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THE SOCIAL MESSAGE

OF

THE PROPHET AMOS

by

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A THESIS

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To

Dr. Howard Tillman Kuist

Adviser, Teacher, Friend

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But let justice roll down as waters,
And righteousness as a mighty stream.

(5:24)

INTRODUCTION

THE SOCIAL MESSAGE

OF

THE PROPHET AMOS

INTRODUCTION

A. The Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is to ascertain and to present clearly the social message of the prophet Amos. The term "social" pertains to relationships which subsist between individuals or groups within society. Try as he may, a man cannot segregate himself from his fellow men, but sustains certain relationships to them. It is with the ethical character of these relationships that the prophet Amos is concerned.

B. The Significance of the Problem

Though nearly twenty-seven hundred years have passed since Amos delivered his message in Bethel, time raises no barrier to applying his words to the social situation of our own day. This is true for two reasons.

In the first place, we must remember that the prophets dealt with moral and ethical truths which did not lapse with the passing of time, but which are eternal. These men of God grounded their message in the fun-

damental principles of right living, which are eternal in character and universal in scope.

The second reason, complementary to the first, which makes the message applicable to our day is well expressed by Rauschenbusch.

"History is never antiquated, because humanity is always fundamentally the same. It is always hungry for bread, sweaty with labor, struggling to wrest from nature and hostile men enough to feed its children. The welfare of the mass is always at odds with the selfish forces of the strong."¹

Because human nature does not change essentially, the sins of selfishness and greed which made for oppression and injustice in the days of Amos, are ever present.

The message of Amos is rich in social teaching. It is therefore important that we search out and evaluate the social content, with the express purpose of discovering the permanent social principles proclaimed by him.

C. The Method of Procedure

To comprehend the social message of the prophet Amos, a careful study of the historical background and of the book itself is essential. By a process of analysis the materials of social significance are collected. Then the method of synthesis is applied for the purpose of classifying the materials. Finally, the deductive method

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1. Rauschenbusch, Walter: Christianity and the Social Crisis, p. 1

is used to arrive at the permanent values of the social message of Amos.

The first chapter of this present study deals with the general background, a knowledge of which is necessary to understand the social message of Amos. Israel's relation to the neighboring nations, Egypt, Assyria, and Syria, during the early half of the eighth century is presented, as well as the political, cultural, economic and religious condition within Israel. The second chapter presents a survey of prophecy in Israel up to the time of Amos and discusses the relation of the prophet to the social process. Following this the personal life of Amos is considered giving special attention to the various influences preparing him for his work. The third chapter sets forth the social message of Amos as it concerns the social situation of the neighboring nations and Israel. At the close of this chapter the permanent principles inherent in the social message are stated. This is followed by a summary and conclusion of the entire study.

CHAPTER I
THE GENERAL BACKGROUND
OF AMOS

CHAPTER I

THE GENERAL BACKGROUND OF AMOS

A. Israel's Relations with the Neighboring Nations

Palestine, lying between the Syrian desert and the Mediterranean sea, formed a bridge connecting the nations of the ancient world. Whether for commerce or conquest, this land became the tramping ground of the neighboring peoples. Egypt to the southwest, from the fifteenth to the ninth centuries before Christ, sent her armies periodically into and through the land, conquering and robbing the cities of their wealth to replenish the coffers at home. Assyria to the northeast, from the twelfth century to the time of her fall in the seventh century, also invaded Palestine, plundering and laying her cities waste, exacting tribute, and seeking permanently to establish her rule in the land by wholesale deportations.

So it was that between the twelfth and the seventh centuries before Christ the Kingdom of Israel was caused to contend with both powers, as well as to suffer during the same period from the frequent onslaughts of their northern neighbors, the Syrians. The political life of Israel was therefore inextricably bound up with the life span of these nations, for when they were in power they

crippled Israel's strength, while upon their withdrawal Israel enlarged her borders. To appreciate Israel's relation to these foreign powers in the early half of the eighth century, it will be helpful to consider briefly the relations of these nations to Israel in the preceding centuries.

1. Egypt

The death of Ramses III (about 1167 B.C.) marks the decline of Egypt.

"The death of Ramses III introduced a long line of nine weaklings all of whom bore the great name Ramses. They were far from bearing it worthily, and under them the waning power of the Pharaohs declined swiftly to its fall in a few decades."¹

During this period of decline at home, Egypt's influence in Palestine and Syria also lessened. The Hebrew people were thus afforded the opportunity to establish their kingdom under David and Solomon by subduing their other enemy the Philistines.²

Though waning in power, Egyptian foreign interests were revived under the ambitious and energetic monarch, Sheshonk I (945 B.C.).³ Upon the death of Solomon the kingdom of Israel, due to a rebellion, was divided into Judah and Israel. This gave Sheshonk a splendid op-

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1. Breasted, James H.: A History of Egypt, p. 505
2. Cf. Ibid., p. 526
3. Cf. Ibid., p. 529

portunity to make an advance in Palestine, taking advantage of the crippled condition of the Hebrew kingdom. Therefore, in the fifth year of Rehoboam, king of Judah, (probably about 926 B.C.) Sheshonk invaded Palestine.¹ His plunders did not extend much beyond the Sea of Galilee. According to the Scriptural record, we know that he entered the city of Jerusalem,² and stripped the temple and palace of its treasures which had been accumulated by Solomon. He returned to Egypt with considerable wealth, and the pledge of Judah and surrounding countries to pay tribute to Egypt.³

As her central authority grew weaker and taxes exacted by feudal lords grew heavier, Egypt became involved in civil wars. As a result Egyptian influence in Palestine totally vanished. Becoming concerned, however, because of the growing power of Assyria in Palestine, as Breasted the historian suggests, Takelot II probably sent an army of a thousand men to the western coalition against the Assyrians in the battle of Qarqar in 854 B.C.⁴ In this battle Egypt with the others went down in defeat before the advancing Assyrian. No longer could she speak of having any rule or exerting any influence over the

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1. I Kings 14:25
2. Ibid.
3. Cf. Breasted: op. cit., p. 530
4. Cf. Ibid., p. 534

states in Palestine. Israel in the eighth century, therefore, had no fear of nor was molested by any devastating invasion by Egypt. She was free to give attention to the building of her own kingdom.

2. Assyria

From the very beginnings of the Assyrian empire Palestine had suffered by their frequent invasions. Under Tiglath-pileser I, in the last part of the twelfth century Assyria extended its boundaries and wielded a power not known before in its history.

"Never had so many people paid tribute to the Assyrians, and never was so large a territory actually ruled from the Assyrian capital."¹

Tiglath-pileser had subdued his enemies by cruel methods of warfare. With the passing of this powerful monarch, the empire rapidly declined. His successors were occupied in subduing the Aramaean hordes and barbarous people of the East, thus being unable to look after his conquests in the West.² As a consequence the Assyrian commonwealth lost its territory and power in the West. It was a period of silence in Assyrian history; a period of great importance in the history of mankind, for as the Assyrian power was at a low ebb peoples elsewhere had

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1. Rogers, W. R.: A History of Babylonian and Assyria, Vol. II, p. 175
2. Paton, Lewis B.: The Early History of Syria and Palestine, p. 199

opportunity to grow and develop without Assyrian interference.¹ During this time the Hebrew people made their conquests in Palestine, and set up a kingdom under David. Solomon, his son, succeeded him on the throne. Under his direction the Israelitish kingdom reached its height. However, after his death the people of the north rebelled against Rehoboam, who had succeeded Solomon, and made Jeroboam their king.² This break resulted in the formation of two kingdoms, those of Israel and Judah.

The silence of Assyria ended with the passing of a century and a half. In 877 B.C., Assurnasirpal crossed the Euphrates for the first time since the days of Tiglath-pileser I. He subdued Carchemish, the capital of the Hittite kingdom, and making his way across the Levant he took tribute from Tyre, Sidon, Gebal, Arvad, the Amorites, and other districts which feared him and sought to buy him off. As a result of this campaign the whole of Northern Syria became subject to Assyria.³ George Adam Smith considers that Omri, who was king of Israel and reigning in Samaria during this time, must have come into close relations with the Assyrians, for during more than a century and a half after Omri's death they continued to speak of the land of Israel by

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1. Cf. Rogers: op. cit., pp. 178F
2. I Kings 12: 19-20
3. Cf. Paton: op. cit., p. 201

his name, Omriland.¹

With the death of Assurnasirpal, Shalmaneser II became ruler of Assyria. In 854 he directed a campaign against Damascus.² Though he defeated the combined forces of Ahab, king of Israel, Benhadad, and probably an army from Egypt at Qarqar, he did not acquire any new territory. In 850, 849 and 846 Shalmaneser made three attacks upon Damascus, and again when Syria was under Hazael in 842 and 839.³ It was during this time that Jehu, king of Israel, paid tribute to Assyria, thereby declaring his independence of Damascus. Hazael, without the help of others, could not withstand the power of Assyria. He went down in defeat. Shalmaneser wasted the land, but did not take Damascus.

After this a whole generation passed without Assyrian invasions disturbing the Syrian capital. Hazael took this opportunity to avenge himself on Jehu and the other kings who had refused to help him and who had paid tribute to the foreign power.⁴

Ramman-nirari III was crowned king of Assyria in 812 B. C. After he had sufficiently curbed his enemies to the north, he made his power felt in the land of Syria.

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1. Cf. Smith, G. A.: The Books of the Twelve Prophets, Vol. I, p. 45
2. Cf. Paton: op. cit., p. 208
3. Cf. Smith: op. cit., p. 45
4. Cf. Paton: op. cit., p. 219; II Kings 10:32f

In 803 B.C. he besieged and captured Damascus, compelling it to pay a heavy tribute.¹ This defeat of the Syrians gave Israel a breathing spell, for "Jehovah gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians."²

The first half of the eighth century, covered by the reigns of Shalmaneser III (783-774), Ashurdan III (773-755), and Ashurnirari II (754-746), was a time of weakness and inactivity on the part of Assyria.³ Both Ashurdan and Ashurnirari undertook an expedition into northern Syria, but the campaigns were of little consequence to Assyria.

With the power of Syria paralyzed by Assyrian conquests, and Assyria herself in a temporary period of weakness, the first half of the eighth century gave to Israel the opportunity to enlarge her own kingdom. Joash inaugurated the territorial expansion which reached its highest peak during the reign of Jeroboam II.

However, the triumph of Israel was short-lived. In 745 B.C. a new king, Tiglath-pileser III, usurped the Assyrian throne. He followed a more vigorous policy, and under him Assyria became a dominant power in Palestine. Israel bowed to his scepter in 721 B.C. The fall of

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1. Cf. Smith: op. cit., p. 46
2. II Kings 13:5a
3. Cf. Paton: op. cit., p. 224

Samaria took place after the time of Amos. However, it was foretold by him.¹

3. Syria

The history of the peoples known as the Arameans or Syrians is closely related to that of Israel. Though both were of Semitic origin, their different cultures made for a great gulf between them.² It was a gulf that ever widened as their armies met on the field of battle. Few were the periods in Syria's history when war was not being waged against Israel.

