

# **AMOS' PROPHETIC MESSAGE**

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*By*

**RANDRIANJAKA Olivier**

**Tutor**

**Pr. Dr. Magnar KARTVEIT**

**SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY (MHS), STAVANGER**

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*DEDICATION*

I dedicate this thesis to my  
son Minofitahiana who was  
three months when I left my  
family in 2006.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ASAE :</b>	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte</i>
<b>NIV:</b>	<i>New International Version</i>
<b>CAT:</b>	<i>Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament</i>
<b>OTL:</b>	<i>Old Testament Library</i>
<b>IDANE:</b>	<i>Interpretations of Dreams in Ancient Near East</i>
<b>KAT:</b>	<i>Kommentar zum Alten Testament</i>
<b>ThZ :</b>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<b>VTS:</b>	<i>Vetus Testamentum Supplement</i>
<b>OTG:</b>	<i>Old Testament Guides</i>
<b>V T:</b>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<b>DBS:</b>	<i>Dictionnaire de la Bible Supplément</i>
<b>WO:</b>	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
<b>JBL:</b>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<b>HTR:</b>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<b>ZAW:</b>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche</i>
<b>BZAW:</b>	<i>Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<b>NTT:</b>	<i>Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
<b>HSM:</b>	<i>Harvard Semitic Monograph</i>
<b>JSS:</b>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<b>BA:</b>	<i>Biblical Archaeology</i>
<b>EvTh:</b>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<b>BTS:</b>	<i>Biblical and Theological Studies</i>
<b>HUCA:</b>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>

## **0. INTRODUCTION**

### **0.1. Statement of the Problem**

Nowadays, the study of the classical Israelite prophets has not yet achieved consensus on a number of important issues. As far as I am concerned with the prophet Amos in this thesis, I would say that until now, scholars have different views with regard to the intention of Amos' prophetic message. This is because apart from the numerous oracles of judgment predicting plagues, death and even the end of Israel, there are some texts which are apparently promising hope and life for the Israelite or, at least, for a "remnant". According to the five vision narratives (7: 1- 3, 4- 6, 7- 9; 8: 1- 3; 9: 1- 4) which culminates with YHWH's harsh statement predicting the end of Israel (Am 8: 2), Amos was probably sent to proclaim doom for the Northern Kingdom. Oracles of judgment leveled against both individuals and Israel as a nation are many throughout the book of Amos due to the unethical social behavior of the Israelites. Nevertheless, in that dark prophecy, exhortations especially those recorded in 5: 4- 6, 14- 15 seem to testify to the fact that the prophet Amos was also commissioned to preach and to call the obstinate Israelites into repentance. Even though Wellhausen in 1892<sup>1</sup> declared that 9: 13- 15 suddenly deals out "roses and lavender instead of blood and iron" and that Amos cannot so quickly change his mind in 9: 8- 15 to let from "the wrath of Yahweh flow milk and honey," there have been scores of scholars who have denied this passage to Amos. In discussions since the 1970s it has been suggested that the ending of the book of Amos is a voice of Deuteronomistic salvation hope.<sup>2</sup> I myself see their arguments strong enough to help us to deny the authenticity of 9: 11- 15. Therefore, I will not include this passage in my study in this thesis in this sense that the concept of restoration and salvation it contains are not from the prophet Amos but a later addition.

Thus, facing this difficult contradiction, my question is: was the prophet Amos only sent to announce doom and malediction or was he also sent to preach YHWH's words so that Israel repent and be saved?

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<sup>1</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Die Kleinen Propheten*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1963), p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, ed. S. Dean McBride, trans. Waldemar Jansen, S. Dean McBride and Charles A. Muenchow (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p.



## **0.2. The Scope of the Study**

As I have shown above, my interest is to find the intention of Amos' prophetic message. Therefore, the scope of this study is limited in the study of those texts which could directly point out to the both positive and negative sides of the prophecy of Amos. For the negative side, I will deal especially with the five vision narratives (7: 1- 3, 4- 6, 7- 9; 8: 1- 3; 9: 1- 4), the oracles of judgment against Israel (2: 6- 16; 8: 4- 14), the exile materials (3: 9- 11, 13- 15; 5: 1- 3, 12- 13, 16- 17, 21- 24, 27; 6: 7; 7: 11, 17; 9: 4, 9), the texts testifying to the incorrigibility of Israel (4: 6- 13) and "the day of YHWH" (5: 18- 20). For the positive side, my study will focus on the exhortations (5: 4- 6, 14- 15) and the motif of remnant in 3: 12 and 5: 15.

## **0.3. The Methods to be Employed**

This study of the prophecy of Amos will make use of the main tools of the various historical-critical methods. The central interest of the investigation is in the original intention of the passages in the life situation of the prophet himself. How are these texts intended to function from the point of view of the original prophetic message, in so far as this is recoverable?

In order to perceive the original intention, we will need to use textual criticism to establish the original wording of the utterances as best we can. Literary criticism will help to deal with the question of authenticity. Form criticism will provide clues to the background of the genres employed and how these genres yield meaning in the new prophetic situation. Tradition history and redaction criticism will enable us to follow the progression of an utterance from its initial proclamation to its place in the canonical book and to distinguish between the original intention and later reapplication of a passage to a new time.

## **0.4 The Plan of the Study**

This thesis will contain an introduction, part one which is divided into five chapters, part two divided into two chapters, and a conclusion.

In chapter one, I will study the five vision narratives through textual and literary criticism.

Chapter two will be focused on the study of the judgment oracles against Israel through different point of views and different perspective of interpretations of the texts in question.

In chapter three, I will deal with the exile materials through translation and interpretation of the texts.

Chapters four and five will deal with the pertinent passages concerning the incorrigibility of Israel and the phrase “the day of YHWH” in the book of Amos.

In the second part, my study will be based on the texts which could testify to the hope and salvation of Israel. To do so, I will shortly survey the different perspectives of the Am 5: 1-17, followed by the interpretation of the exhortations in the vv. 4- 6 and vv. 14- 15. Similarly, in the last chapter, I will present the different scholar debates on the motif of “remnant” in 5: 15 and its interpretation.

## Part One: TEXTS WITNESSING TO THE END OF ISRAEL

### Chapter 1: The Five Vision Narratives

#### 1.3 Problem of Translation

##### 1.3.1 The First Vision (Am. 7: 1-3)

7: 1: *This is what the Lord YHWH showed me: there was someone forming swarms of locusts, just after the king's mowing had been harvested and just as the late planting was shooting up.*

7: 2: *When they were about to finish off the herbage of the land, I said: "My Lord YHWH, forgive! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!"*

7: 3: *YHWH repented for that. "This will not happen", says the Lord.*<sup>1</sup>

The problems of translation in this first vision relate to the words יוצר and לקש (v. 1). The LXX reads ἐπιγονή, "offspring" in the place of יוצר, "creator" or "the one who is creating". Some commentators adopted this translation by reading יוצר; S. Amsler, among others, noted that Amos does not see the creator or the one who is creating (יוצר) but a flight of locust devastator meaning that YHWH is not the active subject of the plague.<sup>2</sup> We are not convinced of this translation, moreover that which is proposed by TM, which we consider to be more convincing, is followed by other former witness like the Vulgate. Probably, but not explicitly, the one creating / forming is to be understood as YHWH. And also the term יוצר, a participle, is used to describe YHWH in the hymnic material in 4: 13. The term for locusts (גב), of which biblical Hebrew has several, only occurs elsewhere in Nahum 3: 17 and may imply a meaning like "swarm of locusts".<sup>3</sup>

The word לקש is a hapax legomenon. Hammershaimb put this word in connection with the root לקש, "to be late" from which מלקוש, "the latter rain", the word which indicates the rains of spring, comes.<sup>4</sup> The reading of the LXX testifies to the difficulty of this passage: καὶ ἰδοὺ βροῦχος εἰς Γωγ ὁ βασιλεύς : *and behold one locust: the king Gog*. This means that it reads ילק (kind of locust) in the place of לקש (aftermath); אחד (one) instead of אחר (after) and נג

<sup>1</sup> My translation here and in the following.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Amsler, "Amos," *CA T XIa*, troisième édition (Génève: Labor et Fides, 1992), p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> See Joel 1: 4.

<sup>4</sup> Erling Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, trans. John Sturdy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), p. 108.

(Gog) instead of גזי (mowing). This reading is not possible in the sense that here there is no question of king Gog. We thus choose the TM's reading. In this first vision, Amos was shown a locust swarm being created and made ready just when the late planting had begun to spring up. This indicates the seriousness of the plague, in this sense that, the threat looms when the last growth of pasture and field before the summer's dry season is beginning; if it were lost the people would have nothing to carry them over until the next harvest.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.3.2 The Second Vision (Am. 7: 4-6)

7: 4: *This is what the Lord YHWH showed me: The Lord YHWH was calling for judgment by fire; it consumed the great deep and was consuming the fields.*

7: 5: *Then I said, "Lord YHWH, (I beg you), stop! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!"*

7: 6: *The Lord repented for that. "This also will not happen," said the Lord YHWH.*

The problem of translation announced by TM relates to the expression באש לרב in 7: 4b. S. Amsler<sup>6</sup> proposes to read ויהנה קרא לרב באש and behold, a flame of fire approached, whereas Wolff<sup>7</sup> prefers לרביב אש "rain of fire". The apparatus of the BHS proposes the reading להבת (flame of fire) instead of לרב באש (judgment by fire). This last one seems to me to be the most probable relevant reading. This would mean that the Lord was calling forth a legal contest to contend with his people and judge them with the punishment of fire. This expression is also common among the prophets and other Old Testament literatures.<sup>8</sup> The Hebrew רב (written without a yod also in Ex 23: 2; Pro 25: 8; Job 13: 6; 29: 16; 31: 13) is a technical term that denotes a legal disputation in which Israel is put on trial for crimes it has committed. The problem is, however, that in just such instances the next word, introduced by the particle ב, should point to the party accused.<sup>9</sup> But here באש does not refer to the accused against whom God is contending but rather to the means whereby he is about to execute his judgment. The two suggestions are an alternate word division, reading לרביב אש or an

<sup>5</sup> James Luther Mays, *Amos: A Commentary* (Great Britain: SCM Press, 1983), p. 127.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Amsler, "Amos", p. 225.

