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AMOS

INTRODUCTION

The Amos Scroll

Those responsible for the Amos scroll introduce it in the following way:

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds 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.

As noted in the Introduction to this volume (page 11) this locates Amos in the middle of the 8th century BC. He is the first of the prophets to have his words preserved in a scroll. Tekoa is eight kilometres south of Bethlehem on the edge of the ‘wilderness of Tekoa’ (2Chronicles 20:20) in Judah. It is significant that Assyria is not mentioned in his prophecies. Even if we follow the Septuagint and read ‘Assyria’ instead of ‘Ashdod’ in 3:9, this is only to summon Assyria as a witness, not as a threat to Israel. A reasonable conclusion from this is that Amos exercised his ministry as a prophet prior to the military expansion of Assyria which began with the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III in 745. Amos’s concern was with the small nations surrounding Israel (see Amos 1:3 – 2:3 and map page 25). As regards the ‘earthquake’, Shalom M. Paul writes in his commentary on Amos in the Hermeneia series (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1991, page 35):

Most exegetes relate this earthquake to the one attested at stratum VI of Hazor and dated to around 760 B.C.E.

We might reasonably place Amos’s ministry between 762 and 750. As noted in the Introduction (see page 11), the period during which Amos was prophesying was one of relative peace and considerable prosperity. The problem that confronted and shocked him was that the prosperity favoured a small upper class who were living in luxury (see Amos 3:15; 5:11; 6:4-6), while the vast bulk of the population was being exploited. This cuts at the very heart of the covenant with YHWH that gives Israel its identity. The administration of justice was corrupted by bribery and extortion, and paid no regard to the rights of the poor. The wealth flowing from commerce and trade enabled the main northern shrines to have lavish cult and elaborate rites (see Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-23), but Amos judged this style of religion to be a travesty. It lacked justice, integrity, honesty, and fidelity to the covenant with YHWH, which made it abhorrent to God. God would have to put an end to their prosperity. There would have to come what Amos calls ‘the Day of YHWH’ (see 5:18-20).

As one would expect from words that were born from a profound communion with God, Amos’s key focus throughout is on YHWH, the God who hears the cry of the poor. Amos is faithful to the traditional faith that gives Israel its identity. YHWH is the God who heard the cry of the slaves in Egypt and sent Moses to rescue them from the tyranny of the Egyptian pharaoh. Amos saw that the tyranny that was enslaving God’s people was now coming from within the political, judicial and religious institutions of Israel. The abhorrence he experienced was, as he interpreted it, a sharing in the abhorrence felt by YHWH, and in YHWH’s name he denounced the injustice he encountered. In the scroll we will find words that challenge the rich and powerful to change their ways in the hope that YHWH would not have to punish them. Amos prays for this. However, the main thrust of his words indicates that his appeal failed. He declares in no uncertain terms that the nation of Israel cannot survive.

However, this cannot be Amos's final word, for, as a true prophet, he is speaking about YHWH. The scroll ends with words of hope – based not on human behaviour (he found no signs of repentance) but on the fidelity of YHWH (see 9:13-15). The nation of Israel would be destroyed, but Israel was still YHWH's own people, and YHWH would be faithful to his commitment. A remnant would listen and a true Israel would emerge from the coming catastrophe.

In the Introduction we reflected on the genesis of prophetic scrolls. First comes the spoken words of a prophet. Next the spoken word is written down to ensure that YHWH's words, spoken through the prophet, continue to influence God's people. The writing would be done by the prophet's immediate disciples, and possibly by the prophet himself. As generations passed, other scribes, in an attempt to keep the prophetic word alive and relevant, and with the greatest care and respect, were moved to adapt, clarify, and update God's word. This process is very clear with the Isaiah scroll, and one ought to suppose a similar process at work in the development of the Amos scroll.

There was a time when scholars were not afraid to bring what they saw as greater clarity to a text by speculating as to how the text may have been 'damaged' in the process of copying. Today's scholars have reacted against the speculative 'findings' of earlier times. They are more concerned to take the text as we have it and to work on finding a meaning in the text before opting to 'improve' it to obtain clarity. Andersen and Freedman in their commentary in the Anchor Bible Series (1989) state (page 10):

The work done in preparing this commentary has convinced us with ever increasing force that the text is in better shape than has generally been supposed in modern criticism.