In the time of David, Hadarezer, King of Zobah, was David's most dangerous enemy. Israel, however, proved stronger than her foe and conquered in battle, compelling the Syrians to serve them.³ Under Solomon, the kingdom met a more powerful antagonist in Rezon, who came to Damascus and made it the stronghold of a new dynasty, which was destined to become the leading political power in Syria.⁴

During the reign of Benhadad I a treaty was concluded between Syria and Israel. Later, however, upon the request of Asa, king of Judah, the league was broken and Benhadad sent his armies against Israel to aid the

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1. Amos 6:14
2. Foakes-Jackson, Frederick, J.: The Biblical History of the Hebrews to the Christian Era, p. 246
3. II Sam. 10:13, 18
4. I Kings 11:25

king of Judah.¹ In the reign of Benhadad II, according to the annals of Shalmaneser II, who invaded Syria at this time, it is recorded that Ahab fought as Benhadad's ally in the battle of Qarqar (854 B.C.).² In the book of Kings we read only of war between these two monarchs.³ With no reason known why the alliance should have been broken, Paton suggests that Ahab was compelled to join the coalition at Qarqar and that later with the help of the king of Judah he sought to throw off the Syrian yoke.⁴

About 843 B.C. Hazael usurped the throne of Syria. The Syrian states which under Benhadad had been unified to withstand the Assyrian, immediately revolted and Hazael was confronted with the difficult task of building up an alliance to halt the advance of Assyria.⁵ Assyria under Shalmaneser in 842 invaded Palestine, finding Hazael unprepared. He stood alone and went down in defeat.⁶ With the withdrawal of Assyria for a time, Hazael marshaled his forces and went to battle against Israel, conquering the entire territory east of the Jordan.⁶ In a second campaign he came down as far as Jerusalem, when Joash took the treasures of temple and palace and

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1. I Kings 15:19-20
2. Cf. Paton: op. cit., p. 208
3. Ch. 20 and 22
4. I Kings 22:1-10
5. Cf. Paton: op. cit., p. 215
6. Cf. Ibid., p. 218

sent them to Hazael to keep him from plundering the city. Hazael accepted the gifts and returned to Damascus.¹

In 812 B.C. Hazael died and Benhadad III became the ruler of Damascus. He followed the policy of his father in his dealings with Israel until Assyria again crossed the Euphrates and invaded Syria.² Benhadad III was weak in comparison with the strong, powerful Assyrian hosts. Consequently Damascus was captured and compelled to pay tribute to Assyria.³

With the opening of the eighth century, we see the power of Israel's worst enemy, Syria, shattered. What in the past had been victories for Syria became victories for Israel. Under Joash the armies of Israel thrice defeated Benhadad, thereby regaining the territory lost in previous wars.⁴ Jeroboam II further weakened Syria by extending his kingdom as far north as Hamath.⁵

4. Summary

Our study has now proceeded to a point where a summary of ground covered will be advantageous. In doing this we note how the aggressions of the surrounding nations, Egypt, Assyria, and Syria, influenced the life and destiny of the kingdom of Israel. Because Israel's geo-

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1. II Kings 12:17
2. Cf. Paton: op. cit., p. 220
3. Cf. Smith: op. cit., p. 46
4. II Kings 13:25
5. II Kings 14:28

graphic position made it a strategic center from which to control the affairs of the ancient world, the neighboring powers were interested in acquiring this territory. Israel was, therefore, frequently invaded. We observe that for the sake of peace and a measure of independence, Judah in 926 B.C. paid tribute to Sheshonk I of Egypt. Likewise Jehu in 842 B.C. paid tribute money to Assyria. It is probable that for a short period around 854 B.C. Israel under Ahab was under the yoke of Syria. Following this time Israel suffered a number of defeats at the hands of Hazael, the Syrian.

In our survey we see also that there were periods of silence on the part of these foreign nations. After the death of Ramses III (1167 B.C.) Egyptian invasion ceased until the time of Sheshonk (926 B.C.). During this same period, from the middle of the eleventh century until the time of Assurnasirpal (877 B.C.), Assyria discontinued her military operations in Palestine. The silence was significant, for in that very period the Hebrew people laid the foundations for, and established the kingdom of David.

A second period of silence came in the eighth century. Egypt's power had waned, having made her last invasion into Palestine under Sheshonk in 926 B.C. Assyria in 803 B.C. conquered the Syrian power under Benhadad III, and then for a few decades from 783 to 746

B. C. practically withdrew from Palestine except for invasions of little consequence in northern Syria. Indeed, this was a period of tremendous importance in Israel's history. A nation which for centuries had been harassed by the foreign powers now saw them standing by. Israel's time had come. In the next section of this chapter, we shall see what important political and social changes took place in Israel during this time.

B. Israel's Internal Social Situation

The early half of the eighth century in Israel's history is marked by great social transformations. We shall consider these changes under four different aspects, political, cultural, economic, and religious.

1. Political

The first half of the eighth century may be characterized as a time of political expansion in Israel such as they had not known since the days of Solomon. With Egypt in "senile decline," Assyria in "adolescent ascendance,"¹ and Syria convalescing from wounds inflicted by Assyria, there was no foreign nation to obstruct the advancing armies of the Hebrew kingdom. Joash, king of Israel, in the sixteen years of his reign (798-783)

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1. Kuist, Howard T.: "The Minor Prophets and Human Nature"; Westminster Uniform Lesson Teacher, August 1934

won back all the territory which the Syrians under Hazael had taken from Jehoahaz.¹ He was succeeded by Jeroboam II, whose long reign (783-743) covers nearly half a century.² He came in upon a flowing tide, not to be carried by it, but to use it along with his own powers as an able military leader. Determined to restore the kingdom, he pushed the borders of Israel to the north as far as Hamath, thus including in his kingdom Damascus, the capital of the Syrians.³ Driver speaks of this period as "the culminating point in the history of the northern kingdom."⁴

While Jeroboam was making his conquest of the north, Uzziah, king of Judah (778-740), extended his kingdom toward the south as far as Egypt.⁵ Though in the foregoing centuries Samaria and Jerusalem had been in conflict, this was no time for internal strife.⁶ Their opportunity had come to subdue the enemies round about them. In the heat of selfish conquest, they forgot about national disagreements and built up their own kingdoms.

Having defeated the neighboring peoples in battle, there followed a short period of peace for the lands

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1. II Kings 13:25
2. Cf. Smith: The Book of the Twelve Prophets, Vol.1,p.32
3. II Kings 14:28
4. Driver, S. R.: An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, p. 314
5. Cf. Smith: op. cit., p. 32
6. I Kings 15:16

of Israel and Judah. Therefore, at the time of Amos, about 760 B.C., "a generation was grown up who had not known defeat, and the most of whom had perhaps no experience even of war."¹

2. Cultural

From the standpoint of Israel's culture, the first half of the eighth century witnessed the second of two important changes. The first definite step toward civilization was taken when the children of Israel crossed the Jordan into Canaan. In so doing they left behind their nomadic life of the wilderness, and settled down to pursue agriculture and husbandry. The second advance came in the eighth century before Christ, when the rural population moved into the cities, and civic culture for the first time emerged.² Many peasants left their farms and vineyards for the villages, while rich villagers, merchants, and the nobility sought a place in the capital cities and growing commercial centers. With these changes taking place,

"Israel rose from one to another of the great stages of culture. Till the eighth century they had been but a kingdom of fighting husbandmen. Under Jeroboam and Uzziah city-life was developed, and civilisation, in the proper sense of the word, appeared."³

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1. Smith: op. cit., p. 32
2. Cf. Bizzell, William Bennett: The Social Teaching of the Jewish Prophets, p. 61
3. Smith,: op. cit., p. 34

Though we may think of the urbanization of Israel as an advance in their cultural life, there were accompanying dangers. The concentration of wealth, made possible by city life, brought with it the temptation to extravagant and luxurious living on the part of the rich with no regard for the poor. Thrown into close relation to the foreign cults, there was the danger of assimilating their practices of vice and immorality. As we further describe conditions in Israel, we shall see that the people succumbed to the dangers and temptations of city life.

3. Economic

A period of material prosperity came as a consequence of Israel's program of political expansion. The kings and nobles of the land filled their purses with the spoils gained through plunder and robbery of war. The fertile land acquired by conquest proved to be a source of permanent income through the raising of products for the foreign markets. It was a time of extensive commercial activity. The main trade routes from Egypt to the north, and from the desert across the Levant, were controlled by the two Hebrew kingdoms. Robinson calls this period "the golden age of Israel, when national prosperity was at its height."¹

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1. Robinson, G.L.: "Wealth in the Eighth Century B. C."; Westminster Uniform Lesson Teacher, August 1934

The intensive building program carried on by kings and the rich nobles is another indication of the prosperous times. Uzziah reconstructed the walls of Jerusalem, fortified cities, and erected towers in the wilderness to protect the important trade routes.¹ The wealthy nobles were no longer content to live in a moderate dwelling, but built summer and winter palaces of ivory and hewn-stone.²

The wealthy were a lazy people reveling in their riches. They slept upon beds of ivory and stretched themselves out upon couches. Their tables were decked with the choicest lambs in the flock, and with calves fattened in the stall. They passed their time away in the singing of idle songs to the sound of the viol. They drank only the best wine, and anointed themselves with the most precious ointment.³

This period of Israel's history is characterized as a time of great prosperity, yet there was also deep poverty. The rich were growing richer, and the poor were growing poorer. "It was the luxury of the few at the expense of the toil and poverty of the many."⁴ The poor man, who had suffered most during the time of war,

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1. II Chronicles 26:9-10

2. Amos 3:15; 5:11

3. Amos 6:1-6

4. Soares, Theodore Gerald: The Social Institutions and Ideals of the Bible, p. 220

now received none of the rich spoils. Rather, upon returning from the battles he found his property in the hands of greedy land-lords. Gradually the peasant proprietor was crowded out and reduced to serfdom. To live, the poor borrowed from the rich paying exorbitant rates of interest. When the interest could not be met, even if the debt be but small, the man was tried by judges who were members of the ruling class and receiving bribes from the rich. Thus, unjust decisions were made and the poor were compelled to be the servants of the rich.¹

Though the poor were suffering severely from such oppression and greed, the rich were indifferent to their affliction.² Business proceeded on the false principles of deceit and dishonesty. Cheating was practiced by giving the customer short weight, and means were devised to sell poor grain as if it were of the best.³ George Adam Smith describes the situation as follows:

"The growth of comfort among the rulers meant the growth of thoughtlessness. Cruelty multiplied with refinement. The upper classes were lifted away from feeling the real woes of the people. There was a well-fed and sanguine patriotism, but at the expense of indifference to social sin and want."⁴

Such were the conditions in the northern kingdom which

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1. Amos 2:6; 5:12
2. Amos 6:6
3. Amos 8:5f; cf. Kent, Charles Foster: The Social Teaching of the Prophets and Jesus, p. 40; cf. Soares: op. cit., pp. 220F
4. Smith: op. cit., p. 34

caused Amos to cry out, "Let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream!"¹

4. Religious

The religion of Israel in the eighth century which Amos denounced was an empty sacrificial system degenerated by the influence of Canaanite ritual. The immoral practices of the Canaanites in the worship of pagan deities became a part of the sacred rites of the Israelites.² The people were very intent on carrying out their religious duties. Frequent pilgrimages were made to the temples at Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba.³ The tithes were brought to Jehovah more often than the Law required.⁴ The sabbath and new moon, days for rest and worship, were strictly observed.⁵ All special feast days and solemn assemblies were well attended, with the people zealous to make their various offerings unto Jehovah.⁶

Though Israel appears very devoted to Jehovah in the faithful performance of these rites, she was utterly ignorant of God's true character, and fell far short of pleasing Him in their lives.

"Religious zeal and liberality increased, but they were coupled with all the proud's misunderstanding

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1. Amos 5:24
2. Amos 2:7
3. Amos 4:4; 5:5
4. Amos 4:4
5. Amos 8:4
6. Amos 5:21F

of God: an optimistic faith without moral insight or sympathy."¹

To a people devoid of moral sense and right living, who regarded material prosperity as evidence of Jehovah's blessing and good-will, but who knew not Jehovah their God, Amos comes with a message to seek Jehovah, as well as with a message of judgment and doom.