<sup>7</sup> Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, ed. S. Dean McBride, trans. Waldemar Jansen, S. Dean McBride and Charles A. Muenchow (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 292.

<sup>8</sup> Shalom M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 230-1.

For further comparison see Is 66 : 15- 16: "See the Lord is coming with fire...For with fire will the Lord contend" באש יהיה נשפט. The Hebrew רב (written without a yod also in Ex 23: 2; Pro 25: 8; Job 13: 6; 29: 16; 31: 13) is a technical term that denotes a legal disputation in which Israel is put on trial for crimes it has committed.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Gen 31: 36; Judg 6: 32; Hos 2: 4.

assumed dittography of the letter ב, that is, לִרְבֹּאֵשׁ (a mighty fire / strong blazing heat).<sup>10</sup> Although the difficulty of translation and interpretation still exists, one thing is clear, the rod of God's wrath in this vision is אֵשׁ (the fire), which most likely refers to a scorching and burning heat (compare to Joel 1: 19- 20; 2: 3). The fierce heat is seen as drying up the רִבְהוֹם תְּהוֹם “the great deep”, that is, the cosmic deep which according to biblical cosmogony lies beneath the earth and is the source of all the springs and rivers.<sup>11</sup> The imagery here is drawn from the ancient Near Eastern mythological tale of the primeval conflict between the Deity and the primordial monster of the subterranean ocean. In many of these descriptions, supernatural fire appears as one of the weapons employed by the Deity. The motif of a god wielding fire against his enemies is transferred in the Bible from the realm of mythology to that of prophetic imagery.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3.3 The Third Vision (Am. 7: 7-9)

7: 7: *This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing upon a wall [plumb line], with a plumb line in his hand.*

7: 8: *And the Lord asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will no longer pass him by".*

7: 9: *"The high places of Isaac will be desolate and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam."*

The G's reading of the 7: 7a is: οὕτως ἔδειξέν μοι κύριος.... (Thus the Lord showed me...) in which the word κύριος does not have an equivalent in TM. Wolff insert יהוה with G and V immediately after הרִבְהוֹם, as in Am 7: 1, 4.<sup>13</sup> This reading seems to be convincing in this sense that, firstly, if one sticks to TM, the subject who “shows” is anonymous, however, in the first two visions, one sees well that אֲנִי יְהוָה is the subject. Secondly, if one maintains TM, the identification of the subject “he” or “one” remains a problem. That is why we agree with the G, and this omission could be made by the copyists.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Shalom, *Amos*, p. 231.

<sup>11</sup> Otto Kaiser, “Die mythische bedeutung des Meeres in Ägypten, Ugarit und Israel” *BZAW* 78 (1959): pp. 45-49.

<sup>12</sup> James Limburg, "The Root רב and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches", *J B L LXXXVIII Part III* (September 1969): pp. 291-304.

<sup>13</sup> Hans W. Wolff, p. 300.

The second problem is in 7:7 b relating to *חומת אֵנֶךְ*: “wall of plumb or wall made of plumb”. Hammershaimb and Wolf treat the first *אֵנֶךְ* as a dittography and propose to remove it and read *חומה* in absolute state instead of *חומת* in construct state.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the expression *אֵנֶךְ חומת* is impossible. *אֵנֶךְ* literally means “lead”, but here one could translate it as “lead weight” or “plumb line”.<sup>15</sup> We thus choose the translation suggested by the BHS’ apparatus, followed by H.W. Wolf. Then the translation of the whole verse could be as follows: “*Thus the Lord showed me: the Lord was standing upon a wall and in his hand a plumb-line*”. The plumb-line is not only used in the erection of walls to ensure that they were perpendicular, but also to test walls that were dilapidated and liable to be pulled down.<sup>16</sup> This symbolic imagery fits the situation announced in Am 8: 2.

### 1.3.4 The Fourth Vision (Am. 8: 1-3)

8: 1: *Thus the Lord YHWH showed me: there was a basket of ripe fruit.*

8: 2: “*What do you see, Amos?*” he asked. “*A basket of ripe fruit,*” I answered. Then the Lord said to me, “*The end is come for my people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore*”.

8: 3: “*In that day,*” declares the Lord YHWH, “*the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many corpses -- cast everywhere! Silence!*”

The expression *קִיץ כְּלוֹב* poses a problem of translation. The majority of the commentators translate this expression by “ripe fruit basket” and the LXX with *ἄγγος ἰξευτοῦ* (fowler’s basket).<sup>17</sup> S. Amsler brings a precision and translates it by “a basket of fruit of the end of summer”.<sup>18</sup> He sticks on the fact that the word *קִיץ* designates both the hottest and the driest season of the year, from August to September, and the fruits of that period, mainly the olives and the figs. This translation is also held by *θ’* by entering an explicit correction: “*ἄγγος ὀπώρας θερίνης*” (basket of summer tree-fruit). And also in the Gezer Calendar, the eighth and last month of the agricultural year is called *ירח קץ* “month of summer fruit” which corresponds to the late summer and early autumn harvest of fruit.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, *θ’*’s translation is more convincing.

<sup>14</sup> Erling Hammershaimb, p. 111; Wolff, p. 300.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 317.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Amsler, “Amos”, p. 232.

<sup>19</sup> Shalom M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 253. ANET, p. 320a.

The second problem of translation is about the hapax legomenon שִׁירוֹת in 8: 3. This word refers to the “singing women” of the palace who intone the dirges. Songstresses are mentioned several times in the Old Testament: in 2 Sam 19: 36 and Eccl 2: 8, they appear along with male singers as part of the personnel of the royal court, and in 2 Chr 35: 25, they are together with their male counterparts in the lamentations. In all these three passages, however, the word for “female singer” is שָׂרוֹת which leads many exegetes to re-point שִׁירוֹת in this verse to שָׂרוֹת.<sup>20</sup> The apparatus of the BHS, S. Amsler and H.W. Wolf propose to read שָׂרוֹת (female singers) instead of שִׁירוֹת (songs).

Indeed, the root ילל refers to the plaintive and groaning modulation of the singers’ voice. In fact, the songs will become moanings, but not the singers who will groan. We thus prefer to maintain the text offered by TM.

The expression בְּכָל־מָקוֹם הַשְּׁלֵיף, הָס in 8: 3d is obscure and gives place to various translations, but the main idea is that the whining is occasioned by the sight of heaps of corpses strewn all about.

### 1.3.5 The Fifth Vision (Am. 9: 1-4)

9: 1: *I saw the Lord standing upon the altar, and he smote the capital so that the thresholds shook. [Then he said] [I will cleave] by earthquake all of them; those who are left I will kill with the sword. The fugitive among them shall not escape.*

9: 2: *Though they dig down to the depths, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heaven, from there I will bring them down.*

9: 3: *Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, there I will search them out and seize them. Though they hide from me at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them.*

9: 4: *Though they go into exile before their enemies, there I will command the sword to slay them. I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good."*

In 9: 1, one encounters a problem on the place of the verb וַיִּאָמֶר. H.W. Wolf omitted it, while the apparatus of the BHS moves it after הַסָּפִים and reads וַיִּךְ (and he strikes) instead of הִךְ (strike) in imperative. The question is to whom YHWH gives the order to strike? To the prophet or to someone else? If this order were given to the prophet, is he able to destroy the

<sup>20</sup> Among others E. Hammershaimb, p. 120; Hans Walter Wolff, p. 317

temple by himself? The ambiguity and lack of clarity allow for several possibilities of interpretation. It may have been addressed to the prophet or to one of the heavenly host.<sup>21</sup> Other commentators, basing their analyses on the following first person verb אֶהְרַג (I shall kill), relate the action directly to the Lord himself.<sup>22</sup> Following this translation, Rudolph for example, suggests reading either וַיִּךְ (and he smote) or the infinitive absolute הִכָּה, or an emphatic , הִכָּה אֶכָּה (I shall smite).<sup>23</sup> Weiser's explanation of the use of imperative form seems to me to be convincing. He thinks that "*Later sensitivity could not tolerate this drastically anthropomorphic image and hence established the present form of the text*".<sup>24</sup> Then I agree that YHWH himself took the action as I translate it above in the first person. Certain commentators such as A. Amsler and the apparatus of the BHS read ברעש in 9: 1 (by an earthquake) instead of בראש (on the head). The capital (כפתור) refers to the spherical knobs at the heads of the columns of the pillars that uphold the roof of the shrine. Once smitten, the threshold tremble (וירעשו). The entire temple, from the top to bottom, is in convulsion. Moreover, because of the fact that the verb רעש is very often employed in connection with earthquakes, some exegetes interpret this vision as symbolic of an earthquake and refer back to Am 1: 1.<sup>25</sup> We thus prefer to consider the reading suggested by the BHS' apparatus.