In earlier times scholars felt very free also in suggesting when parts of the text were composed by later scribes. Often very little remained that could confidently be ascribed to the original prophet. While still recognising (as has just been said) the possibility and appropriateness of later scribal additions and clarifications, in the case of Amos, scholars are more inclined to attribute almost the whole of the text as we have it to Amos himself. It can make sense as words challenging Israel in the period of prosperity in the middle of the eighth century. Andersen and Freedman claim (page 11; see also page 148):

The book itself (or something very close to it) comes from Amos himself, representing a comprehensive synthesis and testament prepared either by him or by an immediate disciple.

Shalom M. Paul in his commentary in the Hermeneia Series (1991) comes, independently, to much the same conclusions.

It is clear from the scroll that Amos himself came to the realisation that his words were falling on deaf ears. The scroll begins (chapters 1-2), therefore, with words that may well have been spoken late in his career: oracles announcing divine punishment that cannot now be avoided. This is followed by what appears to be earlier oracles, warning the people but holding out hope if only they would change their ways (3:1 – 5:17). The country was experiencing certain 'plagues' (see 4:6-11). Amos may well have seen these as warnings from God to those who were acting unjustly and with no concern for their obligations under the covenant.

Introduction to Amos

Amos knows, however, that YHWH is always faithful. It is only when the people refuse to change that the results of their behaviour cannot be avoided (see his oracles on the 'Day of YHWH', 5:18 – 6:14).

Amos is a 'seer', graced to look beyond the horizon of human decision and indecision. The scroll records a number of 'visions' that he was given. It is perhaps these 'visions' (7:1 – 9:6) that gave energy and direction to his speaking. Finally, in what we are calling an Epilogue, Amos sums up the thrust of his prophecies, concluding, as we should expect, with a statement on the fidelity of YHWH that carries with it an assurance of restoration and renewal.

Note on Amos's use of the term 'Israel'

In the tradition 'Israel' was used as a term for the whole people whose ancestors were led by Moses through the wilderness to the Promised Land. In this sense the term 'Israel' covers all the tribes of Jacob. However, with the death of Solomon, the northern tribes broke away from Judah and the term 'Israel' is used to distinguish them from Judah. Amos uses the term 'Israel' 39 times in a scroll which has only 9 chapters. Is he referring only to the northern kingdom where he is carrying out his ministry, or does he see his words as applying also to Judah?

Since Amos was prophesying in the north, especially in the northern royal sanctuary of Bethel, the context will often make it clear that 'Israel' is used to refer to the north. But not always. Andersen and Freedman spend over forty pages examining each of the 39 uses of 'Israel'. Their conclusion offers us a good starting point. As a general rule, when 'Israel' is used on its own, it refers, in their view, to the northern kingdom. When, however, it is qualified, as in 'house of Israel', 'sons of Israel' ('Israelites'), and 'people of Israel', we should assume that Amos is addressing his audience (in the northern kingdom), but as members of God's people, which includes Judah.

Inspired by Amos?

There are large slabs of Amos that are probably not going to inspire us. He is not slow to name evil when he sees it and to insist that evil has within it the seeds of its own destruction. We can surely learn from this. His way of reacting to evil, however, falls so far short of that of Jesus that we can't help hearing Jesus say to us: 'It was said to you of old: hate your enemy; but I say to you: love your enemy' (Matthew 5:43-44). We need also to remember the prevailing assumption that everything that happens is willed (controlled) by God (see page 14).

There are also statements that go to the heart of the religion of ancient Israel and that are as relevant today as they were in Amos's time. This is especially true of his denunciation of injustice (see 2:6-8; 3:15; 5:10-15, 21-24; 6:4-7; 8:4-6). He insists that a genuine response to God must include working for justice for all. He challenges any smug assurance that we might entertain that all will be well for us, since God is loving and has chosen us as his own. Religious practice is no substitute for true obedience, and true obedience requires justice. These statements we will find inspiring only to the extent that we accept their challenge and find and follow ways of living justly in our world today (see 3:2). We must 'seek good and not evil' (5:14).