5. Summary.

Once again let us permit the scene we have been surveying to pass as in panorama before our eyes. During the early half of the eighth century before Christ we have noted significant social changes. Politically Israel became a leading power, extending her borders to include the territory of northern Syria. Within the kingdom, cities took the place of villages, giving rise to civic culture not present before this time. Commercial activity increased. There was an artificial prosperity. The wealth was in the hands of the ruling class, while the masses were steeped in poverty. The rich, motivated by greed, oppressed the poor. Business proceeded on the principles of deceit and dishonesty. The law courts accepted bribes and rendered unjust decisions. Religion meant no more to the people than the observance of certain rites and festive days. There was a complete

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1. Smith: op. cit., p. 34

collapse in morals. Vice was encouraged in the name of religion.

Could conditions have been much worse? Certainly there was sufficient reason for the wrath of Jehovah to be aroused against such a people. Jehovah chose Amos as His prophet to lay bare Israel's sin and to warn her of a fast-approaching judgment. We shall be interested to discover just what Amos has to say.

CHAPTER II
PROPHECY AND THE PROPHET AMOS

CHAPTER II

PROPHECY AND THE PROPHET AMOS

A. A Survey of Prophecy in Israel

To appreciate the place occupied by Amos in the development of prophecy in Israel, it will be helpful to consider the main stream of which he was a tributary. From the time of the Exodus to Amos there were many prophets in Israel, four of whom stand out above the rest, namely Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. They all fall into the pre-literary period of the prophets.

Though Moses is generally thought of as a law-giver and statesman, he also played the role of prophet in that he spoke for God. Samuel came upon the scene in a critical period of Israel's history. "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes."¹ Through his wise counsel and leadership he was instrumental in establishing the kingdom of David.

"His fundamental contributions consisted in directing the energies of the people to the establishment of political unity and social security through a military organization."²

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1. Judges 21:25
2. Bizzell, William Bennett: The Social Teachings of the Jewish Prophets, p. 29

Elijah and Elisha, following the policy of the prophet Samuel, were closely allied with affairs of state. Elijah fearlessly denounced Ahab for killing Naboth and taking possession of his vineyard.¹ Elisha figured largely in advising the kings in a time of international strife. "His ascendancy marks the return of the influence of the prophets over the kings of his country."²

With the passing of Elisha there follows a half century of silence, which is suddenly interrupted by the clarion voice of the prophet Amos. He has the distinction of being the first of the prophets to put his message into writing. With him begins what is properly called the literary period. Along with Amos, the eighth-century prophets who fall into this general classification are Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. They stand in contrast to the prophets of the pre-literary period, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha, in that they are not leaders of great national movements nor actively engaged in political affairs. They are known rather for their preaching and teaching. They are men of deep thought and profound words, proclaiming fearlessly the message which they have received from their God.

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1. I Kings 21:17-24

2. Bizzell: op. cit., p. 55

B. The Prophet's Relation to the Social Process

In discussing the prophet's relation to the social process, it is necessary to have a clear idea of what is meant by this phrase, "the social process."

Soares puts it well when he says:

"It is the conception of human society as an organism reacting to its environment. Society is never static. It is in a continuous condition of readaptation to the situations in which its life is cast."¹

Since society is always shifting in adapting itself to a changing environment we may rightly speak of it as a social process.

1. A Product

In one sense we may consider the prophet a product of the social process. He was an integral part of the society of his own day. The social and religious principles which he proclaimed must certainly have been held by some in the society which gave him birth, for the prophet was no isolated miracle without some connection with the group in which he lived. Davidson says in speaking of the prophets:

"We cannot account for the appearances of a succession of such men otherwise than on the supposition that they arose out of a society, in the main, like-minded with themselves, and fitted to give them birth--that they were the efflorescence, season after season, of a tree whose roots always stood in

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1. Soares: The Social Institutions and Ideals of the Bible, pp. 209f

the soil. Something immediately extraordinary in the case of each individual prophet being fully admitted, something which is not to be quite explained by the operation of the mind upon truth already committed to it under the influences of Providence and life, still this operation is a thing on which the strongest emphasis must be laid. ... Each prophet is the child of a past stretching back indefinitely behind him; and, if so, this past must have put forth its power in the forces and religious life of the society which gave the prophet birth."¹

Furthermore, the prophet may be regarded as a product of the social process because he was "often the spokesman of the social need. He was often quite as much the representative as the leader."² His message in part grew out of as well as was directed to a definite situation in his own day.

2. A Critic

The prophet however, was also a critic of the social process. Acting in that capacity he rose above the people of his day, and was enabled thereby to view society objectively. He was constructive in his criticism, for in denouncing the evils of society, he also pointed out how they might be corrected. He criticized the social process with the view to bringing about social reform. Amos condemned the rich rulers for their oppression, violence, and robbery, and warned them of the consequences of such a life.³ However, he also exhorted

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1. Davidson, A. B.: Biblical and Literary Essays, p. 109
2. Soares: op. cit., p. 211
3. Cf. Amos 3:9-12

them to seek Jehovah.¹

What is it that causes the prophet to transcend the group, and to take a stand against the social and religious evils of his time? We find the answer to this question by taking into account the religious experience of the prophet.

"He was a man who had an experience of God. To him the most evidently certain fact of life was God. .. the prophet lived with a most intimate sense of community with God."²

Out of this intimate experience the prophet came to a knowledge of His character. Jehovah was a God of righteousness, mercy, and justice. The universe in which He reigned supreme was therefore a moral universe. For the people to enjoy the blessing and favor of God they must obey the moral laws of the universe and deal justly with their fellow men. With such a vision of God, the universe, and what man ought to be, the prophet was quick to sense the social evils of his day. Unless they were corrected judgment was inevitable. Thus the prophet, seeing things as they are, knowing what they should be, in his zeal for God became a critic of the social process.

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1. Cf. Amos 5:6

2. Soares: op. cit., p. 214

C. The Personal Life of Amos

During the half century of Israel's external prosperity, religious corruption, and moral collapse, Amos appears on the scene to denounce the people for their iniquitous practices, to warn them of the consequences of their sin, and to exhort them to seek Jehovah. The tone of his message is in keeping with the meaning of his name, "burden" or "burden-bearer."

"Stern, fearless, self-contained, a man of granite-make, he possessed a powerful well-knit mind and a vivid imagination, and is one of the most arresting figures ever on the stage of Hebrew history."¹

It will now be our purpose to point out those factors in the life of Amos which made him an outstanding personality and qualified him for his prophetic mission.

1. His Preparation

a. His Home

Though Amos does not make any reference to his home in his message, from the opening words of his book we learn that he lived in Tekoa.² Tekoa was a little Judean hamlet situated on a hill six miles south of Bethlehem and twelve miles south of Jerusalem.

"In the time of Amos Tekoa was a place without sanctity and almost without tradition."³ The name appears

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1. Robinson, George L.: The Twelve Minor Prophets, p. 47
2. Amos 1:1
3. Smith: The Book of the Twelve Prophets, Vol. I, p. 75

but twice in previous Old Testament history. When Rehoboam was king of Judah, he built Tekoa for the purpose of strengthening his defense. The town is also mentioned as the home of the wise woman who appeared before David upon **Joab's** request.¹

George Adam Smith out of his intimate personal knowledge of the surroundings gives an excellent description of the environs of Tekoa.

"The men of Tekoa looked out upon a desolate and haggard world. South, west, and north the view is barred by a range of limestone hills, on one of which directly north the grey towers of Jerusalem are hardly to be discerned from the grey mountain lines. Eastward the prospect is still more desolate, but it is open; the land slopes away for nearly eighteen miles to a depth of four thousand feet. Of this long descent, the first step, lying immediately below the hill of Tekoa, is a shelf of stony moorland with the ruins of vineyards. It is the lowest ledge of the settled life of Judaea. The eastern edge drops suddenly by broken rocks to slopes spotted with bushes of "retem," the broom of the desert, and with patches of poor wheat. From the foot of the slopes the land rolls away in a maze of low hills and shallow dales, that flush green in spring, but for the rest of the year are brown with withered grass and scrub. This is the Wilderness or Pastureland of Tekoa,² across which by night the wild beasts howl, and by day the blackened sites of deserted camps, with the loose cairns that mark the nomad's graves, reveal a human life almost as vagabond and nameless as that of the beasts. Beyond the rolling land is Jeshimon, or Devastation, a chaos of hills, none of whose ragged crests are tossed as high as the shelf of Tekoa, while their flanks shudder down some further thousands of feet, by crumbling precipices and corries choked with debris, to the coast of the Dead Sea. The northern half of

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1. II Samuel 14:2
2. II Chronicles 20:20

this is visible, bright blue against the red wall of Moab, and the level top of the wall, broken only by the valley of the Arnon, constitutes the horizon. Except for the blue water--which shines in its gap between the torn hills like a bit of sky through rifted clouds--it is a very dreary world. Yet the sun breaks over it, perhaps all the more gloriously; mists rising from the sea simmering in its great vat, drape the nakedness of the desert noon; and through the dry desert night the planets ride with a majesty they cannot assume in our more troubled atmospheres. It is also a very empty and a very silent world, yet every stir of life upon it excites, therefore, the greater vigilance, and man's faculties, relieved from the rush and confusion of events, form the instinct of marking, and reflecting upon every single phenomenon."¹

It was in such a world that Amos grew up. The desolate and rocky surroundings gave him a ruggedness of character which would not cringe when facing a difficult and dangerous situation. In this barren and silent wilderness his powers of observation and reflection were also developed. Nothing moved across the wastes of the desert lands but that Amos noted it and thought about it. Here he learned to appreciate relationships. Every effect must have a cause. "Will a lion roar in the forest when he hath no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?"² "Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is set for him?"³ His environment played an important part in making him both a realist and an idealist. He was not afraid to face the

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1. Smith: op. cit., pp. 74-76
2. Amos 3:4
3. Amos 3:5

hard and cold facts which his desert eyes brought into his consciousness, for he saw them in the divine light. In the lonely and quiet hours of the desert life, God had become a living, personal reality to him.

b. His Occupation

"In the case of no other prophet is the question of occupation more interesting, since with this there stands closely connected the problem of Amos's preparation for his life-work."¹ Amos was a herdsman and a dresser of sycomore trees.² In the Hebrew the term for herdsman connotes a shepherd of a particular breed of desert sheep. "They are small in size, and ugly in appearance, but highly esteemed on account of their wool."³

In addition to his work as a shepherd, Amos also took care of some sycomore trees. There are two kinds of fig trees which are grown in the East. The one bears small fruit, which is considered the more valuable. The fruitage on the other is large, but of inferior quality. It is seldom eaten by man, and is refused even by the cattle unless they are very hungry. However, by puncturing the fruit as it reaches maturity, drops of acrid juice are discharged and when ripe the figs may be used as food.

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1. Harper, William Rainey: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea, p. civ
2. Amos 7:14
3. Robinson, G. L.: The Twelve Minor Prophets, p. 48

Amos undoubtedly tended a grove of the poorer quality of sycomore trees in the sandy soil of the wilderness of Tekoa.¹ He had not fallen heir to the riches which filled the palaces of his day, but eked out a scanty livelihood through common and lowly tasks.

Though Amos lived in poverty and quietness, he was not ignorant of the wealth and confusion in the urban centers. As a woolgrower he evidently sought a market for his wool, and therefore made frequent trips to the commercial cities in northern and southern Israel. About an hour's walk westward brought him to the main trade routes between Hebron and the North.