## 1.4 Literary Criticism

### 1.4.1 Unit Delimitation

There is a rupture between 6:14 and 7:1. Moreover the formula נאם־יהוה אלהי הצבאות usually concludes a prophetic oracle. On the other hand in 7: 1 we have the formula אדני יהוה ארני כה which is an introduction formula of a vision. Thus in this unit we can have the following pericopes:

7:1 - 3: vision of the locusts

7:4 - 6: vision of the fire

7:7 - 9: vision of the plumb line

<sup>21</sup> William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 188.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Amsler "Amos", p. 239; H. Walter Wolff, p. 334; E. Hammershämb, p. 131.

<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm Rudolph, *Joel- Amos- Obadja- Jona, KAT XIII/2* (Güterlson: Gerd Mohn, 1971), p. 241.

<sup>24</sup> Artur Weiser, *Die Profetie des Amos, BZAW 53* (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1929), p. 42.

<sup>25</sup> Artur Weiser, *Die Profetie des Amos*, p. 188; W. Rudolph, p. 245; H. Walter Wolff, p. 339.



8:1 - 3: vision of a basket filled with ripe fruits

9:1 - 4: vision of YHWH who executes his sentence

The pericope that we study ends here, because 9: 5 introduces another literary genre.

### 1.4.2 External Structure

As we have already detected above, our study will focus on the five vision narratives. They are presented in sequential pairs, except that between the third and the fourth vision there is an insertion, the account of Amos' historic visit to the temple at Bethel and the fateful confrontation with Amaziah, the royal high priest (7: 10- 17). We will talk about the reason of this insertion later, but here we are dealing with the form and structure of the visions themselves.

Vision 5 stands apart from the others and follows a collection of oracles in Am 8: 4- 14 found after the end of the fourth vision. The visions could be therefore listed as follows:

First Pair	{	(1)	7: 1- 3: Vision of the locusts
		(2)	7: 4- 6: Vision of the fire
Second Pair	{	(3)	7: 7- 9: Vision of the plumb line
		(4)	8: 1- 3: Vision of the ripe fruit
		(5)	9: 1- 4: Destruction of the altar and the Temple

The visions have a formal structure, which is similar in its features to the series of oracles on foreign nations in chapter 1 and 2.<sup>26</sup> There are five units in each and each concludes with a major unit, 4: 13 and 9: 5- 6.<sup>27</sup> Now we may have a closer look at the external structure of the visions.

#### 1.4.2.1 Vision 1 and 2

Let us notice that in the first two visions (7: 1 - 3; 4 - 6), YHWH repented because of the intercession of the prophet Amos. We can thus detect the following structure:

- Introduction Formula: כה הראני ארני יהוה

<sup>26</sup> Francis I. Andersen, David Noel Freedman, "Amos", *The Anchor Bible Vol. 24 A* (New York: The Anchor Bible Doubleday, 1989), p. 611.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

- Vision : והנה קרא לרב באש / והנה יוצר גבי
- Intercession of Amos : ואמר אדני יהוה חדל-נא / ואמר אדני יהוה סלח-נא
- Repentance of YHWH: נחם יהוה על-זאת

In the second pair one could notice that it is structured differently as we see it below.

#### 1.4.2.2 Vision 3 and 4

7:7 - 9 seems being the evidence of the stubbornness of Israel. What differ these two accounts from the first pair is the absence of the intercession of Amos. We find in these pericopes the following structure:<sup>28</sup>

- Introduction formula: כה הראני
- Vision: והנה כלוב קיץ / והנה אדני...
- Question of YHWH to Amos: מה-אתה ראה עמוס
- Answer of the prophet: ואמר כלוב / ואמר אנך
- YHWH's interpretation of the vision: בא הקץ / הנני שם אנך

According to Susan Niditch, this structure is that of a royal lawsuit: call to testimony, charge and judgment. We will develop this point later.

#### 1.4.2.3 Vision 5

9:1 - 4 is a kind of conclusion which insists in particular on the execution of the sentence previously announced. Its structure is the following:

- Introduction formula: ראיתי
- Vision: אחי-אדני נצב על-.....
- YHWH in action: ויך הכפתור
- Project of YHWH: אם....משם....

#### 1.4.2.4 Summary and Conclusions

After this short study of the external structure of the five visions, we could conclude in the following points:

The first four visions follow the same pattern with only minor variations, whereas the fifth not only stands apart but varies widely in form, length, and content from the others. The first

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<sup>28</sup> Susan Niditch, "The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition", *HSM* 30 (1983): 23.

two visions divide into two pairs, with each member of a pair resembling the other very closely. The concluding lines of each pair are practically the same, with the final words of YHWH in each member of the pair being identical. It is clear therefore that the message is the same for the members of a pair, and the second vision of each is intended to reinforce or confirm the first. It is worth to mention that the first four visions begin with exactly the same words, while the fifth conveys essentially the same ideas but differently. In spite of the change of vocabulary used for the intercession of Amos (חדל/סלח), the main idea does not change, the prophet Amos intercedes on behalf of the people of the Northern Kingdom.

The fifth vision differs from the previous four in several aspects. The Lord does not make the prophet see but he is himself seen (ראיתי). No object bearing a symbolic significance is present, and no dialogue takes place between God and Amos. Let us now go and see the visions deeper through an internal structure studies.

### 1.4.3 Internal Structure

#### 1.4.3.1 Vision 1 and 2

As we have already seen above that these two visions have the same structure. Here below, I will make a deeper study through these structures. In this first pair, we are dealing with the so-called “event-vision”. Amos sees an event. Mays explain that *“The meaning of the event goes without overt interpretation, for its significance is transparent in the fact of what happens and in the nature of the event in relation to the tradition about YHWH’s action.”*<sup>29</sup>

##### 1.4.3.1.1 Structure of the Vision 1

We have the following components in the vision 1:

- **Introduction Formula:**

The two visions present the same formula of introduction: הִרְאֵנִי אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה. We have the hiphil of the verb רָאָה (to make see or to show), whose semantic field is that of the vision. This semantic range includes auditory as well as visionary phenomena.<sup>30</sup> The subject is well specified, the Lord YHWH. This shows us that the origin of the event is YHWH himself. In fact, it underlines the objective aspect of the vision which comes like a foreign reality to the prophet, that is, a vision emanating from other. By this formula of introduction, the prophet

<sup>29</sup> James Luther Mays, “Amos: A Commentary,” *OTL* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), p. 124.

<sup>30</sup> H. Walter Wolff, p. 296.

would like to persuade his audience to take with serious what he announces in the sense that his message comes from YHWH.

- **The Vision**

YHWH showed the prophet his decision. He is present in the vision as the agent of the event. He did everything so that Israel comes into the repentance, but in vain. The object of the vision, the locusts, is a symbol of plague and punishment in the context of the ancient Israel. The swarm of locusts which YHWH shows to Amos is about to devour completely all vegetation. The Hebrew word עֵשֶׂב designates green plants such as weeds, grass, vegetables, cereals, growing during rainy season.<sup>31</sup> But in this context, they consist of nongrain crops such as vegetables and onions.<sup>32</sup> If locusts plague attacks in the late spring, the results are extremely deleterious. At the time when the late sowing is beginning to sprout out, the earlier sowing, the grain crop is already well advanced.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the locusts would devastate (לְאַכִּיל) not only the late crop (לִקְצֵ) but also the more developed. Since the earlier crop is still unreaped, it causes a total agricultural catastrophe. If the locust invasion were a bit earlier, when the late crop had not yet sprouted, this future harvest would remain untouched and unharmed and subsequently could be reaped.<sup>34</sup> If the locusts came a bit later, the crop would have been harvested. Either way, earlier or later at least one crop could have been saved. However, an attack precisely at this late-spring season of the year would destroy both crops and culminates in a disastrous year of famine.

Moreover, the recurrent appearance of locust swarms was one of the most dreadful plagues that afflicted the people of the Ancient East.<sup>35</sup> The horror was great in Israel because the locust was regarded as the plague of YHWH, the instrument of his judgment and curse upon Israel.<sup>36</sup> Here the prophet Amos recognizes the sign of divine anger, YHWH's wrath had broken out against his people and punishment had been decreed for Israel.

The reason for the invasion of the locusts is rather frequent in the Old Testament, especially in the book of Joel (see Joe 1: 4ff). The old texts of the Middle East also testify to the existence of the similar events. In Egypt, the Anastasi papyrus tells us about the invasion of

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<sup>31</sup> BDB, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907) p. 793.

<sup>32</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 227.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> See for example Ex 9: 31- 32.