DIVINE JUDGMENT

AMOS 1:1 – 2:16

¹The words of Amos, who was a herdsman from Tekoa, who had visions 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.

Amos is named also later in the scroll (see 7:8-12; 8:2). The nearest name to his in the Hebrew Bible is found in 2Chronicles 17:16, which speaks of a certain ‘Amasiah’, adding a reference to YHWH (‘iah’). ‘Amos’ (אַמּוֹס) means ‘carried’ (see Psalm 68:19). He is described as a ‘herdsman’. In 7:14, he will describe himself as a cattle breeder who was in charge of sheep and goats. The use of the word ‘had visions’ (הִזָּיֶה, *hāzâ*) highlights the fact that Amos was ‘enlightened’ by YHWH, and, in turn, was given the mission to ‘enlighten’ the people. In 7:12 Amos is called a ‘seer’ (הִזָּיֶה, *hōzeh*).

The editors introduce the visions of Amos as ‘concerning Israel’. As noted on page 22, when ‘Israel’ is mentioned with no further qualification, it refers to the northern kingdom of that name, as it clearly does in verse 1 when speaking of Jeroboam. Similarly when it states that the visions were ‘concerning Israel’. Amos was called to deliver his oracles in the royal shrine of the northern kingdom at Bethel, not in the Jerusalem Temple. This is not to say that his words had no application for Judah. As he says himself later: he was sent to prophesy ‘to my people Israel’ (7:15).

The earthquake referred to in verse 1 must have been especially violent. Two hundred and fifty years later, the prophet Zechariah refers to it:

On that day his [YHWH’s] feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley ... and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah.

– Zechariah 14:4-5

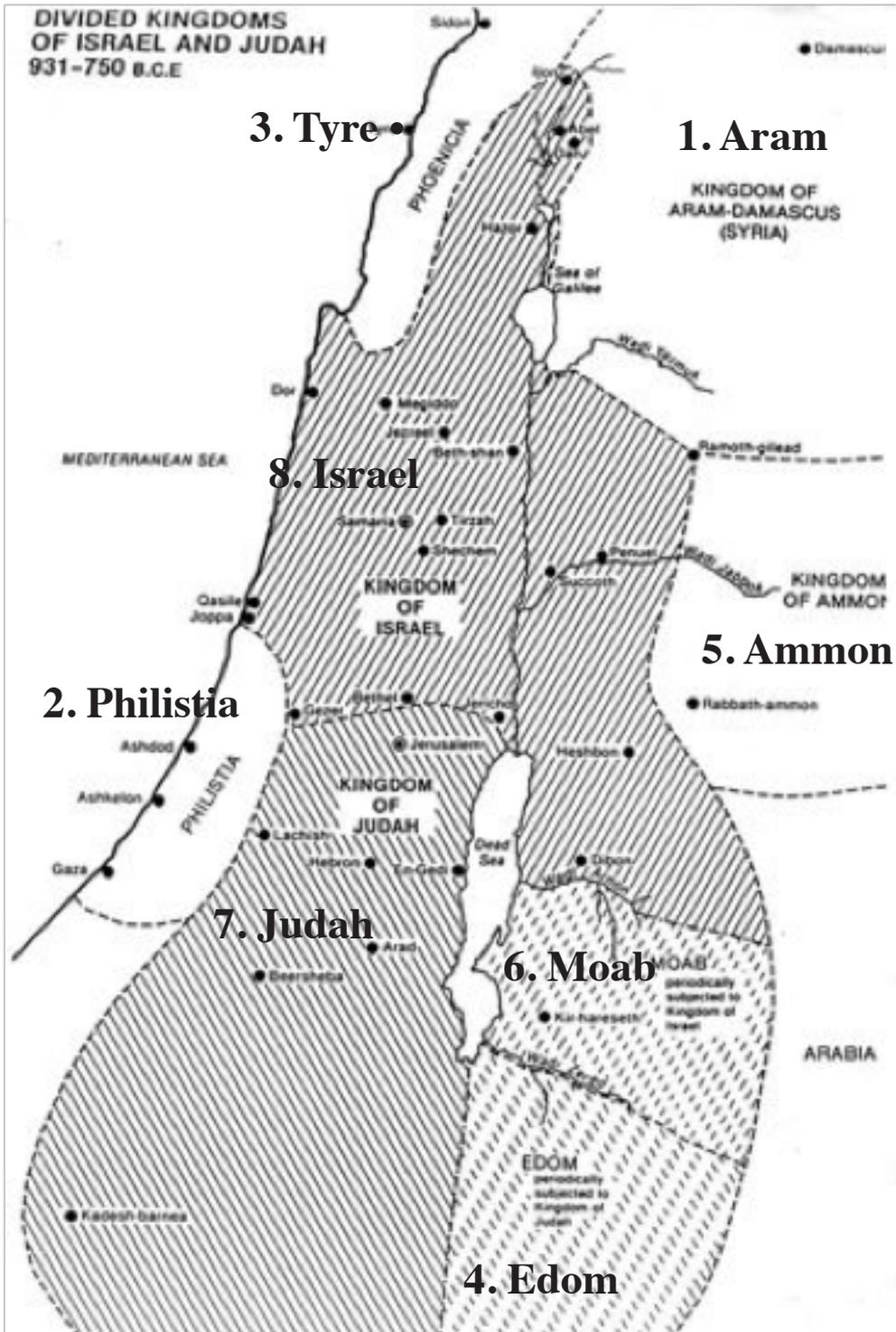
²He proclaimed: YHWH roars from Zion, and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds are in mourning, and the summit of Carmel withers.