"Bethlehem was only six, Jerusalem twelve miles from Tekoa. Ten miles farther, across the border of Israel, lay Bethel with its temple; seven miles farther Gilgal, and twenty miles farther still Samaria the capital, in all but two days' journey from Tekoa. These had markets as well as shrines; their annual festivals would be also great fairs. It is certain that Amos visited them; it is even possible that he went to Damascus, in which the Israelites had at the time their own quarters for trading."²

In going to these centers Amos came into contact with the world of his day. There he had opportunity to talk with traders from different localities and to learn about the affairs of neighboring peoples. He saw also at first hand the gay life of the city, with all its

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1. Cf. Rogers, Robert Williams: Great Characters of the Old Testament, p. 92
2. Smith: op. cit., p. 79

wealth, poverty, and oppression. He could not help but notice the many worshippers as they made their pilgrimages to the shrines to indulge in religious immorality. Thus Amos became familiar with the corrupt social life of Israel.

What a contrast between the life that Amos saw and the life he himself lived. No wonder that he returned there, not to trade, but to expose the iniquities of this urban civilization. His occupation was far from a handicap to him as an interpreter of social ills. This rustic intruder

"brought with him a freedom of spirit and an independence of outlook which saved him from the numbing influence of familiarity ... The things that are most familiar to him are those of the outdoor world, and from his varied experience of nature he comes to the complicated and artificial life of the city with an amazing clarity of vision which reaches far below the surface and penetrates the most familiar disguise. It was, perhaps, only such a man as this who could see the rotting civilisation of Samaria as it really was, and could give to her habits and customs the right and proper names."¹

c. His Religion

Amos tells us nothing of his early religious life, yet there are certain things we may infer from the other facts we possess. Being a child of the soil, Amos undoubtedly grew up in a religious atmosphere, for religious practices and tradition are more fixed among coun-

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1. Robinson, Theodore H.: Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel, p. 62

try folk than city dwellers. He had certainly learned the Law, as well as acquainted himself with the history of his own people. Jerusalem was only twelve miles away, making it possible for him to attend the religious festivals.

Furthermore, Amos surely had an inner religious experience which brought him into intimate relation with the God of Israel, and gave him a knowledge of His character. From his message we are convinced that he had a high conception of the character of God. The God of Amos was "Jehovah, the God of Hosts."¹ He was omnipotent, for He controlled the forces of nature,² and directed the movements and destiny of Israel³ as well as the surrounding nations.⁴ Moreover, Jehovah was a God of righteousness who was just in all His dealings with the nations, and demanded that His people likewise practice justice and righteousness.⁵

Thus we see that the religious atmosphere in which Amos grew up, giving him a knowledge of the history of his people and of the character of his God, was an important factor in his preparation as a prophet of the Most High.

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1. Amos 6:14f, 27; 6:8b, 14B
2. Amos 4:6-11
3. Amos 2:10; 9:14
4. Amos 1:3ff; 2:1ff; 9:7
5. Amos 5:24

2. His Education

We have no record that Amos ever attended school, yet to conclude that he was therefore an ignoramus is to be sorely mistaken. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The message he delivered at Bethel is the product of no inferior intelligence.

Nowhere in the Old Testament do we find an "example of stronger or purer literary style. He is absolute master of the language that he uses."¹ Though Amos was a lowly shepherd and husbandman,

"to associate inferior culture with the simplicity and poverty of pastoral life is totally to mistake the conditions of Eastern society. At the courts of the Caliphs and their Emirs the rude Arabs of the desert were wont to appear without any feeling of awkwardness, and to surprise the courtiers by the finish of their impromptu verses, the fluent eloquence of their oratory, and the range of subjects on which they could speak with knowledge and discrimination. Among the Hebrews, as in the Arabian desert, knowledge and oratory were not affairs of professional education, or dependent for their cultivation on wealth and social status. The sum of book learning was small; men of all ranks mingled with that Oriental freedom which is so foreign to our habits; shrewd observation, a memory retentive of traditional lore, and the faculty of original reflection took the place of laborious study as the² ground of acknowledged intellectual preeminence."

Amos was not only a literary genius, but he also possessed a "breadth of human interest embracing both acute observation and wide historical knowledge."³ He

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1. Harper: op. cit., p. cvi
2. Smith, W. Robertson: The Prophets of Israel and Their Place in History, p. 126
3. Driver: An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, p. 106

was well informed concerning the social conditions of the northern kingdom. He also knew what was taking place in the countries surrounding Israel. It may certainly be said of Amos that he was an intelligent man.

3. His Call

The call to go and prophesy came to Amos while he was following the flock. It was a climactic experience for which the various influences throughout the years had been preparing him.

The experience which caused Amos to speak of his call was an unhappy one. While prophesying at Bethel, the priest of that shrine, Amaziah, accused Amos of being a professional prophet. He commanded him to leave Bethel and earn his living in his own land. To this false accusation Amos replies:

"I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdsman, and a dresser of sycomore trees: and Jehovah took me from following the flock, and Jehovah said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."¹

Amos makes it clear that he was no prophet through membership in a prophetic guild, nor was he seeking to make a living by prophesying. He refused to be reckoned among that group who sought ecstatic experiences and voiced only the popular sentiments of the people.

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1. Amos 7:14f

Amos prophesied because he was commissioned of God. God "lifted him out of one manner of life into another."¹

Throughout his entire message we are conscious that Amos is positive that God has spoken to him. "The lion hath roared; who will not fear? The Lord Jehovah hath spoken; who can but prophesy?"²

D. Summary

In surveying the prophetic movement in Israel we noted the significant place Amos held among his fellow prophets. Not only was he the first of them to commit his message to writing, but he also inaugurated a change of emphasis in the activity of the prophet. Instead of being active participants in the affairs of state, the prophets of the eighth century following Amos gave themselves to proclaiming the message received from Jehovah with a view to correcting the evils in society.

We noted also that the prophet was both a product and a critic of the social process. He was a product in that his life and message were greatly influenced by the social process of which he was an integral part; a critic in that he pointed out the social evils of his day and sought to correct them.

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1. Winton, George Beverly: Pleaders for Righteousness, p. 39
2. Amos 3:8

By giving attention to the personal life of Amos, we discovered that his home, occupation, and religion were important factors in his preparation as a prophet. Intellectually he was well qualified for his work. Accordingly when the call came to Amos to leave his flock and go to Bethel to prophesy, he was equipped for his exalted ministry.

CHAPTER III

THE SOCIAL MESSAGE OF THE PROPHET AMOS

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As we contemplate the situation already presented, two strikingly dissimilar scenes emerge, each of which grows more distinct when contrasted with the other. On the one hand we view the city. There we see the social life of Israel denuded of all that is right and good. The upper classes live in an ease and luxury wrung from their enslaved fellow men, while zealous worshippers throng the shrines to perform the sacred rites without thought of moral obligation. On the other hand, upon the barren foothills of the Judean wilderness, we behold an arresting figure among the herdsmen of Tekoa. Though far removed in culture from sophisticated urban civilization, this rustic is not ignorant of the social evils intrenched in these centers. When called of Jehovah his God, Amos is quick to respond. We now accompany him as he treads across the hills and valleys to appear at the city of Bethel. Let us give ear to his message.

A. Concerning Contemporary Life outside Israel

The God Whom Amos worshipped was not a mere tribal deity, but a universal sovereign Whose sway included the moral conduct of peoples beyond the borders of Is-

rael. The prophet therefore has a message for the surrounding nations. Beginning with Damascus, he follows with Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, introducing each with the phrase:

"Thus saith Jehovah: For three transgressions of -----, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof;"¹

The reference to the number of transgressions need hardly be taken literally, but only as a graphic way of expressing the idea that "the measure of guilt ... is not merely full, it is more than full."² "The cup of iniquity is running over ..."³ Though the nations are guilty of many sins, Amos mentions one as typical.

The word for transgressions in Hebrew (PASHA') means to overstep a line or law, or to rebel against authority.⁴ In the Old Testament we observe that this term is used to express rebellion either against man or God.⁵ It is definitely a moral term with both a social and religious connotation. The term, therefore, aptly characterizes the sins of the nations which were perpetrated

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1. Amos 1:3. 6. 9. 11. 13; 2:1
2. Driver, S. R.: The Books of Joel and Amos, p. 133
3. McFadyen, John Edgar; A Cry for Justice, p. 6
4. Cf. König, Edward: Hebräisches und aramäisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament, s.v.; Harper: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea, p. 14; Driver: op. cit., p. 133; Cripps, Richard S.: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos, p. 118
5. Cf. (Man) I Kings 12:19; II Kings 1:1; (God) Hosea 6:7, 8:1

against humanity and thus also involved a breaking or an overstepping of the moral laws of a righteous God.

1. Relations between Nations

The sins which Amos exposes in the heathen nations concern their relations with Israel or other neighboring states. The prophet introduces the nations in a dramatic order, beginning with Damascus and sweeping in wide concentric circles like an eagle swooping to its prey, until he finally reaches Israel. However, we shall not treat them in the order given, since there is a distinct advantage in viewing their sins according to the similarity of their particular social transgressions.

a. Damascus

"Thus saith Jehovah: For three transgressions of Damascus, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron."¹

The people to whom Amos here refers are the Syrians, whose capital is at Damascus. The land of Syria is northeast of Israel, lying contiguous to the territory of Gilead. Since Syria frequently warred against Israel, Gilead was the first to suffer from her barbarous raids. Her cruel methods of warfare were predicted by Elijah,² and actually carried out by Hazael and his son Benhadad, as may be seen by a reference to Second Kings:

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1. Amos 1:3
2. II Kings 8:12

"For he left not to Jehoahaz of the people save fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria destroyed them, and made them like the dust in threshing."¹

It is this relentless treatment of her enemy which Amos condemns. In the phrase "They have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron"² he strikes at the very heart of her sin. The threshing instruments were constructed of boards about seven feet long and three feet wide, armed underneath with sharp stones or knives of iron. These, being weighted, were drawn by oxen over the grain, thereby separating the kernel from the chaff.³ Destitute of all sympathy, the Syrians substituted the Israelitish captives for grain and dragged these instruments over their bodies, tearing them into shreds and causing untold agony. What a gruesome picture! Such cruel and inhuman conduct violated even the lowest standards of right international relations. Syria was deserving of the doom predicted by Amos. Fire shall fall upon the house of Hazael and the palaces of Benhadad, the power of Damascus shall be broken, and her people shall go into captivity!⁴

b. Ammon

In the main, the Ammonites were similarly bar-

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1. II Kings 13:7
2. Amos 1:3
3. Cf. Driver: op. cit., p. 134
4. Cf. Amos 1:4

baric in their methods of warfare, as Amos so vividly portrays:

"Thus saith Jehovah: For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they may enlarge their border."¹

The people of Ammon occupied the territory east of the Jordan, bounded by the Arnon on the south and the Jabbok on the north. The land of Gilead lay on the northeast. The people of Gilead were again the victims of a nation's brutalities in war, for the Ammonites lanced their pregnant mothers. Extermination of the living was not enough. The yet unborn must also perish. For such horrible outrages territorial expansion was a feeble excuse. No purpose, not even a worthy one, could ever warrant such atrocities. In due time punishment shall be meted out. Rabbah, the capital of Ammon and representative of the whole nation, shall be burned with fire, an enemy shall conquer the city in battle, and the king and his nobles shall be carried away into captivity.²

The positive social principle underlying the indictments of the Syrians and Ammonites for cruelty is that even warring nations must at all times act in accordance with the plain dictates of common justice and humanity.

