) the inhabitants will be sent into exile
 - b. Philistia 1:6
 - 1) they trafficked in slaves
 - 2) fire shall devour her strongholds
 - 3) the remnant of Philistia will perish
 - c. Tyre (Phoenicia) 1:9
 - 1) they forgot the covenant with David

2) also trafficked in slaves

3) fire shall devour their strongholds

d. Edom 1:11 - founded by Esau, Jacob's brother

1) constant war with his brother

2) repeated and cumulative violence

3) a fire will devour its strongholds

e. Ammon 1:13

1) ripped up pregnant women (a crime frequent in Near East warfare)

2) fire will destroy its strongholds

3) the people will be taken into exile

f. Moab 2:1

1) they desecrated the grave of the king of Edom

2) it shall be devoured by fire

3) its king and princes shall be killed in war

4. the Hebrews are glad to hear the downfall of their enemies, not happy to hear the following prophecies against themselves

a. to Judah 2:4

1) they have rejected God's law

2) they have become liars

3) a fire will devour the strongholds of Jerusalem

4) they also are too at ease 6:1

b. to Israel

1) they oppress the poor 2:6, 5:11, 8:4

a) they are selling the poor for shoes 2:6, 8:6

b) they turn away from need 5:12, interested only in luxury 5:11

(1) they are at ease 6:1, 6:4 on ivory beds

(2) they are no better than their enemies 6:2

(3) they sing idle songs

(4) they drink wine in bowls

(5) they anoint themselves with fine oil

(6) they are blasé and complaisant 6:6

c) they take garments in pledge of loans 2:8

d) the women (fat cows of Bashan) are worse

(1) they deserve special blame 4:1

(a) where is womanly compassion?

(b) luxury makes brutes of women

(2) interested only in what they drink

(3) they shall be taken away through the breaches with

- fishhooks in their noses like cattle 4:2
- (4) they will be cast on the dung heap (Harmon)
- e) they eat young, tender meat which is extravagant 6:4
- f) they sell the refuse of the wheat 8:6
- 2) they are immoral people
 - a) a man and his son go to the same cult prostitute 2:7-8
 - b) money from unjust fines is enjoyed in God's house 2:8
 - c) they pervert those of religious intent 2:12
 - d) they take bribes 5:12
- 3) their religion is corrupt
 - a) a satire of public worship 4:4
 - b) all is done for show 4:5
 - c) God hates their feasts, offerings, assemblies 5:21
 - (1) because they are unjust
 - (2) in simple times (desert) they had pure observances
 - d) worship of Assyrian deities 5:26, superstitious oaths 8:14
 - e) can't wait for Sabbath to be over, to sell again 8:4
- 4) all this despite what God has done for them
 - a) destroyed the original inhabitants 2:9
 - b) brought them out of Egypt
 - c) led them forty years
 - d) gave them possession of the land
 - e) raised up prophets and Nazirites
 - f) of all peoples, they alone have been God's own 3:2
- 5) God will punish by raising up a nation (Assyria) 6:14
 - a) press them down into the ground
 - b) no one will be able to flee
 - (1) no place to hide 9:2 all will be slain
 - (2) Sheol or bottom of the sea is not away from God 9:3
 - c) weapons will be of no use, nor horses 2:15
 - d) Bethel's altars will be pulled down 3:14
 - e) fancy houses will be smitten 3:15, 6:11
 - f) there will be famine 4:6
 - g) ghastly description of the destruction 6:9
 - h) from one end of the land to the other 6:14
 - i) songs will turn into lamentations 8:10
 - j) He will utterly destroy 9:8
- 6) He has already warned them 4:7ff