When Amos speaks of YHWH, he is speaking of God. But he is also remembering how God called Moses to go back to Egypt: ‘I have heard my people’s cry. I am determined to liberate them’ (Exodus 3:7-8). He called Moses to lead his people out of slavery (see 2:10; 3:1). When Amos speaks of YHWH, he speaks of a God who will do everything to set us free.

YHWH’s words are likened to the roaring of a lion (compare 3:8), and to thunder. The sound is so powerful that it reaches from Jerusalem (the temple that is YHWH’s sanctuary) to Mount Carmel (mentioned again in 9:3).

The drying up of the pastures and even of the lush and bountiful vegetation of Carmel sounds a warning that the self-revelation of YHWH, the ‘divine warrior’, is for the purpose of judgment and punishment.

Israel and its neighbours (Amos 1:3 – 2:16)



**³Thus says YHWH:
For three transgressions of Damascus,
and for four, I will not revoke it; because they threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron.**

As suggested in the Introduction to Amos, the scroll begins with eight oracles that speak of irreversible destruction. They appear to come from the end of his prophetic ministry. The nations named here have refused to repent, and so must inevitably suffer the consequences.

1. Damascus (Aram; see map page 25)

‘Transgressions’ translates the Hebrew פֶּשָׁע (peša‘). The atrocities committed by Damascus constitute a persistence in rebellion against the will of YHWH. Amos understands YHWH to be the lord of history, and so of all nations. The ‘it’ in verse 3 raises an anxious question: What is it that YHWH will not revoke? For the answer we have to await verses 4-5.

The effect of the ‘three’ followed by the ‘four’ is to underscore that the one transgression mentioned goes beyond all boundaries. There is no limit to the evil for which Damascus (Syria/Aram) is guilty. If we are to read the text as 3 *plus* 4 Amos may also be stating that rebellion has reached fullness (7).

Gilead is the area to the east of the Jordan, just south of Aram. The military incursions from Aram were particularly severe in the mid-ninth century (see 2Kings 10:23; 12:18-19). Even though Gilead was in relative peace during the reign of Jeroboam, who occupied Damascus and Hamath (see 2Kings 14:25-28), the memory of earlier atrocities was still acute.

⁴So I will send fire on the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-Hadad.

‘Fire’ is a normal accompaniment of the destroying power of the divine warrior, YHWH. A typical example is in Deuteronomy 9:3:

Know then today that YHWH your God is the one who crosses over before you as a devouring fire; he will wipe them out.