<sup>35</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 128.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

the locusts, the worms, the mice which involved an agricultural catastrophe.<sup>37</sup> Among others ARM (Archives Royales de Mari) III mentions an invasion and a capture of locusts which are offered to the king of Terqa as food.<sup>38</sup>

- **Amos' Intercession**

At the end of the description of the danger and the damage already done, the prophet intrudes. His intervention is introduced by the verb **אמר** in the first-person qal imperfect with waw consecutive: **ואמר** (and I said). Israel's future is endangered. Therefore Amos cries out, **יהוה אדוני** (Lord YHWH!). As Wolff mentions it, this appellation is appropriate to the language of prayer, especially imploring lamentation.<sup>39</sup> Maag emphasizes the fact that this particular appellation "...uniquely and simultaneously suggests both the absolute exaltedness of YHWH and his close relationship with the prophet".<sup>40</sup> Then Amos pleaded the Lord with the phrase **סלחנא** (forgive!). The root **סלח** is etymologically related to the Akkadian *salāhu* (to sprinkle), by way of the specialized meaning "to sprinkle for the purpose of cleansing", it has developed the only meaning attested for it in the Old Testament, namely "to pardon, forgive".<sup>41</sup> Paul gives an interesting remark in stating that "*In the Old Testament this verb occurs only when the Deity is the subject or object and refers to an absolute and total pardon of sin. Man may 'forgive' (מחל) individual wrongdoings, but only God can grant complete 'pardon' (סלח).*"<sup>42</sup> Here it serves as the introduction to the brief supplication of the prophet, who begs the Lord to pardon and forgive his people. Israel's guilt is not directly mentioned, but it is the basic assumption underlying the divine punishment. Amos' petitionary plea is that Israel's sin be completely expurgated. Note that in his role as prophetic intercessor, Moses appeals to the Lord with the same verb **סלח** (Num 14: 19- 20). Amos' plea is based on the fact that "How can Jacob stand or survive?" (**מי יקום יעקב**) because "he is small" (**הוא קטן**). His appeal is not based on the hope of the possible repentance of the people. He does not call upon the traditional guarantees of salvation, nor does he cite the Lord's promises to the patriarchs.<sup>43</sup> The prayer is not motivated by a reminder of Israel's election. Nevertheless,

<sup>37</sup> L. Keimer, *ASAE* 33 (1933): pp. 97- 130.

<sup>38</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 227.

<sup>39</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 297. See 2 Sam 7: 18- 20, 22, 28; Jos 7: 7; Jer 1: 6; 4: 10; 14: 13; Ez 4: 14; 9: 8; 21: 5.

<sup>40</sup> Victor Maag, *Text, Wortschatz und Begriffswelt des Buches Amos* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1951), p. 119.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 229.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Amsler, p. 224.

he immediately intercedes. One of the most basic functions of the prophet is to serve as an advocate for his people and defend them by acting as an intercessory mediator between them and the Lord. In terms of covenant, Amos seems to have accused YHWH, being powerful and great, of being unfair in this sense that he wants to destroy the weak or the small Jacob.

- **YHWH's Repentance**

God considered Amos' supplication. Israel is spared because YHWH consents to accept the prophetic plea. YHWH "relented concerning" (נחם יהוה על) the plague he showed in the vision. The phrase על נחם refers to the Lord's changing his decision and not executing a predicted doom (Ex 32: 12, 14; Jer 18: 8; Joe 2: 13; Jon 3: 10; 4: 2). His compassion overcome his justice and judgment. It is worth to notice that here there is no indication that YHWH forgave Israel. In Moses' case, for example, the Lord responded clearly that "I forgive as you have asked" (סלחתי כדברך).<sup>44</sup> Here God relents but does not forgive. YHWH has promised that "it will not happen" (לא תהיה). In itself "to repent concerning" means neither forgiveness nor condemnation.<sup>45</sup> Only the punishment has been offset and may be postponed. Is that mean that YHWH gave Israel the opportunity to repent? Or was he offering an opportunity for selection of punishment?<sup>46</sup> The next vision may give us the answer.

#### 1.4.3.1.2 Structure of the Vision 2

We have the same components as in the first vision:

- **Introduction Formula**

The second vision shares several basic characteristics with the first one. They both commence with a formal introductory presentation of the vision: כה הראני אדני יהוה (This is what the Lord YHWH showed me).

- **The Vision**

The object of the vision, although still under scholarly debate, is about the devouring fire.<sup>47</sup> God is summoning to contend Israel by fire (קרא לרב באש). The verb קרא refers to the

<sup>44</sup> Num 14: 19- 20.

<sup>45</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 298.

<sup>46</sup> 2 Sam 24: 12: "Go and tell David, 'This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.'" (NIV translation)

<sup>47</sup> See the short presentation of the different translations above, pp. 5- 6.

courts scene, in which YHWH is at the same time the prosecution, the judge and the one who carries out the sentence.<sup>48</sup> In the vision Amos sees the great deep, in which all springs have their origin, is dried up by the strong heat. The question is that is it a real devouring fire or a symbolic imagery of a severe dryness of the land. The most common scholarly agreement is the former, but Hammershämb gives another probable significant translation of the phrase *לֹרֶב בַּאֵשׁ*.<sup>49</sup> In summer, when everything is dry after months of strong sun, small fire start which spread in every direction with incredible speed, and burn up both grass and trees. Streams and watercourses have dried up in summer, so firefighting is difficult and almost impossible. Then this vision means that by the time the primeval deep has been dried up everything will be so dry that the fire will consume the earth with that is on it. In either case, dryness or real fire, the objects of YHWH's punishment are heat and fire. The searing flame begins to consume the "portioned land" (*החלק*) which means either the territory of Israel (Mic 2: 4) or Israel as the portion of YHWH (Deut 32: 9).<sup>50</sup> This also may mean the portion of the land allotted to the individual Israelite farmer.<sup>51</sup> Here also we have the "event-vision".

- **Amos' Intercession**

Terrified by the vision, the prophet Amos again intercedes, with the same idea but with different verb as in the first vision, that YHWH desist (*חדל-נא*). The prophet beseeches the Lord "to relent" or "to cease" (*חדל*) in place of pardon (*סלח*). The supplication to cease relates to the execution of the punishment; it is not a prayer for a total forgiveness.<sup>52</sup> The prophet begs the Lord to cease to execute the plague he sees in the vision. This is because his first plea for pardon was not granted, what he can do now is to rely on God's mercy and kindness. Amos uses the same rhetorical question: "How can Jacob stand, for he is small?". Israel lived in pride and thought themselves invulnerable (6: 1ff; 8: 13). "*But*", stated Mays, "*Amos sees them before the awesome majesty and might of YHWH's wrath in their true helpless, hopeless littleness.*"<sup>53</sup> In Amos' theology the election was not a ground for indulgence but a basis for judgment.<sup>54</sup> For him YHWH is passionately concerned for the

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<sup>48</sup> Erling Hammershämb, p. 110.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 131.

<sup>51</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 299.

<sup>52</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 233.

<sup>53</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 129.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

weak, the poor and the helpless.<sup>55</sup> Therefore the only hope for their salvation or survival before YHWH lay in the very contradiction of religious confidence and national pride.

- **YHWH's Repentance**

Fortunately, Amos' appeal is once again heard and YHWH revokes his plan by using the same expression as in the first vision: "it will not happen" (לֹא תִהְיֶה). YHWH once again countermands his plan. The verb נָחַם (to repent) when used with YHWH as subject does not include any sense of regret or remorse about a course of action seen as wrong.<sup>56</sup> The outcome of the second vision leaves a sense of unbearable tension. Israel has been spared the cataclysmic outbreak of the divine wrath only because of YHWH's willingness to hear the intercession of the prophet. But, of course, the ongoing process of the judgment is still on the way because the circumstances which provoked the decree of punishment continue unchanged.

#### **1.4.3.1.3 Summary and Conclusion**

In this first pair we are dealing with "event-vision" type of vision. Amos sees an event; as he watches it moves towards completion. In these first two visions YHWH shows Amos a scene that horrifies him so that he cries out to YHWH to forgive or to desist. In both occasions YHWH changes his mind and reassures the prophet that the disastrous plagues will not occur. It is clear that there is a single interchange between the prophet and YHWH, initiated by the prophet and concluded by God.

#### **1.4.3.2 Vision 3 and 4**

The third and the fourth visions change in content, form and outcome. Amos is shown mundane objects whose meaning is not obvious, a plumb line and a basket of summer ripe fruit. The meaning of what is seen is revealed through the dialogue between YHWH and the prophet Amos. The objects serve as symbols and correspond to a keyword in a divine decree.<sup>57</sup> That is why Niditsch called this category of vision "symbolic vision" but Mays prefers the term "wordplay vision".<sup>58</sup> Their structure, as I have showed earlier, has the

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<sup>55</sup> This view is developed in 2: 6- 8.

<sup>56</sup> W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament I*, 1961, p. 216.

<sup>57</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 124.

<sup>58</sup> Susan Niditch, p. 19. James Luther Mays, p. 125.



following components: (1) Introduction formula, (2) Vision, (3) Question of YHWH to Amos, (4) Answer of the prophet, (5) YHWH's interpretation of the vision and (6) the oracle of judgment. Let us now see these elements.

#### 1.4.3.2.1 Vision 3

In the third vision we have the following components:

- **Introduction Formula**

The introduction formula of the vision is the same as we saw in the first pair: **הֲרֵאֵנִי וְהִנֵּה אֲדֹנָי כֹּהֵן**. The prophet is shown the Lord holding a plumb line in his hands. The verb **רָאָה** is in hiphil which emphasizes the fact that the vision was emanating from outside the prophet.