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1. Amos 1:13
2. Cf. Amos 1:14f

c. Edom

The nature of Edom's sin, though also social in character, differs from that of the nations already discussed. Of the Edomites Amos says:

"Thus saith Jehovah: For three transgressions of Edom, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever."¹

The Edomites, dwelling in the district south of the Dead Sea, traced their ancestry back to Abraham through Esau, thus being brethren of the Israelites.² Their attitude and treatment of their kin was, however, not consistent with this blood relation. Animosity against Israel was Edom's crowning sin. This hateful spirit expressed itself in wars of aggression. Edom "cast off all pity,"³ that is, "they suppressed or stifled the natural instinct of tender regard which a person would normally cherish towards a brother."⁴ According to Hebrew scholars,⁵ the phrase "his anger did tear perpetually"⁶ is more accurately translated "his anger he guarded or cherished perpetually," making for a poetic parallelism, since the same thought is expressed in the phrase "he kept his wrath forever."⁷

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1. Amos 1:11
2. Genesis 25:29f
3. Amos 1:11 (cf. Mrg.)
4. Driver: op. cit., p. 142
5. Cf. Ibid.; Cripps: op. cit., p. 131; Harper; op. cit., p. 33
6. Amos 1:11
7. Amos 1:11

Edom did not allow time to dissipate his enmity toward Israel. Rather, he took advantage of every opportunity to add more fuel to the flames. To that nation which nourishes animosity, enmity, and hatred toward a brother nation, and by that very attitude and practice breaks the moral law of Jehovah, Amos comes with a message of destruction. Jehovah shall send fire upon Teman and Bozrah, representative cities of the entire kingdom, to destroy them.¹

d. Moab

The Moabites, who inhabited the "elevated and fertile tableland"² east of the Dead Sea, are denounced by Amos for manifesting a similar spirit toward her neighbors, the Edomites, as Edom cherished toward Israel.

"For three transgressions of Moab, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime."³

The burning of the bones of the king of Edom into lime was a "mark of unrelenting hate and vindictiveness."⁴

There is some uncertainty as to the circumstances which called forth this act of spite. We know of a coalition of Jehoram, Jehoshaphat, and the King of Edom, directed against Moab in an attempt to crush a rebellion. In the

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1. Cf. Amos 1:12
2. Driver: The Books of Joel and Amos, p. 146
3. Amos 2:1
4. Driver: op. cit., p. 147

course of this conflict Mesha, the Moabite king, made a direct attack upon Edom, but was driven back.¹ It is possible that at some later time Moab subdued Edom, and anxious to avenge himself he disregarded all respect for the dead and the sanctity of the king's tomb by treating his bones with an "unwonted and shocking indignity."² This awful act, prompted by a spirit of revenge, Amos regards as the reason for Moab's destruction. Fire shall consume his palaces, the enemy shall lay waste the land, and the leaders shall be slaughtered.³

In the cases of Edom and Moab, we see that it is their spirit of animosity and vindictiveness which calls forth the denunciatory words of the prophet. It goes without question that where nations cherish such a spirit toward one another trouble is always brewing. We may, therefore, rightly infer that for the establishing of wholesome and harmonious international relations Amos condemns such attitudes unsparingly.

e. Gaza

The city of Gaza was strategically located in the southern corner of the land of Philistia. Trade routes joining northern Syria with Egypt passed through the metropolis. Regular caravans also connected Gaza

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1. Cf. II Kings 3:4-27

2. Driver: op. cit., p. 147; cf. Cripps: op. cit., p. 136

3. Cf. Amos 2:2f

with the important commercial centers in Edom. Consequently Gaza became an emporium of trade, and preeminently of the slave traffic.¹ The prophet's denunciation of Gaza concerns that very practice:

"Thus saith Jehovah: For three transgressions of Gaza, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they carried away captive the whole people to deliver them up to Edom."²

In an attempt to interpret this indictment, George Adam Smith makes the following enlightening comment:

"It is difficult to see what this means if not the wholesale depopulation of a district in contrast to the enslavement of a few captives of war. By all tribes of the ancient world, the captives of their bow and spear were regarded as legitimate property: it was no offence to the public conscience that they should be sold into slavery. But the Philistines seem, without excuse of war, to have descended upon certain districts and swept the whole of the population before them, for purely commercial purposes. It was professional slave-catching."³

It is very likely that this is the correct interpretation of the Philistine's great sin. Having thus herded together their fellow men, they sold them to the Edomites, who in turn sent some on to Arabia. Amos is aware of the injustice of such practices. He sees that God's judgment shall come upon them to destroy their land completely.⁴

f. Tyre

Tyre, the great commercial city in the north

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1. Driver: op. cit., p. 136
2. Amos 1:6
3. Smith: The Book of the Twelve Prophets, Vol. I, pp. 125f
4. Cf. Amos 1:8

and representative of the entire Phoenician country, had sinned in common with Gaza.

"Thus saith Jehovah: For three transgressions of Tyre, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have delivered up the whole people to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant."¹

We see here that Tyre is also guilty of participating in the slave traffic. Unlike Gaza, Tyre did not go out to round up men for the slave market, but merely delivered up whole populations into slavery. In other words, Tyre acted as an agent for those who took men captive, by buying them and then selling the slaves to Edom.² In doing this she too was forgetful of a "brotherly covenant."

George Adam Smith gives three possible interpretations of just what is meant by the "brotherly covenant":

"... that the captives were Hebrews and the alliance one between Israel and Edom; that the captives were Hebrews and the alliance one between Israel and Tyre; that the captives were Phoenicians and the alliance the natural brotherhood of Tyre and the other Phoenician towns."³

The first of these alternatives is quite improbable, for if it were true Edom would be the one guilty of buying the slaves rather than Tyre for selling them. Though the latter interpretation may be correct, it is not likely that Amos would speak of Tyre's relation to the other Phoenician towns as a covenant-relation. The second seems

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1. Amos 1:9
2. Cf. Driver: op. cit., p. 140
3. Smith: op. cit., p. 127

the most probable view. In the days of Solomon, Hiram, the king of Tyre, manifested a friendly spirit toward the Israelitish king and entered upon an agreement or league with him.¹ Harper suggests that this covenant "possibly contained a provision against selling the Hebrews as slaves."² If that be true, Tyre's guilt in selling the Israelities into slavery was aggravated by the fact that she disregarded a former agreement. Because of this sin against a fellow nation, Tyre shall not escape the judgment of God. As with the other cities, fire shall fall upon her and consume her palaces.

Both Gaza and Tyre had established a lucrative slave-trade, pilfering the neighboring nations in order to embellish their national coffers. The principle underlying Amos' denunciation of this despicable practice is that no nation is justified in traducing the liberties of men for the sake of economic gain.

2. The Bearing of the Message of Amos upon International Relations

For cruelties in warfare, for acts of vengeance instigated by long-nurtured national hatred, for a lucrative, cold-blooded slave traffic, the prophet denounces the life of the peoples beyond the confines of Israel. They are guilty of the "atrocities of Barbarism."³

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1. Cf. I Kings 5:1-12
2. Harper: op. cit., p. 29
3. Smith: op. cit., p. 122

Amos does not pronounce the doom of these nations because their sin was directed against the chosen people of Israel. Rather he judges them upon the impartial standard of God's righteousness, by which--as we shall see later--Israel's life also will be measured.¹

In condemning the nations for their sins of inhumanity, we may infer that the prophet was pleading for an international justice which would wipe out cruelty, encourage friendliness instead of animosity and hate, and safeguard the rights and liberties of all peoples by abolishing commercialized slavery.

With the social message of Amos concerning contemporary life without Israel well before us, let us pass on to discover his message to Israel.

B. Concerning Contemporary Life within Israel

Though Amos begins his message by pointing out the transgressions of the surrounding peoples, his real objective is to persuade Israel to see her many social wrongs and to realize that the equitable law of Jehovah's righteousness which brought judgment upon those nations will also bring judgment upon them. Being very familiar with Israel's social conditions, Amos describes the evils in great detail.

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1. Smith: op. cit., p. 133

It is our purpose now to present in a systematic manner those materials in the message of Amos which concern the social situation within Israel. This may be best accomplished by considering his message in the light of social institutions: political, economic, and religious. The prophets were essentially not interested in institutions, but "their criticism is directed at life as it functions in institutions, at the personnel of the institution rather than at the institution as such."¹ This is especially true of Amos. He directs his words to Israel's life as it functions in the institutions mentioned. Though the message is presented largely in a negative manner, it is our purpose to extract therefrom the positive social principles as they concern man's relationships both with his fellow men and with God.

1. The Political Problem

The problem with which Amos came to grips in the political life of Israel is well put by Davidson:

"The chief want in Israel, as in the East generally, was probably not so much the want of laws or customs as the want of an upright executive to put them in operation."²

As we lift out this particular phase of Amos' social message we shall see the truth of this statement.

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1. Graham, William Creighton: The Prophets and Israel's Culture, p. 68
2. Davidson, A. B. : "The Prophet Amos--II: The People of Israel"; The Expositor, Vol. VI, p. 171

a. Administrative Problems

The ideal of the Hebrew theory of the state is clearly presented by Kent when he says:

"... the state is organised simply to promote the welfare of the social group and of each individual citizen. Rulers are the servants of the people and should be governed in all their public acts by the demands of public welfare. No ruler, in order to gratify his personal ambition, has the right to use his power to deprive even the humblest of his subjects of his freedom or of his rightful possessions. Any tax or levy required to promote the general welfare of the people may justly be imposed, and the individual citizens are under obligation to abide by the decree of their properly appointed rulers. But any tax levied for mere satisfaction of a ruler or a ruling class without regard to the welfare of the people is a crime."¹

This ideal administration of governmental affairs by the rulers of Israel was far from being realized during the reign of Jeroboam II. In fact, the indictments hurled against the leaders by Amos show us that the exact opposite was the case. Let us examine his message.

(1) The Problem of Luxury. Amos describes the rulers of Israel as an easy-going, pleasure-loving lot. The rapid accumulation of wealth through the fortunes of war and oppression of the poor led to extravagant indulgences in the palace of Samaria. In one of the most graphic passages in the whole Old Testament,² Amos takes us into a home of the aristocracy where we are given a close-up view of their luxurious life:

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1. Kent: The Social Teachings of the Prophets and Jesus, p. 24
2. Cf. McFadyen: A Cry for Justice, p. 76

"Ye ... that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the stall; that sing idle songs to the sound of the viol; that invent for themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief oils ... "1

The leaders of the nation who should be busy about the affairs of state, are lazily stretched out on divans inlaid with ivory. It was the usual custom in Israel to sit erect while eating, whether it be on the floor or on a seat.² The rich, however, are here described as reclining at table. This is regarded by the shepherd-prophet as a sure indication of "effeminacy and luxury."³ Furthermore, these indolent rulers add to their profligacy the sins of gluttony and intemperance. They feast upon the choicest lambs out of the flock and the finest calves from the stall. Lively songs are idly improvised to the accompaniment of the viol. The revelry at these sumptuous banquets is heightened by the intemperate drinking of wine from extra large bowls. In keeping with the extravagance and merry-making, they anoint themselves with the most costly perfumes.

The end of such a life of debauchery can be only destruction. No one can disregard the moral laws of the universe without suffering dire consequences. Amos was fearless in predicting that judgment was bound to ensue.