⁵I will break the gate bars of Damascus, and cut off the one who sits on the throne 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 Qir, says YHWH.

In the late ninth century it was Hazael who seized Gilead (see 2Kings 10:32-33; 13:7). Ben-Hadad was the son of Hazael (see 2Kings 13:25) and continued his father’s aggressive policies. The ‘Valley of Aven’ probably refers to the fertile valley between the Lebanon and anti-Lebanon mountains. ‘Beth-Eden’ was a city-state on the banks of the Euphrates. The two names stand for the whole of Aram from extreme west to extreme east. Mass exportation of peoples would become normal under Assyria, but it happened sporadically in Amos’s time and before. ‘Qir’ would appear to be in the vicinity of Elam (see Isaiah 22:6), just north of the Persian Gulf. They will be forcibly taken back to their original homeland (see Amos 9:7). The gains they made in the past through expansion will be completely erased.

2. Gaza (Philistia; see map page 25)

Verse 6 is patterned on verse 3. Gaza, the southernmost of the five city-states that make up Philistia is chosen to represent the nation, perhaps because it was situated on the crossroads of the caravan routes that led to Edom and Arabia. It seems that it played a central role in the slave trade which is the ‘transgression’ highlighted by Amos. Amos does not mention who were taken as slaves. It is the slave trade itself that is the object of condemnation and punishment.

It is likely that Edom would have used the slaves in its copper mines, as well as selling them on at a profit to Africa or Arabia.

In verses 7-8 Gaza suffers the same fate as Damascus (see verses 4-5).

Three of the other city-states of Philistia are mentioned: Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron. It is not clear why the text does not include the fifth city-state, Gath (mentioned later in 6:2). In any case, the destruction of Philistia will be complete.

3. Tyre (Phoenicia; see map page 25)

Once more the refrain found in verses 3 and 6 is repeated, this time in reference to Tyre, the island power that dominated all trade with the area that depended on shipping in the Mediterranean. Tyre provided some of the slaves mentioned in the indictment of Gaza. Here, too, Amos is not focusing on where the slaves came from. It is the atrocious trade in slaves that he is condemning.

It is not clear what Amos is referring to by the expression ‘covenant of kinship’(verse 9). There was a long history of covenants between Tyre and Israel going back to the period of David and Solomon. The fact that no two covenanting nations is mentioned may be intentional. It is the breaking of covenants that concerns Amos, not any specific covenant.

Verse 10 picks up the refrain already found in verses 4 and 7.

⁶Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke it; because they carried into exile entire communities, to hand them over to Edom.

⁷So I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, fire that will devour its strongholds. ⁸I will cut off the one who sits on the throne 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 the Lord YHWH.

⁹Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke it; because they delivered entire communities over to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of kinship.

¹⁰So I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre, fire that shall devour its strongholds.

¹¹Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke it; because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity; his anger fumed unabated; his fury raged incessantly.

¹²So I will send a fire on Teman, and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah.

¹³Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for four, I will not revoke it; because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead in order to enlarge their territory.

¹⁴So I will kindle a fire against the wall of Rabbah, fire that will devour its strongholds, amid cries of victory on the day of combat, with a whirlwind on the day of tempest.

¹⁵Their king shall go into exile, he and his officials together, says YHWH.

4. Edom (see map page 25)

Verse 11 follows the form of verses 3, 6 and 9. Edom is the first of three nations that had traditional kinship ties with Israel: Esau is presented as the brother of Jacob (see Genesis 25:19ff). A century prior to the time of Amos, Edom attained independence from Judah (2Kings 8:20-22). This had been lost by Amos's time (see 2Kings 14:1-10), but the atrocities condemned here could have occurred at any time between these two antagonistic 'brothers' (see Genesis 27:40).

The fact that 'pity' (רַחֵם, *rahm*) and 'womb' (רֶחֶם, *rahm*) come from the same root could suggest that 'cast off all pity' may better be translated 'destroyed their womenfolk', thus providing a link with the next oracle condemning Ammon (see verse 13).

Verse 12 follows the form of verses 5, 8 and 10. Teman is often used as an alternative to Edom, in which case it stands for the whole country. Bozrah, the main city in northern Edom, is 50ks southeast of the Dead Sea. Referring to Teman and Bozrah is like referring to Judah (the country) and Jerusalem (its main city).