- **The Vision**

Instead of seeing a punitive event, the vision of Amos is focused on an object whose function is symbolic of what YHWH is about to execute. The object is from something from everyday life, a plumb line (**אֵנָךְ**), that is a cord and a weight used by builders to ensure that walls are erected in the vertical. This word which is a hapax legomenon has an ambiguous meaning. One of the suggested meanings is the idea that **אֵנָךְ** is understood as a substance indispensable for the production of weapons (tin or bronze) and as such supposedly synonymous with "sword".<sup>59</sup> This means that the third vision consists of seeing the Lord standing on the wall holding in his hands a sword. But we see this interpretation irrelevant in this sense that why to use the word **אֵנָךְ** if sword is meant.<sup>60</sup> Another suggested approach to the understanding of the text is that in the ancient Near East, walls of metal refer to a fortified city unassailable against attacks of enemies.<sup>61</sup> If, then, walls of iron and bronze symbolize strong fortified walls, a wall of **אֵנָךְ** (tin) would be very opposite. This metal is a symbol of softness, uselessness and perishability.<sup>62</sup> Again this view brings some clarifications on the meaning of the expression **אֵנָךְ חֲזִמָּה** but still lacks some elements to be convincing. Let us now pay attention to the interpretation given by YHWH himself in the next part of the structure.

- **YHWH's interpretation of the vision**

<sup>59</sup> Gilbert Brunet, "La vision de l'étain, réinterprétation d'Amos 7 :7-9", *VT XVI N° 4* (1966): 388- 395.

<sup>60</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 300.

<sup>61</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 235.

<sup>62</sup> B. Landsberger, "Tin and Lead", p. 287.

After the short conversation between the Lord and Amos, YHWH himself gives the interpretation of this difficult object he shows in the vision. Amos was questioned “what do you see?” Amos replied by calling the object’s name אֵנֶךְ. Abruptly he is told what the object signifies, and in such a way a rejoinder or a further plea is not possible. He is displaced as intercessor and allowed only to name the symbolic object name.<sup>63</sup> It’s now the Lord’s turn to supply the necessary explanation. He declares that he is setting (שִׁים) a plumb line (אֵנֶךְ) among his people Israel and he will spare (עָבַר, literally means “to pass through”) them no longer (לֹא-אִוְסִיף עוֹר עָבַר לּוֹ). It seems to me that the use of the verb שִׁים, which refers to the action of putting, setting, placing an object, implies the meaning of אֵנֶךְ as a plumb line.<sup>64</sup> The applying of אֵנֶךְ refers symbolically to the execution of judgment.<sup>65</sup> This means that Israel was measured and judged to be pulled down. This fact is witnessed by the use of the verb עָבַר, “to pass through, to go through” in a negative form which means that YHWH will no longer spare his people Israel. It assumes that *“The theological name “my people” makes it clear that Israel is to be judged precisely in her identity as the covenant people.”*<sup>66</sup> The emphasis on the theological title for Israel stands in the tension with the basis of Amos’s intercession in the first two visions.<sup>67</sup> To put it in another word, as a response to Amos’ intercession in the first two visions, YHWH has decided that his people will not survive. It closes the door to any intercession, and excludes any repentance on YHWH’s part. Judgment and destruction are emphasized in the judgment oracles which concludes the vision report.

- **The Oracles of Judgment**

The third vision is concluded by oracles of judgment. The verse 9 shows in what punishment cults places and the royal family will consist. The mainstays of Israel’s existence, both cultic and secular, are destined for extermination. The cult places will be laid waste, and royal family exterminated. בְּמִוֶּה the plural of בְּמִוֶּה means literally simply a height, but since the sanctuaries of the Canaanites were located on the high places, the word comes to mean sacrificial high places, at which the Baal cult is practiced.<sup>68</sup> These high places were open-air sanctuaries and had an altar, an unhewn stone or carved stone pillar (מִצְבֵּה) a living tree or a

<sup>63</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 132.

<sup>64</sup> BDB, p. 964.

<sup>65</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 235. See for further information, 2 Kgs 21: 13; Is 28: 17; 34: 11; Lam 2: 8, where קָו (measuring line) symbolizes judgment and retribution.

<sup>66</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 132.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> BDB, p. 1116.

wooden post (אשרה).<sup>69</sup> They are the legitimate sacrificial high places that existed all over the country prior to the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Kgs 18: 3- 6; 22- 23).<sup>70</sup> Here, they are to be ruined along with the sanctuaries of Israel (מקדשי ישראל). The high place מקדש was a holy place, usually a temple. The sanctuaries are the official religious centre of the Northern Kingdom, Bethel (7: 13) and Dan, established by Jeroboam I.<sup>71</sup> They represent the entire religious shrines of Israel which YHWH condemns. The prophet refers to them as the high places of Isaac, written ישחק instead of the usual יצחק. This appellation may probably mean that this oracle was addressed to those on pilgrimage to Beer-Sheba from the Northern who claim that their eponymous ancestor was Isaac.<sup>72</sup> The threat also concerns בית ירבעם (literally means house of Jeroboam) a Hebrew expression which does not refer to the king's family (his wives and children), but rather to the entire dynasty.<sup>73</sup> The instrument of devastation and death will be חרב (sword), and the use of the first-person וקמתי (and I will rise) assumes that YHWH himself will carry out all the actions of destruction. Israel's Protector has become his executioner.

Clearly, in this v. 9, we assist to a change of recipient: Sanctuaries, high places, house of Jeroboam instead of Israel. This fact leads Wolff to think that it was not part of the vision but was inserted here later.<sup>74</sup> We unanimously agree with him and other biblists who hold that this oracle is originally independent of the vision, but was inserted here for two reasons:

- To clarify the sentence of 7: 8
- To introduce the account of 7:10 - 17

#### 1.4.3.2.2 Vision 4

The fourth vision narrative is similar to the third in structure. Amos saw a basket of summer fruit. As in the third vision, the fourth vision is introduced by the formula **כִּי הִנֵּה הִרְאֵנִי אֶרְנֵי יְהוָה**. Let us now see the major elements, which are the vision and the oracles of judgment:

<sup>69</sup> Erling Hammershåmb, p. 112.

<sup>70</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 236.

<sup>71</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 132.

<sup>72</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 302.

<sup>73</sup> Erling Hammershåmb, p. 113.

<sup>74</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 301.

- **The vision**

I will not discuss again the problem of translation I have presented earlier. The object of the vision is a basket of summer fruit (כַּלִּיב קִיץ), probably fresh figs which are harvested at the end of summer during the months of August and September.<sup>75</sup> As in the vision three, Amos was asked to give the name of the object he saw in the vision. According to Shalom “קִיץ constitutes a paronomasia on its homonym, קֵץ (*final hour, hour of doom*).”<sup>76</sup> He holds that although the roots of these two nouns are different (קִיץ derived from קִיץ and קֵץ is from קָצַץ, “to cut off”), they resemble each other in orthography and even in pronunciation.<sup>77</sup> He continues in arguing that “*in Samaria diphthongs were monophthongized*”.<sup>78</sup> Amos, therefore, while addressing his northern audience, affected their very own dialectal pronunciation in order to heighten the similarity of sounds.

The message is obvious in v. 2: בָּא הַקֵּץ אֶל-עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל (the end has come for my people Israel). According to the paronomasia itself, this phrase means that “the final hour is at hand” and the people are ripe for disaster because of their sins. Hammershaïmb recalls us about the important place played by the word קֵץ in the book of Daniel: the time of the end does not only bring judgment to the apostates, but contains hope for the pious, who suffered for their faith. One could say that this v. 2 is the climax of the first four visions and the result is the end of Israel the people of YHWH. YHWH has decided to put an end to his people Israel; YHWH is ready to harvest Israel as the farmer harvests the summer fruit. The decision is already taken, no further intercession is allowed from Amos’ part.

- **The oracle of judgment**

As in the third vision the fourth vision is concluded by an oracle of judgment in the v. 3. The terrible end will consist of two major things: wailing and corpses everywhere. This oracle is probably attached here to illustrate that the end seen in the vision is the end of life.<sup>79</sup> Wailing is an aspect of funerary lamentation.<sup>80</sup> The funerary wailings are intoned by the female singers (שִׁירוֹת) who usually provide most pleasant enjoyment for the royal court. Whenever songstresses are mentioned in the Old Testament they are related to the royal court (2 Sam

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<sup>75</sup> See above p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 253.

<sup>77</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 253.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 319.

<sup>80</sup> See, for example, Jer 4: 8; 25: 34; 49: 3 and Zeph 1: 11.

19: 36; 2 Chr 35: 25; Eccl 2: 8). Thus the word **היכל** in this verse probably indicate the royal palace and not the temple.<sup>81</sup> The reason for the wailing is mentioned in the following phrases: “Many, many bodies (**רַב הַפְּנֵי**); cast everywhere ! (**בְּכָל-מְקוֹם הַשְּׁלִיךְ**) Silence! (**הִס**)”. Masses of bodies are cast about unburied or disinterred, because the greatest ignominy and disgrace is not to be brought to a proper burial.<sup>82</sup> This is the final stage of defeat and devastation.<sup>83</sup> This picture shows how dreadful is the sentence YHWH is about to execute. All the prophet can say is **הִס** (Hush! Or silence!). This is because “*under such circumstances one must be extremely careful not to mention the name of God.*”<sup>84</sup> It also may be a brief counter charm, an attempt to “silence” the course or turn it away. One should view the use of the same interjection in Am 6: 10 in a similar light.<sup>85</sup> A. Leo Oppenheim lists a number of Assyrian counter-charms to be chanted in the event of a bad dream. **הִס** is a simpler example of the same human response to a bad vision experience.<sup>86</sup>

#### 1.4.3.2.3 Summary and Conclusion

The second pair of vision narratives are similar in structure: Amos saw a symbolic object and was only asked to name it. Then YHWH give the interpretation. YHWH begins the conservation, and by interpreting the symbolic object announces his decree concerning Israel. Amos was not allowed to make any rejoinder or intercession. There is no YHWH’s changing of mind or repentance. Both conclude with a description of the action of YHWH will take against his people Israel (oracles of judgment in 7: 9; 8: 3). The punishments are described in first-person, meaning that YHWH himself is the executioner of the sentence.