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1. Amos 6:4-6

2. Cf. Gen. 27:19; Judg. 19: 6; I Sam. 20:5; II Kings 4:10

3. Driver: The Books of Joel and Amos, p. 198

The revelry of those who stretch themselves out upon soft couches shall cease. They shall all be taken captive.¹

"The luxury of no civilisation can be measured without its women ..."² Neither does Amos forget them. With scathing words he exposes the wives of these rich rulers:

"Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, that oppress the poor, that crush the needy, that say unto their lords, Bring and let us drink. The Lord Jehovah hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that they shall take you away with hooks, and your residue with fish-hooks."³

In this passage the prophet makes two direct references to the luxurious life of the women who dwelt in the palace of Samaria. At the outset he pictorially and most aptly addresses them as the "kine of Bashan." The Territory of Bashan was a fertile region east of the Jordan, whose pasture lands were particularly fine for the fattening of cattle.⁴ In using the phrase, therefore, the prophet was no doubt thinking of the sleek, well-fed cattle which he had seen on many occasions in his shepherd life. The women of the palace were as the cattle of the field, waxing fat in their bovine ease wrung from the poor. The finer qualities of their womanhood had become coarse. As brutes, they lived only to satisfy their base desires.

Their voluptuous life further expresses itself in intemperance. They urge their husbands to provide the

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1. Cf. Amos 6:7

2. Smith: op. cit., p. 147

3. Amos 4:1-2

4. Cf. Driver: op. cit., p. 167

wine so they may carouse. Perilous indeed is the situation when the foremost women of a land cast aside all decency and refinement to be governed by their lower passions and animal appetites. Amos sounds the note of destruction. The day is coming when, like fish pulled out of the water on a hook, they shall be violently jerked from their indolence and luxury and led away into captivity.¹

In the case of both the rulers and their wives, Amos does not denounce them for their wealth, but rather for the selfish and extravagant use to which it was put. The positive social principle growing out of his denunciation of the rulers would, therefore, be a wise and unselfish expenditure of wealth.

(2) The Problem of Oppression. The term "oppression" well describes the method used by the ruling class in the accumulation of wealth. Though it was the business of the rulers to protect the rights of the poor, they were among the first to rob them. Twice in his message, Amos definitely condemns the practice of oppression by the aristocracy. He says:

"Publish ye in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and behold what great tumults are therein, and what oppressions in the midst thereof. For they know not to do right, saith Jehovah, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces. Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah: An Adversary there shall be, even round about the land;

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1. Driver: op. cit., p. 168

and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be plundered. Thus saith Jehovah: As the shepherd rescueth out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be rescued that sit in Samaria in the corner of a couch, and on the silken cushions of a bed."¹

Amos calls upon the heathen nations, Ashdod and Egypt, to come to Samaria and there behold the corruption within the palace. The four words describing the life, tumults, oppression, violence, and robbery,² all suggest the ruthless means employed by the rulers in amassing their fortunes. The word tumult "refers to the turbulent and voluptuous life of the nobles"³ growing out of a disregard of justice. It is the "result of a state in which might rules over right,"⁴ embodying, therefore, the idea of oppression of the poor. Violence and robbery are stored up in their palaces, or in other words, the rulers replenished their coffers literally by robbing the poor of their few pence.⁵ They knew "not to do right,"⁶ that is, to do what was straightforward, honest.⁷ Instead of helping the needy, as was their duty, they deliberately oppressed them for the sake of personal gain.

It is against such unjust practices in the ac-

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1. Amos 3:9-12
2. Cf. Amos 3:9f
3. Harper: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea, p. 77
4. Driver: op. cit., p. 163
5. Cf. Ibid.
6. Amos 3:10
7. Cf. Cripps: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos, p. 160

quisition of wealth that the prophet raises his voice. An adversary, Assyria,¹ will pounce upon their palaces like a lion upon a sheep. The few people of Samaria who will not be destroyed are likened to the scant remains of a sheep, such as two legs and a piece of an ear which the shepherd rescued from the leavings of the lion's feast.²

The oppression of the poor by the ruling class is aggravated in that the women of the palaces are guilty of the same unjust and inconsiderate treatment of the weak as their husbands. They "oppress the poor" and "crush the needy."³ One can almost hear the crunching of the bones as the enslaved sufferers toil day in and day out under the greedy and grabby hands of the oppressors. Once the shekels are obtained, they are spent recklessly in the mad pursuit of pleasure. As Driver suggests:

"The wages, or other dues unjustly withheld from the poor, enabled the ladies of Samaria the more readily to indulge their own luxurious and expensive tastes."⁴

Such conduct on the part of these women affords but another indication to Amos that judgment is inevitable. The positive principle underlying these stern indictments of the ruling class is this: Wealth accumulated through oppression will ultimately recoil to the destruction of the oppressor.

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1. Cf. Cripps: op. cit., p. 161
2. Cf. Amos 3:11f
3. Amos 4:1
4. Driver: op. cit., p. 168

(3) The Problem of Indifference. In constantly yielding to low impulses, the nobles of Israel had lost the capacity to sympathize, or to be concerned about the social welfare of their fellow men. With one stroke Amos paints their deplorable state: "they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."¹ Joseph, their fellow Hebrew, is broken in body and spirit because of ruthless oppression. Yet they care not. McFadyen says:

"The test of a true statesman is that he is grieved, sick, when the people are broken--as, for example, by social injustice."²

Truly there was ample reason for concern, but these indolent and dissolute politicians cared naught about the needs of their people. For this, along with their many other sins, the rulers of Israel shall be the first to go into captivity.³ The fact that the rulers are responsible for the safeguarding of the rights of the poor and defenseless is the positive principle underlying this indictment.

(4) The Problem of False Security. Political supremacy and material prosperity gave to the rulers of Israel a sense of security which turned a deaf ear to the predictions of destruction made by Amos. He deals with this problem when he says:

"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and to them that are secure in the mountain of Samaria, the nota-

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1. Amos 6:6
2. McFadyen: A Cry for Justice, p. 77f
3. Cf. Amos 6:7

ble men of the chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come! Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines: are they better than these kingdoms? or is their border greater than your border?--ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near!"¹

Though the prophet includes in his denunciation the kingdom of Judah, his primary interest is in the notables of Israel. They are secure, that is, they "live on in tranquility and contentment, insensible to real danger."² In an effort to break down their false confidence in power and wealth, Amos calls their attention to the kingdoms of Calneh, Hamath, and Gath, as examples of "fallen greatness."³ Though prosperous and powerful at one time, disaster had now overtaken them. Even so, Israel should take warning. Wealth and power are no guarantee of stability. Though they "chase away"⁴ the evil day, destruction is certain, for the very things which bring it on, violence and injustice, reign supreme in their palaces.

Amos makes it clear that there is no security in political supremacy or material prosperity, neither in the moral corruption of their lives. Therefore the rulers have no basis whatsoever for feeling secure. Their kingdom is soon to crumble and fall. Amos finds the only assured basis for national and individual security in God: "Seek Jehovah,

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1. Amos 6:1-3
2. Driver: The Books of Joel and Amos, p. 194
3. Ibid., p. 195
4. Cripps: op. cit., p. 205

and ye shall live."¹

b. Juridical Problems

(1) The Correction of Injustice. The administration of justice is essential for the maintenance of right relationships between individuals and classes within society. There are always some members of the social group who are eager to take advantage of others to accomplish their own selfish ends. It is therefore necessary to have law courts whose primary purpose is to preserve justice in human relations.

Under the monarchy, the king was Israel's final court of appeal. However, he also appointed deputies or judges who held court in the city gate.² Though intrusted with juridical power, these men misused their power for personal ends. Amos addresses them with the indictment, "Ye who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth."³ Justice rightly administered is wholesome and sweet, but when perverted by its officers it is like wormwood, bitter and cruel.⁴ These iniquitous judges do not obey the dictates of civil and social righteousness, but cast it to the ground and trample upon it.⁵ This is exemplified in their receiving of bribes, and by

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1. Amos 5:6
2. Cf. Soares: *The Social Institutions and Ideals of the Bible*, p. 193; Kent: *The Social Teachings of the Prophets and Jesus*, p. 45
3. Amos 5:7
4. Cf. Driver: *op. cit.*, p. 182
5. Cf. Cripps, p. 183

their attitude toward those who love justice.

(a) Bribery. To accept bribes from the rich and then render unjust decisions in their favor, was a common practice in the law courts of Israel. The judges "sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes."¹ Driver says:

"The venal Israelitish judges, for a bribe, pronounced the innocent guilty, i. e. 'sold' them for a consideration to any one whose advantage it might be to have them condemned: in a civil case, by giving judgment in favor of the party really in the wrong, in a criminal case, by condemning the innocent in place of the guilty. Righteous is used here not in an ethical, but in a forensic sense, of one 'righteous' in respect to the particular charge brought against him."²

It was in this way that many a poor debtor, who owed but a few pence, the value of a pair of shoes, was compelled to become a slave of his creditor.³ The judges sacrificed personal and juridical integrity to carry out their own selfish purposes.

The same evil is again denounced by Amos when he says:

"For I know how manifold are your transgressions, and how mighty are your sins--ye that afflict the just, that take a bribe, and that turn aside the needy in the gate from their right."⁴

The judges afflict the innocent ones, in that they accept bribes from the rich and, therefore, are biased in their decisions; and also in that they will not hear the cases

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1. Amos 2:6

2. Driver: op. cit., p. 151

3. Cf. Keil, C. F., and Delitzsch, F.: The Twelve Minor Prophets, Vol. I, p. 253

4. Amos 5:12

of the poor, even though they be in the right, since they have no money to bribe the judge. The needy are turned aside in the gate; they are not given a hearing though they have a perfect right to be heard. The acceptance of bribes must cease, in order that the poor may be given their right.

(b) Hatred. The character of the men who sit as judges is further seen in that "They hate him that reproveth in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly."¹ The man who protests in the court, either by pleading the case of the innocent or exposing the evils of the guilty, is hated and abhorred by these judges. Greed has so warped their emotions that the very thing they are required to preserve, they hate. As judges they ought to love justice, and welcome any man who seeks to safeguard it. However, since they perverted justice, their mansions of hewn stone and their acres of pleasant vineyards, that in which they have invested their ill-gotten gains, shall be destroyed.

(2) The Establishment of Justice. Justice is one of the key words of Amos' social message. In order that the courts may be reformed, injustice must be corrected and justice established.

Amos' plea for the enthronement of justice comes

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1. Amos 5:10

at a high point in his message. The words "Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish justice in the gate:"¹ are part of a series of hortatory admonitions to "Seek Jehovah" and "Seek good."² The prophet in this portion of his message makes a supreme effort to get the people of Israel to change their ways by turning to Jehovah and doing that which is right and good in their relationships with their fellow men. The transformation of the juridical system is an important factor in bringing about this change in Israelitish society; therefore, justice must be established in the gate. Only as this injunction is obeyed, only as the judges refuse to take bribes, only as they love justice and do all in their power to administer it, only then will the suffering of the oppressed be mitigated and the future of the nation made secure.

We have seen the corruption in the palace and in the court. The evils intrenched there point to an inevitable destruction of the nation. When leaders use their office as a means to selfish ends, their fall is not far hence. Even so, Amos must warn Israel of her doom. The nation shall be plundered by the enemy, Assyria, and the people shall be led into captivity.³

Since Amos prophesied the destruction of a nation whose political system, both administrative and

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1. Amos 5:15

2. Amos 5:6 and 5:14

3. Cf. Amos 3:11 and 6:7

juridical, was used as a machine for the selfish accumulation of wealth by oppression, we may infer that the positive social principle underlying his indictment is that it is the duty of rulers and officials in a government to protect jealously the rights of both the poor and the rich, and to promote the welfare of each citizen.