5. Ammon (see map page 25)

Verse 13 follows the form of verses 3, 6, 9 and 11. The Ammonites are condemned for dreadful atrocities committed in the process of territorial expansion.

Verse 14 echoes verses 4, 7, 10 and 12. 'Rabbah' ('the great') is the capital of Ammon (see 2Samuel 11:1). It is today's Amman, the capital of Jordan.

The storm imagery is a reminder that the devastation is the work of the divine warrior, YHWH. The expression 'their king' (מֶלֶךְצָם, *malkom*) may include a subtle allusion to Milkom, the national deity of the Ammonites.

6. Moab (see map page 25)

Verse 1 follows the pattern of verses 3, 6, 9, 11 and 13. Once again the reason for the denunciation is not because a foreign country has committed a crime against Israel. It is the crime itself that is denounced. As with the previous nations, Moab is punished because of atrocities that constitute a rebellion against the will of the Lord of all the nations.

Moab has desecrated the corpse of a foreign king in order to make lime from his bones.

Verse 2 follows the pattern of verses 4, 7, 10, 12, and 14. 'Kerioth' is one of the main cities of Moab (see Jeremiah 48:24, 41). It was the city of Chemosh, the chief god of Ammon.

Verse 3 echoes verses 5 and 8, and especially verse 15.

7. Judah (see map page 25)

To this point Amos has been circling. He is about to strike at his main target. Before doing so he turns his attention to his own home country, Judah. The first part of verse 4 and the whole of verse 5 follow the patterns we are used to from the first six oracles (see, for example, verses 1 and 2 above).

The key material is in the second part of verse 4. The countries chastised to this point have rebelled against the will of YHWH by the atrocities they have committed. Judah, however, is in a special position, for it is in a special covenant relationship with YHWH. This makes its behaviour all the worse, for it has 'rejected the Torah'. It has failed to keep its side of the covenant (compare Isaiah 30:9-11). Instead of keeping faith with YHWH, Judah has gone after 'lies': false gods and false prophecies. Like its neighbours, it must face judgment.

¹Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke it; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom for lime.

²So I will send a fire on Moab, and it shall devour the strongholds of Kerioth, and Moab shall perish amid the uproar, amid battle cries to the sound of the trumpet;

³I will cut off the ruler from its midst, and will kill all its officials with him, says YHWH.

⁴Thus says YHWH: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke it; 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.

⁵So I will send a fire on Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.

**6Thus says
YHWH: For three
transgressions
of Israel, and for
four, I will not
revoke it;**

**because they sell
the just person
for silver, and
the needy for a
pair of sandals**

**— 7they who
trample the
heads of the
powerless into
the dust of the
earth, and push
the oppressed
out of the way.**

8. Israel (see map page 25)

Having completed his indictment of the behaviour of Israel's neighbours, Amos now comes to the central issue of his prophetic critique, and it is directed against the northern kingdom of Israel. Verse 6 opens with the refrain already heard in the seven previous oracles. Amos goes on to denounce crimes against YHWH, crimes which cut at the heart of the special covenant relationship which Israel has with YHWH, who hears the cry of the poor, who frees from slavery, and who abhors injustice. Amos is particularly concerned with injustices that are hidden behind the mask of apparent religious duty and political and social responsibility. The impartiality required by law is being used to grind the poor into the ground. The powerful appear to be obeying divine law, but they are doing so against YHWH's intention.

In his first accusation Amos seems to be speaking of a situation in which money is lent and the borrower – a person who is 'just' (צַדִּיק, *saddîq*), that is to say who is living in accordance with God's will – defaults on repayment. The law protects the lender and allows him to take the borrower's property if necessary. This could reduce the borrower to slavery. Amos is objecting to the use of this law in circumstances that have made it impossible for the debt to be repaid as promised, or when the legal action is disproportionate to the fault. The lender might be acting legally, and so 'in God's name'. He is, however, acting unjustly.