#### 1.4.3.3 Vision 5

Let us notice that the form of this vision narrative is different from that of the first four. For this reason Weiser regards it as an addition. We do not share the same idea in the sense that the first four visions present a clear thematic evolution, and that this fifth is the “climax”.

<sup>81</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, pp. 319-20.

<sup>82</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 255.

<sup>83</sup> Francis I. Andersen, David Noel Freedman, p. 799.

<sup>84</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 255.

<sup>85</sup> Susan Niditch, p. 40.

<sup>86</sup> A. Leo Oppenheim, *IDANE* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1956), pp. 295-307.

### 1.4.3.3.1 Structure

The internal structure of this vision is introduced by what Amos saw and not what one showed to him; the verb ראייתי is in qal perfect and not in hiphil as it is in the first pair. S. Amsler insists on the fact that YHWH is not any more the author of the vision but the object itself.<sup>87</sup>

9:1: the verb ראייתי (qal perfect, 1st prs. sing.) shows that the prophet sees directly YHWH leading his army against Israel. Amos sees the Lord standing by the altar (נצב על). The use of definite article in the word המזבח, “the altar” makes one to understand that the vision centered about the main altar in the shrine of Bethel.<sup>88</sup> The occasion might be the autumn feast when a large crowd of worshippers would be present at this central cultic site.<sup>89</sup> The right form of the verb הָךְ (in imperative form) is still under scholarly debate, but we prefer to read it in the third person הָיָךְ (and he stroke), meaning that YHWH himself is the one who takes the action.<sup>90</sup> He is ready to carry out his project to pull down the tilted and irremediable wall. The destruction of the shrine would naturally shatter the faith of those who put their hope and trust in the security of the cult. Although the difficulty of the exact meaning of the word בראש remains, the meaning of the verse is clear: the destruction will be total and it will be impossible to escape YHWH’s wrath. All of them (כלם) shall perish and the remnants (ואחריתם) will be killed by the sword (בחרב אהרנ). Neither fugitive (פליט) nor survivors shall escape (לאיננס) or slip away (ימלט). It is clear that all thought of remnant is thus most decisively rejected.

9:2 - 4a is structured by the expression אהם...משם which expresses the omnipresence of YHWH; nobody could escape the punishment prepared by YHWH. In five conditional sentences highlighted by a fivefold repetition of משם (from there), which means “everywhere”, Amos emphasizes the fact that all possible escape routes are blocked off.

First, “*Though they dig down to the Sheol, from there my hand will take them*”; in Amos’ language “to be taken” (לקח) by the hand (יד) of YHWH is something that is irresistible (7:

<sup>87</sup> Samuel Amsler, "Amos", p. 238.

<sup>88</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 274.

<sup>89</sup> Richard S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: SPCK, 1969), p. 255.

<sup>90</sup> For more information about the debate, see supra pp. 8- 9.

15) and it is also used in 6: 13 to refer to a military conquest.<sup>91</sup> Although at times Sheol is considered beyond the limit of God's reach and even one cannot pray to him from that place (Is 38: 18; Ps 6: 6; 88: 6, 11- 13; 115: 17), the Lord's sovereignty extends even to this subterranean area.<sup>92</sup> The hand of the Lord will seize them from the Sheol for destruction and not for salvation.

Secondly, *“though they climb up to the heaven, from there I will bring them down”*; no matter how high they ascend, they will be brought down by the hand of YHWH. The heaven (שמים) is the polar vertical opposite direction of Sheol.

Thirdly, the verse 3 continue in stating that even the most secluded hiding places cannot shield a fugitive from YHWH's eyes. The verb חבא in niph'al means “to hide oneself”. The top of Carmel (בראש הכרמל) is suited as a hideout not only because of its elevation, which is over 500 meters, but also because of its dense forests.<sup>93</sup> The use of the verb חפש in piel (to search out) is probably referring to someone who hides oneself in the dense forest.

Fourth, no one could conceal himself from the sight of the Lord at the bottom of the sea (הים בקרקע), since from there YHWH will command his serpent to bite them. The word הנהש for serpent refers to *“the mythological dragon of chaos whom he (YHWH) defeated in primeval times and turned into his obedient subordinate servant.”*<sup>94</sup> YHWH will assign the sea monster to execute his retributive punishment.

The fifth and the last conditional sentence proves the total impossibility of salvation. The captivity may be thought of as a means of escaping the divine wrath. But even though they go into captivity (ואם ילכו בשבי), YHWH will command the sword to slay them (החרב והרגתם). No geographical realm is beyond the sovereignty of YHWH and his control extends over all nations. The sword will execute his retribution, no matter how far they may be driven into exile.

9:4 b is a conclusion, YHWH is attentive to all movements, he is there to supervise all the possible escape. The Hebrew expression ושמת עיני עליהם (I will fix my eyes upon them) is usually used in a positive way (Gen 44: 21; Jer 24: 6; 39: 12; 40: 4). But here YHWH fixes his eyes upon Israel for evil and not for good (לרעה ולא לטובה). YHWH is omnipresent for

<sup>91</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 340.

<sup>92</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 277.

<sup>93</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 340.

<sup>94</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 278.

destruction and not for salvation, for retribution and judgment and not for forgiveness and mercy.

#### **1.4.3.4 Summary and Conclusions**

In conclusion, we showed that the block of material in 7: 1- 8: 3 is made up of five vision narratives. Others sayings appear within the block; there is an oracle against the priest Amaziah in 7: 16ff and two fragmentary announcements of punishment in 7: 9 and 8: 3. But these sayings are embedded in the narratives. Four of the narratives are vision reports (7: 1-3, 4- 6, 7- 9; 8: 1- 3) and are composed in autobiographical style (in first-person verb). The other (7: 7- 10) is inserted between the third and the fourth vision reports, its subject is the confrontation between Amos and the priest of Bethel and it is told in biographical style (third-person verb). This difference in style indicates that the block is not an original oral or literary unit.<sup>95</sup> It is also necessary to note that in the structure of chapter 7, 7: 10-17 is inserted just after the absence of the intercession of the prophet and before the final decision of YHWH issuing the end of Israel in 8: 2. First it has been set here directly after the third vision on the basis of the catchword “Jeroboam”.<sup>96</sup> Secondly, Amsler makes an interesting remark in stating that it is placed here in order to switch from the total destruction of the people towards an individual punishment (Amaziah, Jeroboam).<sup>97</sup>

The structural study of the vision reports shows clearly that they are set according a logical thematic progress. One could see the evolution even the gravity of the situation of Israel from the first vision to the fifth. In the first two visions the prophet and YHWH each speak once, the prophet immediately after seeing the terrible vision, and YHWH responding to his words. In the second set, the vision has no obvious meaning in itself, just an ordinary and everyday object that one can hold in the hand or carry. So the dialogue begins with YHWH asking Amos to identify the object and he is not allowed to speak more. To put in another words, in the first two visions narratives, the prophet has the opportunity to intercede on behalf of the people of Israel, whereas in the two others that follow, he is there only to answer YHWH’s questions. The fifth, the last account is the climax of the first four in the sense that it

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<sup>95</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 123.

<sup>96</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 238.

<sup>97</sup> Samuel Amsler, p. 231.



announces the projects and the execution of the judgment of YHWH to put an end to his people Israel.

According to these studies, it is quite clear that the prophet Amos announced doom. The five vision narratives testify the fact that YHWH has decided to put an end to his people Israel, probably even before showing the first vision.

The word לִקְשׁ indicates a temporal aspect, because this king's mowing occurs after the late rains of Mars and of April in contrast with the fourth vision about the summer fruit of August and September. If these indications of time are true, then there are at least six months between the first and the fourth vision. This means that YHWH granted approximately six months, so that Israel repent their sins. But the last fifth vision testifies that Israel stayed unrepentant, a fact which leads YHWH to execute the doom. In his turn, the Lord sees Israel like a ripe fruit ready to be harvested. The time of patience and tolerance is past, the end comes. The Assyrian invasion in BC 720 put an end to the history of Northern Israel.

## Chapter 2: The Judgment Against Israel

### 2.1. 2.2 Study of Judgment Materials

My study will especially focuss on the two blocks of judgment oracles in the book of Amos, that is, Am 2: 6- 16 and 8: 4- 14.