2. The Economic Problem

a. The Problem of Prosperity

The economic situation in Israel in the eighth century gave Amos much reason for concern. We have characterized this period as a time of great prosperity. The turning of Israel's defeats into victories brought not only political power, but swelled the treasuries of the state as well. However, accompanying this rapid accumulation of wealth were many evils which pervaded the whole social life. As already noted, among the wealthy it engendered a life of extravagance and luxury.¹ Immorality and intemperance were not the least conspicuous among both men and women.² The whole moral tone of the nation was at a low pitch. Another evil, likewise already referred to, brought on by a sudden prosperity, was greed for more money. This led to a merciless oppression of the poor. Amos raised his voice in protest against these evils. He criticized the wealthy, not because they

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1. Cf. Amos 6:4-6

2. Cf. Amos 2:7-8; 4:1

were rich, but for the methods they used in procuring their fortunes and the reckless way in which they spent them.

b. The Problem of Poverty

If we measure a nation's prosperity in terms of a wealthy minority, we may correctly speak of eighth-century Israel as a prosperous nation. However, if our investigation is in terms of the majority, we see nothing but dire poverty. It was not a poverty due to personal negligence, but resulting from the vicissitudes of war and exploitation by the rich. The poor are oppressed, and deprived of their just rights in the courts.¹ Inability to pay but a small debt is the only ground for enslavement by the rich landlords.² Their life is literally ground out by the wealthy oppressor.³ Seeing the poor in such destitute circumstances, Amos takes up their cause, not to excuse the poverty-stricken for any disregard of their moral obligations, but to insist upon their right. Justice must be established in the courts, for that alone will bring release to the helpless.

c. The Problem of Exploitation

In dealing with the problem of the rich oppressing the poor, Amos denounces certain specific methods used

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1. Cf. Amos 5:12
2. Cf. Amos 2:6
3. Cf. Amos 5:11

by the wealthy in their exploitations.

(1) Commercial dishonesty. In keeping with the materialistic temper of the time, business resorted to dishonest methods:

"Wherever men care more for the things that can be tasted and counted, handled and weighed, than for the things of the spirit, sooner or later they will learn to be unscrupulous in securing them. If money and the things that it can buy are put first, honor will be put second."¹

The merchants of Israel made the accumulation of wealth their first and principal objective, and did not hesitate to employ dishonest methods to realize their selfish ends. With indignant speech, Amos denounces them for their shady practices:

"Hear this, O ye that would swallow up the needy, and cause the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell grain? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit; that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes, and sell the refuse of the wheat? Jehovah hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? yea, it shall rise up wholly like the River; and it shall be troubled and sink again, like the River of Egypt."²

Obsessed with the thought of money-making, the merchants regarded the sabbath and sacred days as an interruption. They were days to be endured, rather than conscientiously observed. Men were nervously anxious for the sun to set,

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1. McFadyen, John E.: "An Old Testament Message"; The Expositor, Vol. XXI (1921), p. 6
2. Amos 8:4-8

that they might go back to their business and again rob their fellow men.

Almost every possible means was used to cheat the customer. They made the "ephah small, and the shekel great."¹ This was the Hebrew way of saying that they gave short weight, and charged exorbitant prices. To deceive further, they misrepresented their produce, selling "the refuse of the wheat", the poor quality wheat, for what was thought to be first-grade wheat.² By these very practices they were swallowing the needy, practically taking from them all the money they had, and causing the poor of the land to fail.³

Therefore, "Jehovah hath sworn"⁴ and He will not forget their evil works. Because of their enormities, the land shall tremble. It shall rise up like the River of Egypt and in its convulsions the merchants shall be destroyed.

Amos is saying that no group can exploit the defenseless masses and get away with it. A day of reckoning will come. In the case of these rich merchants he traces their exploitations to the source, commercial dishonesty. Likewise, it is at this point where the knife must be laid, if the pain of oppression is to be alle-

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1. Amos 8:5
2. Amos 8:6
3. Cf. Amos 8:4
4. Amos 8:7

viated. The merchants must forsake their dishonest business practices and employ honest standards. Honesty, not profit, must become the ruling principle in all business relations.

(2) Bribery. Bribing judges in the court was another device used by the wealthy in afflicting the poor. They "buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes."¹ As we have noted previously, the judges "sold the righteous for silver,"² showing that they were the recipients of the bribe. Again we see that the rich "buy the poor for silver," showing that they were responsible for the bribe. Since the judges were more concerned in lining their own pockets with money than with administering justice, they eagerly accepted the bribes and rendered their verdicts to please the rich. Thus on many occasions the poverty-stricken, unable to pay a small indebtedness, were tried and, losing the case, were forced to become the slaves of the rich without wages for their toil. Amos insists that bribery must cease, and justice be established.

Is it any wonder that the prophet was a champion for the poor? They were mistreated on every hand. As for the wealthy, who oppress them through dishonesty in business and bribery in the courts, their distress shall soon

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1. Amos 8:6
2. Amos 2:6

be upon them. The end shall be as "a bitter day."¹

3. The Religious Problem

a. The Problem of False Worship

When Amos placed the plumb-line of God's righteousness along the crooked walls of Israel's political and economic injustices, he saw that dissolution of the social order was inevitable. Further justification for the prophet's message of doom lay in the fact that religion, the foundation upon which all moral and ethical principles of society rest, was rotten to the core. As Cheyne says: "The real ground of Amos's prophetic pessimism is the increasingly unsound religious condition of his people."²

The prophet faced a people who were very religious, zealous in their worship; but their worship was shallow and false, for they knew not Jehovah, nor endeavored to live according to His standards of righteousness. They divorced their religion from their conduct. To Amos the two were inseparable. The ethical and moral principles by which the prophet measured the whole of Israel's life were rooted in the Being of God. It was in His Name that Amos addressed his own people. Let us now examine the prophet's message as it bears on their religious life.

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1. Amos 8:10

2. Cheyne, Thomas Kelly: "Amos", Encyclopaedia Biblica, Vol. I

(1) Immorality. The worship of Jehovah degenerated to such a pathetic level that prostitution was habitually practiced within the temple walls as a religious rite. In describing this Amos says:

"And a man and his father go unto the same maiden, to profane my holy name: and they lay themselves down beside every altar upon clothes taken in pledge;"¹

These licentious rites were evidently adopted from the Canaanites who regarded prostitution as an integral part of the worship of their fertility gods. Such sensuality, however, is in direct contradiction to the character of God, and, therefore, a desecration of His Holy Name.

Furthermore, their sin was aggravated in that they reposed upon garments which had been taken from the poor in pledge and, in contravention of the Law, were not returned at sunset.² According to Driver,

"the large square outer garment, or cloak, called the salmah, thrown around the person by day, was used as a covering at night; and hence the provision that, if a poor man (whose sole covering it probably would be) were obliged to pawn it, it should be restored to him for the night."³

Failure to do this was a sin against man and God.

(2) Perversity. Amos regards the religious practices of the people as a profanation of the Name of Jehovah.⁴ The original meaning of the word "profane"

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1. Amos 2:7-8

2. Exod. 22:26f

3. Driver: "The Books of Joel and Amos", pp. 153f

4. Amos 2:7

connotes an act which is inconsistent with the character of God, committed deliberately and intentionally.¹ The people know what is right, but choose the wrong. They ignore God's way, and go their own willful way. In such conduct they manifest a spirit of perversity and thus show contempt of the Holy God.²

(3) Intemperance. "In the house of their God they drink the wine of such as have been fined."³ That is, with the money extorted from the poor they buy the wine for their temple carousals. George Adam Smith vividly describes this as "A riot of sin: the material of their revels is the miseries of the poor, its stage the house of God!"⁴

(4) Ritualism. Israel used her zeal in the observance of religious rites as a covering under which to hide her godless life. In an ironical tone Amos exposes her shallow ritualistic practices:

"Come to Bethel, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgressions; and bring your sacrifices every morning and your tithes every three days; and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill-offerings and publish them; for this pleaseth you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord Jehovah."⁵

Bethel and Gilgal were important centers of Israelitish worship. Over-zealous in carrying out the forms of wor-

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1. Cf. Driver: op. cit., p. 153

2. Cf. Keil and Delitzsch: The Twelve Minor Prophets, Vol. I, p. 254

3. Amos 2:8

4. Smith: The Book of the Twelve Prophets, Vol. I, p. 137

5. Amos 4:4f

ship, the people frequently came to the shrines. Instead of bringing the sacrifices once a year,¹ they bring them every morning. Tithes were ordinarily brought every three years,² but now they bring them every three days. They offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving as was the custom.³ They ostentatiously announce their sacrificial giving so the world may know how religious they are. Though these outward rites please them, this is so much sinning in the sight of Jehovah. The moral and spiritual life of which these sacrifices are intended to be the expressions is entirely lacking.⁴ Therefore, Jehovah speaking through the prophet says to the people of Israel:

"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt-offerings and meal-offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts."⁵

Jehovah hates, He despises, He cannot accept the worship of a people whose very religious festivities and solemn convocations are teeming with immorality and intemperance. Neither can He regard a people's worship when, in their relationships with their fellow men, they are set on perverting justice and exploiting the poor for the sake of personal ends. Such revelry and social injustice are in absolute opposition to the character of Him who is Holy and

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1. Cf. I Sam. 1:3, 7, 21

2. Cf. Deut. 14:28

3. Cf. Lev. 8:12f, 15; 22:29

4. Cf. Driver: op. cit., p. 170

5. Amos 5:21f

Righteous. Israel's ritualistic practices are therefore of no consequence in bringing them Jehovah's favor, but only reveal their hypocrisy. Their entire worship is false. Though the people trust in this pseudo-worship, believing that God's blessing is upon them, and looking forward to a day of greater prosperity, the day of Jehovah, Amos warns them that the day of Jehovah will be a day of darkness, a day of destruction and doom, a day when the nation shall be laid waste, and the people shall go into captivity.¹ A false religion may inspire false confidence, but the prophet sees that disaster is sure to come. No nation is secure whose religion is sensuous and divorced from daily life.

b. The Promotion of True Worship

(1) Seek Jehovah. Heretofore the dominant note in the prophet's message has been one of denunciation and judgment. However, there is a brighter side to the picture. Amos does not leave Israel in a state of hopelessness and despair, but suggests a way out. His message reaches a high peak as he announces the cure for Israel's social ills. It is expressed in the words:

"For thus saith Jehovah unto the house of Israel,
Seek ye me, and ye shall live; but seek not Bethel,
nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba:
for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Beth-
el shall come to naught. Seek Jehovah, and ye shall
live; lest he break out like fire in the house of

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1. Cf. Amos 5:18-20 and 5:27

Joseph, and it devour, and there be none to quench it in Bethel."¹

"Seek Jehovah, and ... live" is the pointed and direct appeal Amos makes to Israel. Driver sets forth the meaning of the phrase when he says:

"To seek God was a standing expression for consulting Him by a prophet, or an oracle, even on purely secular matters. ... but it is also used of seeking or caring for Him more generally, by paying regard to His revealed will, and studying to please Him by the practice of a righteous and holy life. ... The latter is the sense which the expression has here. Seek ye me, says the prophet in Jehovah's name, by the means that I approve, and you will live, i. e. escape the threatened destruction."²

Amos is here contending for a personal relationship between Israel and their God. The assiduous ritual services at Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba, had become an end, rather than a means to an end, the worship of Jehovah. The people were familiar with the ceremonies but they did not know Him. Seeking Jehovah, therefore, involved a coming to know His character and will, and living in obedience to His will. Not only would this mean a change in the character of worship, but in Israel's social life as well. Though true worship consists first and foremost in seeking Jehovah, it has its counterpart in living a righteous and just life. This emphasis on right living is the particular burden of the social message of Amos. Let us consider it further.