It is interesting here to speculate on the purpose of the sandals (also 8:6). If they are purchased to go on a pilgrimage, the hypocrisy of the total disregard for the needy (עִבְיֹן, *'ebyôn*) is powerfully underlined. The *'ebyôn* covers all the following: the beggar, powerless, needy, hungry, thirsty, paralysed, blind, deaf, lonely, last-in-the-line, without-a-voice, redundant.

The small upper class who are profiting from the wealth pouring in through commerce are walking all over the rest of the population, the powerless (דַּלִּים, *dallîm*). They are bullying the oppressed and marginalised (עֲנָוִים, *'anāwîm*; compare Isaiah 3:15). The *'anāwîm* covers all the following: stooped, oppressed, trodden down, deserted, deprived, outcast, despised, cast-aside, humiliated, roughly-treated, burdened, yoked, trapped, caught, crushed by the blows of chronic misery.

‘A man and his father’ is a way of saying every man across the generations. Shrines to a female goddess seems to be what Amos has in mind (though he may be condemning a sexual crime).

People are carrying out their religious observances, but the cloak they prostrate themselves on is one they have taken from the poor who are unable to repay a debt. The Law required that the cloak (used as a blanket at night) had to be returned to the poor before nightfall (see Exodus 22:25-26).

Likewise the wine they drink at communion banquets has been purchased from exorbitant fines imposed on the poor. Their religious cult is founded on rapacious injustice to the poor.

The Torah (Exodus 22:21-26) forbids reducing people to destitution (and Israel has rejected the Torah, verse 4):

You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans. If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them. If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down.

What is said in verse 9 and the following verses is still addressed to ‘Israel’, but it does not apply only to the northern kingdom. Amos is speaking of Israel as a people (see 2:11), which includes Judah.

Speaking for YHWH, Amos reminds Israel of the special providence that YHWH has exercised in their regard, in stark contrast to the way the privileged are treating the poor. As is clear especially from the Book of Joshua, the emergence of Israel in Canaan was attributed to YHWH, pictured as a warrior god conquering the local inhabitants (the ‘Amorites’), making space for his chosen people to prosper. Another tradition emphasised the gigantic stature and prowess of the inhabitants of Canaan (Numbers 13:32) – a way of underlining the fact that Israel could never have conquered on its own. Only the power of YHWH could have won the Promised Land for them.

**A man and his father
go in to the same Girl,
so that my holy name is
profaned;**

**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.**

**Yet it was I who de-
stroyed the Amorite be-
fore them, whose height
was like the height of
cedars, and who was
as strong as oaks; I
destroyed his boughs
above, and his roots
below.**

¹⁰It was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness, to take possession of the land of the Amorite.

¹¹And 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.

¹²But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, "You shall not prophesy."

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

Verse 10 is echoed in the following complaint:

They did not say, "Where is YHWH who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness.

– Jeremiah 2:6

It is clear from verse 11 that Amos sees himself as belonging to a long line of prophets, sent by YHWH to 'enlighten' the people (see Introduction, page 3 and Amos 1:1, page 24).

This is the only text in the Bible where YHWH's raising up of Nazirites is presented as a sign of his providence for Israel. Samson, a hero raised up to achieve deliverance for the people, is described as a Nazirite in Judges 13. In the Septuagint Samuel is described by the same title (see LXX 1Samuel 1:11). Legislation covering their consecration and vows is found only in Numbers 6:1-21. They were committed to total abstinence from wine and any other intoxicating drink (see Numbers 6:3-4).

There are many examples of efforts made to silence those commissioned to speak for YHWH to the people (see Amos 7:12-16). Two examples will suffice:

You say to the seers, "Do not see"; and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions.

– Isaiah 30:10

You shall not prophesy in the name of YHWH, or you will die by our hand.

– Jeremiah 11:21

The powerful are weighed down under the luxury in which they are living. They will know the weight of defeat when YHWH raises up an unnamed enemy to crush them. There will be no escape from the punishment that YHWH will inflict upon them because of their determination to continue the life of luxury and ignore the needs of the disadvantaged and oppressed, who have no control over the institutions set up by the powerful for their own selfish advantage. Their obstinate refusal to change their ways cannot but lead to annihilation.