#### 2.1.1. 2.2.1 The Oracles of Judgment in Am 2: 6- 16

##### 2.2.1.1 Introductory Comments

The oracle against Israel is the culmination of the judgment pronounced by the prophet against the nations.<sup>1</sup> The previous oracles serves as one grand prolegomenon to YHWH's final surprise judgment against his own people Israel. Weiser describes it as "a bolt from the blue sky".<sup>2</sup> After capturing his audience within the web of his first seven pronouncements, Amos adds his eighth and final one which is probably the *raison d'être* of his prophetic commission. This is because the prophet Amos is specifically sent to Israel, and it is not arraigned for crimes committed as a consequence of military belligerency as were the foreign nations or for idolatry as Judah, but for transgressions committed within the social sphere. Israel's guilt lies within the domain of everyday oppressive behavior of its citizens towards one another. The breaking of the covenant is obvious through its unethical and immoral actions, and thus lead to its inexorable punishment.<sup>3</sup> It is surprising that Amos is the first of the classical prophets who gives an expression of what Kaufmann calls "supremacy of morality".<sup>4</sup>

##### 2.2.1.2 Texts and Translation

2: 6: *Thus said YHWH: for three crimes of Israel and for four, I will not revoke it, because they sell the innocent for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals.*

v. 7: *They trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the ground, and thrust the poor off the road. A man and his father cohabit with the same maiden, in order to profane my holy name.*

v. 8: *Upon garments taken in pledge, they stretch themselves out beside every altar. In the house of their God, they drink the wine of the fined.*

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<sup>1</sup> A. Weiser, *Die Profetie des Amos*, p. 86, 110.

<sup>2</sup> My own translation from Weiser's German text: "wie ein Blitz aus heiterem Himmel", *Ibid*, p. 107:

<sup>3</sup> P. Buis, "Les formulaires d'alliance," *VT 16* (1966): p. 410.

<sup>4</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 76.

v. 9: *Yet I myself destroyed the Amorites before them, whose height was like the height of cedars, and who was as strong as oaks; but I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath.*

v. 10: *And I myself brought you up from the land of Egypt and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorites.*

v. 11: *And I raised some of your sons to be prophets and some of your young men to be Nazirites. Is this not so children of Israel? Declares the Lord.*

v. 12: *But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and the prophets you ordered, “Do not prophesy!”*

v. 13: *Behold I will crush you as a cart crushes when full of cut grain.*

v. 14: *Flight shall fail the swift, the strong shall not be able to exert his strength, the brave shall not be able to save his own life.*

v. 15: *The archer shall not hold his ground, the fleet-footed shall not escape, nor shall the horseman save his own life.*

v. 16: *Even the stouthearted of warriors shall flee stripped of arms on that day, declares the Lord.*

### **2.2.1.3 Interpretation**

The root פשע in 1: 3, which introduces these oracles, is a central term in the vocabulary of Amos.<sup>5</sup> The plural noun occurs ten times, in 1: 3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2: 1, 4, 6; 3: 14; 5: 12, and the verb twice, in 4: 4. The meaning may differ from one context to another, but here in this context, as von Rad<sup>6</sup> mentions it, it belongs to the “language of politics” and means “to revolt, rebel, cast of allegiance to authority” (1 Kgs 12: 19; 2 Kgs 1: 1; 3: 5, 7).<sup>7</sup> It may also be used about one’s allegiance to God. To put it in another word, it means “to revolt, to cast off allegiance to authority”, whether of an overlord or the Overlord.<sup>8</sup> The corresponding noun פשע is similarly used both of offences against other men, and of offences against God.<sup>9</sup>

The first accusation against Israel in 2: 6 has been explained in two different ways: some commentators like Sellin, Robinson Horst and Hammershämb relate it to the bribery of judges, whereas others to the illegal action of creditors selling debtors into slavery.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament theology 2*, trans. D.M.G Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 263.

<sup>7</sup> See most commentators, for example, James Luther Mays, p. 30; Erling Hammershämb, p. 22; Arvid S.

Kapelrud, *Central Ideas in Amos* (Oslo: I kommisjon Hos H. Aschehoug & CO. (W. Nygaard), 1956), p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Erling Hammershämb, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> William Rainey Harper, p. 49; H. Walter Wolff, *Amos*, p. 165; W. Rudolph, p. 138.

According to the first interpretation, the judges have sold for silver those whose cause was just. The judges are reproached for accepting bribes (בכסף, literally means for the price of silver) from the guilty parties, as a result of which the צדיק (he whose cause is just) is “sold”, that is colloquially speaking, “sold out”. Justice has been perverted, and the innocent become the victim of a distorted, “paid for”, bribed verdict. The main problem in this line of interpretation is that the judges do not sell the accused.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, nowhere in the Bible is the verb מכר employed in the context of bribery.<sup>12</sup> Amos 5: 12, in which similar charges are leveled against Israel and the צדיק again in parallel to אביונים, specifically states that “bribes are taken” (לקחי כפר).

The other suggestion is that the צדיק, who is either the “innocent guiltless party” or, in a nonforensic sense, an “honest man,”<sup>13</sup> has been sold in order to satisfy creditors demanding their monetary compensation from the debtors, בכסף, “for / on account of silver”, which they owed and could not pay. Alternately, an innocent individual has been sold into slavery on the false charge of owing money, that is, בכסף, “on account of silver”, that is, for a paltry debt too insignificant to justify such an action. According to all these latter interpretations, the charge is sale into slavery to pay a real or assumed debt; the party sold is otherwise guiltless. The other victim is the defenseless אביון, “the needy” who have no means whatsoever at their disposal to protect themselves from being sold into debt slavery.

The main problem centers around the exact meaning of the substantive נעלים. According to the Masoretic pointing, the noun refers to “a pair of sandals”, which is then understood to denote a trifling sum, that is, the debtors are sold into slavery for a very small debt. Many commentators agree on that point.<sup>14</sup> But Shalom assumes that the hapax legomenon singular noun נעלם, derived from the root עלם, “to hide” was confused with the dual and / or plural form נעלים “sandals” and interpreted accordingly.<sup>15</sup> According to this argument, the final mem is being mistakenly understood as the masculine plural suffix rather than the third radical of the stem. This rare substantive develops semantically from the basic root meaning of that which is “hidden” to a “(hidden) gift” or “payoff”.<sup>16</sup> We prefer the literal translation in this sense that here Amos has reproached the judges that their judgment has been sold for

<sup>11</sup> W. Rudolph, p. 138.

<sup>12</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> W. Rudolph, p. 138.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Mays, p. 47; Cripps, p. 140; Rudolph, p. 141; William Rainey Harper, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

money, or for as little as a pair of sandals, so that their verdicts have gone against the innocent and poor, who did not have the means to bribe the judge.<sup>17</sup> This interpretation seems to me more convincing and fits the context.

In the verse 7, the first half verse continues the description of the injustices done to the poor, but the text is very difficult to translate. It has been translated by Hammershäimb as : “those who seek the dust of the earth on the head of the poor”, and understood as meaning that the poor did not even have the right to scatter earth on their head when they mourned, either for their dead or to show their wretchedness after the corrupt law cases.<sup>18</sup> Recent commentators translated it as “They trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the ground”.<sup>19</sup> The Hebrew noun רל means “scanty, mean, poor, insignificant, powerless, oppressed”; and in the Old Testament in three instances the injustice perpetrated against the poor is described as “oppression” or “violation” (עשק).<sup>20</sup> It is in accord with this that Amos’ indictment is directed against “those who trample upon the head of the poor.” The עניים are those who are “humble” or “oppressed” and their opposites are not the rich, but the brutal and the arrogant. Accordingly, according to Kuschke, this concept involves a legal assertion.<sup>21</sup> Then the expression “to pervert the way” (נטה דרך in hiphil) is an abbreviated equivalent of “to pervert the courses of justice”.<sup>22</sup>

- Abuse of maidens:

Generally, the word נערה denotes a young woman, legally a minor, though her status seems less a matter of actual age than of social standing. In our passage “the maiden” is further defined neither as wife nor as sister, nor is there anything which indicates that a female servant is meant. The reproach addresses the case of “a man and his father” consorting sexually with the same maiden, since here the expression אל הלך (literally means “to go unto”) means nothing less than “to copulate with”. The maiden to whom both the father and son go could be the cultic prostitute who plays such an important role in the fertility cult of Canaanite religion (Hos 4: 14).<sup>23</sup> The institution of such a cultic practice is strictly forbidden in Israel (Deut 23: 17). But נערה, “maiden” is a neutral word that does not of itself mean

<sup>17</sup> Erling Hammershäimb, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Wolff, p. 133; Shalom, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 166. For more information, see Pr 14: 31; 22: 16; 28: 3.

<sup>21</sup> Arnulf Kuschke, “Arm und Reich im Alten Testament”, ZAW 57 (1939): 49- 50.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 166. See also Pr 18: 5 and Is 10: 2.

<sup>23</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 46.

sacred prostitute. Possibly v. 7b refers to the violation of the rights of a female bond-servant by making her into a concubine for father and son, also prohibited in Ex 21: 8. The expression “in order to profane my holy name” describes the consequence of this promiscuity with technical terminology that makes a quite professional theological judgment. The phrase could be a redactional expansion of 7b, though it may well be connected with altar and house of YHWH in v. 8 so as to create the sequence “name – altar – house of God”.<sup>24</sup>

- Exploitation of debtors:

The verse 8 talks about the garments taken in pledge. In biblical Hebrew the verb **חבל** is used to denote the fact that if payment is not received from the debtor, if the loan is defaulted, his property is confiscated. The creditor may seize whatever he desires except what is essential to life. However, the distraint pledge does not remain within his jurisdiction forever but be returned upon payment of the loan. The law codes restrict the taking of items as collateral on the basis of the type of article, the length of time, and the person affected.<sup>25</sup> When Amos speaks of “garments taken in pledge”, he is referring to items which, in the case of a widow, may not be kept overnight. The verb **נטה**, “to spread out, to stretch” in hiphil associated with **גדיים**, “garments” surely means the preparation of a place in which to bed down for the night.<sup>26</sup> This rule they violate by keeping them during their orgies, which naturally went on till long into the night.