- a) by a drought - they did not return to God
- b) by blight - they did not return to God
- c) by pestilence - they did not return to God
- d) by a great earthquake 1:1, 4:11 they did not return
- e) therefore: prepare to meet your God 4:12
- 7) how the irresistible working out of things must be 3:3ff
 - a) God has spoken; the prophet must prophesy downfall 3:9
 - b) God will allow it; Israel has been irresponsible to her trust
 - c) the people will be ravaged like a lion's meal 3:12
- 5. God's lament and promise over Israel
 - a. she will fall and rise no more 5:1
 - b. the death and scattering of its people 5:3
 - 1) alas, alas, God will pass through their midst 5:16
 - 2) God abhors the pride of Jacob 6:8, 9:8ff
 - 3) I will never forget their deeds 8:7
 - c. the only hope for Israel
 - 1) seek me and live 5:4 - 7
 - a) do not seek the religion of Bethel or Gilgal
 - b) their righteousness is cast down to the earth
 - 2) seek good and not evil 5:14 that you may live
 - a) God may relent
 - b) graciousness to a remnant 5:15 used previously I Kgs 14:10, II Kgs 19:4,19:31, 21:14
 - 3) the day is coming when the word of God will not be heard 8:11-12
- 6. The Day of the Lord
 - a. not to be the expected day of judgment on enemies of Israel 5:18
 - 1) darkness for them, not light 5:18
 - 2) the sun will go down at noon 8:9
 - b. a bitter day 8:10
 - c. men and maidens will faint with thirst 8:13
 - d. a positive promise for Judah 9:11
 - 1) David's house will be raised from the ruins
 - 2) it will possess nations as old promise said 9:12
 - 3) the plowman will overtake the reaper
 - 4) the mountains will drip with wine 9:13
 - 5) God will restore the fortunes of His people, Israel
 - 6) they will never again be plucked up

7. Visions of the prophet

- a. judgment of locusts halted by Amos plea 7:1 ff
- b. a drought and fire averted 7:4
- c. the plumb line 7:7
 - 1) things crooked and unstable
 - 2) they must be destroyed
- d. the basket of summer fruit 8:1
 - 1) "kais" means "summer fruit", "kes" means "the end"
 - 2) immediacy of the end
 - 3) a day of death and mourning
- e. a vision of Bethel
 - 1) the Lord standing by the altar
 - 2) the temple shattered on the heads of the people

8. The response by the people

- a. they hate him who reproves in the gate 5:10
- b. they abhor the truth
- c. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel
 - 1) reports him to Jeroboam 7:10
 - 2) orders Amos to flee to Judah
 - a) earn your livelihood there
 - b) implies he is a paid performer
 - 3) never again prophesy at Bethel
 - a) the king's sanctuary
 - b) the temple of the kingdom
 - 4) do not preach against Israel 7:16
 - 5) Amos replies he is called by God to prophesy 7:14
 - a) Amaziah's wife will be a harlot 7:17 ff
 - b) sons and daughters will fall by the sword
 - c) his land will be parceled out
 - d) he will die in an unclean land

going on inside that temple, he doesn't mention the golden calves?)

- 1) God was revealing He was more than they had dreamed
 - a. their conscience must be expanded to realize Him
 - b. formalized ritual could not hold Him
 - c. He was the Lord of all nations and all history

B. A *modern* Prophet - problems are not just those of the eighth century B.C.

1. against a background of the commercial city
 - a. isolation of the rich from the poor
 - b. the rise of immorality in cities
2. the people seek religion, but not God
3. the people still seek God in the desert "retreat" experience

C. Amos has a weakness

1. he has no real sympathy-
2. he sees from the outside
3. his sense of justice never contends with love
4. there is no sorrow in his voice - exception? 7:3,6 0.

Amos' strengths are used by God

1. he has strong intuitive powers
2. he listened carefully to God; saw the truth and told it
3. he had a strong inward conviction and sense of justice
4. he anticipated and interpreted events as a student of history
5. he was a realist not a theorizer
6. he was a flesh and blood man
7. original, no prophet has said these things before

III. His place in Salvation History A. New

Revelation of God

1. up to now they believed that God would protect their political interests
2. they believed that their ceremony and sacrifice essential to their religion
(worship of the golden calves is unknown by Amos; did he know what was

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