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1. Amos 5:4-6
2. Driver: op. cit., p. 180

(2) Seek good. Morality was not divorced from the religion of Amos, but was an integral part of it. In two great utterances he insists that social justice be established:

"Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live; and so Jehovah, the God of hosts, will be with you, as ye say. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish justice in the gate: it may be that Jehovah, the God of hosts, will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph."¹

and again, "Let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."²

Having already told Israel to "Seek Jehovah" the prophet now appeals to them to "Seek good."³ The context helps us to determine the meaning of the term "good." Being here associated with establishing justice in the gate, the term takes on a definite social color. McFadyen defines it as follows, "it is the doing of justice in society, the securing of fair play between man and man."⁴ Leslie says, "To seek the good means to seek justice and righteousness in Israelite life."⁵ Such a search, if honestly pursued, would mean a complete change in the society of Israel, for they loved the evil and hated the good.

The fact that Amos is possessed with the passion to have justice pervade the whole social life of Israel, is

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1. Amos 5:14f
2. Amos 5:24
3. Amos 5:6, 14
4. McFadyen: A Cry for Justice, p. 59
5. Leslie, Elmer A.: Old Testament Religion in the Light of its Canaanite Background, p. 172

pictorially and forcefully stated in the immortal words:
"Let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a
mighty stream."¹

In the preceding verses the prophet, speaking
for Jehovah, expressed a scorn for the feasts and assem-
blies of the people.² Jehovah despises the ceremonial
when void of righteousness in life. Israel has obstructed
the flow of justice and righteousness throughout her life.
Amos pleads that they may be given free course. Driver
helps to bring out the truth clothed in this figure of
speech when he says:

"Stream is in the Heb. nahal, a word for which there
is no proper English equivalent, but which corres-
ponds really to the Arabic wady, so often found in
descriptions of travel in Palestine. The nahal, or
wādy, is a torrent running down through a narrow val-
ley, which in the rainy season forms usually a copi-
ous stream, while in summer it may be reduced to a
mere brook or thread of water, or may even be entire-
ly dry. Righteousness, Jehovah claims, should roll
on like a perennial (or ever-flowing) wādy, like a
wādy which is never so dried up, but flows continuous-
ly."³

The stream of justice in Israel had run dry,
for, as we have seen, the rich crushed the poor and needy
in that they perverted justice in the courts and used dis-
honest business methods in order to realize their own self-
ish ends. God could not accept the worship of such a peo-
ple. He demands that they have a tender regard for the

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1. Amos 5:24
2. Cf. Amos 5:21-23
3. Driver: The Books of Joel and Amos, p. 191

poor, seek to remove the evils which corrupt their social life, and build a society which will respect the rights of every individual. Justice and righteousness must permeate every avenue of their life, political, economic, and religious, as an ever-flowing stream. Only as Israel does this, is there any hope that the fast-approaching judgment will be averted.

Thus it becomes evident that Amos regards the worship of Jehovah as acceptable to Him only as the ritual and sacrifice are divested of all insincerity, immorality, and intemperance; and the people, on the one hand, possess a pure, whole-hearted purpose to seek Jehovah, and, on the other hand, establish justice as the base-line of their mutual relationships. It follows, therefore, that were the worship of God what it ought to be, Israel's social ills would vanish.

4. The Bearing of the Social Message upon Life within Israel

Having considered Amos' social message concerning Israel in detail, it will now be advantageous to gather up its salient points. The dominant tone throughout the prophet's message is denunciatory. However, he also strikes a note of hope. He exposes the transgressions of the people, he warns them of a judgment coming as a consequence of their iniquitous practices, and he exhorts them to seek Jehovah; all with the end in view of bringing about a reformation in Israel. His message,

touches the stream of Israel's social life in almost every channel or institution in which it flows.

As we have observed, Amos deprecates the wickedness in the palace and in the gate. He denounces the rulers of the nation for living in extravagance and ease, without regard for the needy. In fact, the rulers add to the misery of the poor by bleeding them of the few shekels they possess. Though it is their official duty to promote the welfare of society and of its constituent individuals, they misuse their office to gratify their own personal ambitions. The judges, likewise, are deserving of Amos' denunciations, for in their lust for material profit they pervert justice, rendering verdicts in favor of those who pay them bribes rather than according to the dictates of justice. If disaster is to be averted, justice must be established.

We have also noted the economic problem which Amos had to face in Israel. The wealth of the land was in the hands of a small minority, who had gained it by unfair means and who spent it recklessly, while poverty hung heavily over the majority of the citizens who were reduced to want by the unjust exploitation and oppression of the rich. Amos, therefore, condemns the rich, not for their wealth, but for the means used to amass their fortunes, and the unwise use to which they were put. The positive principle of acquiring money by legitimate means, and using it wisely, is certainly implied here. Amos

takes up the cause of the poor, not because he sees any merit in poverty, but on account of their being deprived of their human rights. To relieve the oppressed, Amos denounces the oppressor. Dishonest business methods must cease, and honesty must become the ruling principle in all economic relations.

In the last part of our study we considered Amos' message as it concerned the religious problem in Israel. Their zealous, ritualistic worship with all its sensuality, was like a festering sore, poisoning every artery of human existence. False worship was responsible for the corruption in the other avenues of life. The prophet recognizes this, and therefore insists upon the purification of worship as a remedy for Israel's social ills. Thus he says, "Seek Jehovah, and ye shall live;" and again, "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live." Destruction of the nation can be prevented only by correcting the many evils in society. According to Amos, this can be done only as the people turn to Jehovah and obey Him by living righteous and just lives.

C. Permanent Principles Intrinsic in Amos' Social Message

Our study has now proceeded to a point where it becomes possible to extract the permanent principles which are intrinsic in the social message of Amos. Though Amos

directed his message to a particular social situation, certain basic principles inherent in his utterances are universal and eternal, and therefore are applicable to our own and to every day. Herein lies the permanent value of Amos' social message.

1. Justice Must Permeate Every Avenue
of Human Relationships

Soares makes the statement that Amos sets forth only one principle, "the doom of the social order that is unjust."¹ Though we may feel that Soares has limited the message of Amos, it is certainly true that the principle he suggests occupies a major place in the message. Stated in a positive way it is that justice must permeate every avenue of human relationships. In a society where justice holds sway, the rights of every individual will be preserved. When justice is dethroned, some individuals in the social group will immediately take unfair advantage of others for the accomplishment of selfish ends. Therefore, as justice was an essential in the days of Amos, it is so also today. Only as justice dominates all of our mutual relations will the weak be protected from exploitation by the strong. Only then will the rights of the individual be preserved.

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1. Soares: The Social Institutions and Ideals of the Bible, p. 224

2. Religion and Morality are Inseparable

The worship of Israel was not acceptable to Jehovah because of the unspiritual character of their worship ceremonies, and the evil in the life of the worshippers. Amos contended that both worship and life must be in harmony with the character of the God they worship. True worship of Jehovah has its counterpart in living in right relationship with one's fellow men. Morality can not be divorced from true religion. The two are inseparable. This principle needs to be emphasized today, for we have many who worship most piously on Sunday, but wrong their fellow men throughout the week.

3. Sin against a Fellow Man is Sin against God

The term "transgressions" is used frequently by Amos in speaking of the iniquities of the surrounding nations and of Israel. We have noted that the term implies sin against man and sin against God. The barbaric crimes perpetrated against Israel by the neighboring nations, were also acts committed against God. Likewise, those groups and individuals within Israel who mercilessly oppressed the poor were not only grievously wronging them but were also sinning against Jehovah. To the prophet, a sin against a fellow creature meant sinning against God. That this relationship existed in the mind of Amos is seen further in that, speaking in the name of Jehovah, he declares that God's judgment shall come upon the nations

and Israel for their sins, which, as we have seen, were social in their character.

4. Persistence in Sin Receives a Commensurate and Inevitable Judgment

That Jehovah will bring His judgment upon the nations whose people deliberately and continuously sin against Him and against their fellow men, is a very evident truth running throughout the entire message of Amos. Persistence in sin shall receive a commensurate and an inevitable judgment. In the same breath in which the prophet lays bare the sins of the neighboring nations, he warns them of Jehovah's judgment. Time and again as Amos exposes Israel's wickedness in her political, economic, and religious life, he predicts the day of doom which is not far removed. Though the political leaders felt secure, they were trusting in power and wealth, wherein there is no security. The prophet speaks of the day of Jehovah, a day of judgment, when Israel shall be destroyed by the enemy and carried into captivity. This is the fearful and inevitable consequence of persistent sinning.

This principle applies equally to the nations of our own day. A people who will deliberately and persistently break the moral and spiritual laws of God must ultimately reap their just doom.

However, there is one way to avert retribution, and that is by turning to Jehovah. The mighty call of the universe and God is borne to us in the clarion cry of Amos, "Seek Jehovah, and ye shall live!"

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As stated at the outset, the purpose of this study has been to determine and clearly set forth the social message of Amos. In accomplishing this end, we proceeded according to the proposed method of treatment. We are now ready to present a final summary and conclusion of the whole study.

In the first chapter, we considered the activities of the leading nations, Egypt, Assyria, and Syria, and discovered that they frequently invaded Israel. However, in the early half of the eighth century, the nations ceased their plunderings. It was a period of international silence, and Israel jumped to the opportunity to enlarge her own borders. We observed that political expansion led to an increased commercial activity and a rapid accumulation of wealth. However, it was a false prosperity, for dire poverty lurked among the masses. Civic culture for the first time emerged, but became the seed plot of corruption and vice. The morals of the people had completely collapsed. They were religious, but their worship was immoral and divorced from right conduct. Such was the state of society to which Amos came as a prophet of Jehovah, the God of Hosts.

Passing on to the next chapter, we first dis-

cussed the place held by Amos in the prophetic succession. We observed that, beginning with Amos, the prophet's rôle changed from an active engagement in the affairs of state to the proclamation of the message of Jehovah to all. In our consideration of the prophet's relation to the social process, we found him to be both a product and also a critic of it. The rest of the chapter dealt with the personal life of Amos himself. We observed that his home, occupation, and religion contributed largely to qualifying him for his task. Though a country man, from his message we observed that he had an excellent mind and was a master in using it effectively. Though these factors played a large part in equipping him for his prophetic office, his call came as a climactic experience. Amos was motivated by Jehovah to go and prophesy. Jehovah had spoken to Amos, and therefore he must speak in the name of Jehovah.

Having considered both the times and the prophet, we then turned to set forth his social message. As it concerned the neighboring nations, we noted that Amos condemned them for their merciless and inhuman treatment of other peoples. The plea that nations regard the common dictates of human justice in their international relations underlies all of these indictments.

We next dealt with the social message regarding the life within Israel. The prophet directed his

message to the life of the people as it functioned in the political, economic, and religious institutions in society. Because of the iniquitous practices in all of Israel's social institutions, Amos' message is dominantly one of judgment. From these indictments we have deduced their positive implications. However, the prophet also strikes a positive note when he appeals to Israel to seek Jehovah and to establish justice in the courts. Justice must permeate every aspect of Israel's life. However, to realize that fact, she must turn to Jehovah and seek Him. We observed that herein lies Amos' remedy for social ills. We concluded the chapter by setting forth the permanent principles which are intrinsic in Amos' social message and are therefore applicable to our own and to all times.

As we conclude, we need to emphasize an important fact of Amos' social message. Amos does not deal merely with man's relationship to man; he also includes man's relationship to God. In fact, only as man's relationship to God is what it ought to be does the prophet offer any hope for the transformation and stabilization of society. Yes, Amos insists that justice flow down as waters and righteousness as a perennial stream; but justice with Amos is no blindfolded goddess with the balances of equity in one hand and the sword of execution in the other. To him, justice is sourced in

the ever-living and ever-watchful Jehovah. Only as men know Him, thereby tapping the well from which justice and righteousness flow, will they be enabled to practice justice and righteousness in all their social relations.

Seek Jehovah, and ye shall live!

(5:6)

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