In Amos’ denunciation, moreover, these wealthy creditors add insult to injury, for not only do they violate a law that is intended to provide protection for the poor but they also take these very garments and stretching themselves upon them. The preposition **על** makes clear that not the garments are being spread out but that they are stretch themselves upon these very garments. Shalom states that “By expressing this offense by the use of imperfect verbs in both stichs, clearly indicates that the taking of basic necessities for reclining and feasting was extremely widespread at this time, thereby poignantly emphasizing how abhorrent their action was”.<sup>27</sup> What is certain is that both legality and illegality involve the suffering of the poor under the power of the rich to use legal process to their own advantage.

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<sup>24</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 46.

<sup>25</sup> Hand-mill and grindstone may not be taken in pledge at all, according to Deut 24: 6, since they are instruments essential to life; cloak of a poor may not be kept as a pledge overnight (Ex 22: 25; Deut 24: 12- 13); a widow’s garment may not be taken in pledge from her (Deut 24: 17).

<sup>26</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 167.

<sup>27</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 86.

With the phrases “beside every altar” and “in the house of their God”, Amos evokes a picture of cultic festivals in the sanctuaries of Israel where the rich recline and feast on the profits gained from the exploitation of the needy. “The house of their God” has an ironic ring in the context, as though Amos would say that the deity of the shrine belonged to these Israelites, instead of their belonging to YHWH.

By the expression “they drink the wine of the fined”, Amos must refer to a payment in kind exacted from debtors. It either means wine bought with the money collected in fines from the poor, or wine that had been distrained on because the debtor did not have the money to pay.<sup>28</sup>

In either case we should perhaps think that the poor were sentenced to these fines in violation of the law by the judges and rich men, so that the prophet means to describe not only their heartlessness, but also the breach of the law which they commit in order to hold their orgies.

In the v. 9, a dramatic reversal comes and is introduced by an emphatic (וְאִנִּי). Roles are reversed and Israel becomes the object. By means of a series of emphatic first-person pronouns and verbs, Amos contrasts the deeds of the God of Israel with those of Israel. Whereas they are singled out and reprimanded for their exploitation and deprivation of the needy, the Lord reminds them that he, for his part, had constantly come to their aid when they were in need.<sup>29</sup> Their immoral and unethical treatment of those who are unable to defend themselves is juxtaposed here to his protective treatment throughout their early history when they were unable to defend themselves. The acts of kindness of God stand as a stark antithesis to their persistent deeds of disobedience.<sup>30</sup> He mercilessly exterminated the formidable prior inhabitants of the land, and the verb (שָׁמַד in hiphil) designates within the context of the Yahwistic holy war the complete annihilation of the enemy.<sup>31</sup>

It was on behalf of the very Israelites now under indictment that YHWH had destroyed the Amorites. They are described as a nation of giants, whom the Israelites could not have defeated without the assistance of YHWH. Cedar trees were for the Israelites the embodiment of height and dignity, as oaks were of strength. Both the fruit and roots were destroyed so that they could never germinate new trees.

Verse 10 continues with a mention of YHWH’s kindness to the people in the earliest days, with no stress laid on the correct chronological sequence of events. The leading out from

<sup>28</sup> Erling Hammershåim, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> W. Rudolph, p. 146, Hans Walter Wolff, p. 168.

<sup>30</sup> See also for more references to the early history of Israel in Amos: 3: 1; 5: 25; 9: 7.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 168. See Jos 11: 20; 7: 12; 1 Kgs 13: 34.

Egypt and the subsequent events at Sinai formed the highest points in YHWH's saving wonders towards his people.

In the verse 11, as the last of YHWH's kindnesses to the people, the prophets and the Nazirites are mentioned as those who should give the people spiritual and moral strength.<sup>32</sup> The hiphil of (KUM), "rise up" is used with YHWH as subject, when he makes men appear with a special task for the good of the people, whether they are judges (Judg 2: 16, 18; 3: 9, 15), kings (Jer 23: 4f, 30: 9; Ez 34: 23), prophets (Deut 18: 15; Jer 6: 17). The Nazirite's vow of dedication to God obligated him to abstinence, especially from wine (2: 2a; Num 6). Wine may be the key literary reason why the Nazirites, so rarely mentioned in the biblical books, are singled out for distinction, because one of the charges listed in the verse 8 dealt precisely with wine.<sup>33</sup> But Hammershaimb states that "Amos' stress on the Nazirites can be understood as a protest against the sophisticated life and degenerate life of his time, in particular as it appeared in the large cities".<sup>34</sup>

The line of prophetic messengers following Moses created a continual chain of constant communication between God and Israel. Amos is now the latest link in this prophetic continuum. All of this is followed up by a challenging question which could be translated as "will anyone deny these facts?" leveled at the prophet's audience. By its position, it functions both as a conclusion to the manifold benedictions of the Deity and as an introduction to his next accusation. It serves as a reminder that although these things have been done by God for Israel, they are still acting the same without any change. Amos in his usual penchant and predilection for reversing commonly expected conclusions employs the motif of salvation history not as a guarantee for further divine dispensation and protection, as the people so ardently assume and presume, but rather as an indictment. "Salvation history is proclaimed as a judgment history".<sup>35</sup>

The Israelites could not have behaved worse than they did, because, in the verse 12, they compelled the Nazirites to break their vows of abstention from wine, and tried to prevent the prophets from fulfilling their task as preachers of the words which YHWH had inspired them to preach. By an effective use of chiasmic parallelism with the preceding verse, Amos refers first to the Nazirites (mentioned in the v. 11). The Nazirites, who are coerced into drinking

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<sup>32</sup> E. Hammershaimb, p. 52.

<sup>33</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 92.

<sup>34</sup> E. Hammershaimb, p. 53.

<sup>35</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 170.



wine, are thereby forced to break their vows of abstinence. By such impudent action, the populace establishes its own rules of behavior, which run counter to the will of YHWH. Once again they are charged with oppressing a class of people who are unable to defend themselves.<sup>36</sup> However, the present indictment does not refer to offenses committed against the ordinary and underprivileged citizens, but against those who dedicate their lives in consecration to God. On many other occasions, the prophets encountered both popular and royal resistance that attempted to stop their prophetic mission.<sup>37</sup> This specific charge serves as a literary foreshadow of the forthcoming pericope (3: 3- 8) and most likely reflects a personal experience in the life of the prophet Amos himself, who was similarly confronted by the priest Amaziah and ordered to cease prophesying in the North (7: 12- 13, 16; עור להנבא; לא-חוסיה). By silencing the prophet, they silence the source of communication between the Lord and his people.

The vv. 13- 16 consist of announcement of judgment which discloses what action YHWH will take against Israel. He will come upon them as foe in an awesome irresistible onslaught. The scene is portrayed with impressionistic phrases before the attack. The announcement unfolds in two movements: the direct action of YHWH against Israel interpreted by a metaphor (v. 13), and the result of the onslaught described in terms of a military catastrophe (vv. 14- 16).

The announcement of punishment opens with a divine self-asseveration, the emphatic pronoun “I” being a contrasting counterpart to one at the beginning of 2: 9. As YHWH had once actively sided with Israel against the strong Amorites, so now he is about to intervene against his people Israel which has become an oppressor of the weak (2: 6b- 8). The rare verb (עק in hiphil) depicting YHWH’s action against Israel means “to break open, to press, to make totter”. Here it is used with reference to the ground underfoot (תחתכם, “beneath you”) and under the wheels of a heavy wagon. עגלה denotes the cart used by peasants to haul freight (1 Sam 6: 7- 14; 2 Sam 6: 3). עמיר, “sheaf” means the harvested ears of grain which are brought from the field to the threshing floor. The unusual construction המלאה לה, “full of” is probably meant to emphasize that the cart is filled to overflowing with harvested

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<sup>36</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 93.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Kgs 13: 4; 18: 4; 19: 2, 10: 22; 26- 27; 2 Kgs 1: 9ff; 6: 31; Is 30: 10; Jer 2: 30; 11: 21; 18: 18; 20: 10; 26: 23.

grain.<sup>38</sup> The one thing that is clear in v. 13 is that YHWH's action upon Israel is compared to the effect of a wagon, overloaded with sheaves of grain. The imagery describes an earthquake that furrows the earth and throws the populace into a panic.<sup>39</sup> The movements of Israel shall be "hampered, hindered" and then thereby come to a stop.

vv. 14- 16: the ensuing series of seven examples exemplifies the immobility and helplessness of the entire Israelite army. All the various divisions and categories of the troops are threatened with total impotence in time of war.

The announcement of the forthcoming catastrophe is directed entirely against the army of Israel, the army in which the people took such pride during this period of military resurgence (see for example, 6: 13). All that is stated is that the defenders of the people will be incapable of employing those qualities and skills for which they are distinguished.<sup>40</sup> There will be no escape from the impending punishment. Amos describes the malfunctioning of all the various battle units that comprised the Israelite army.

First for the infantry, one of its outstanding characteristics is its swiftness (קל, "swift"), strength (חזק, "strong"), weaponry (גבור, "warrior") and all of these shall be of no avail. There shall be no flight for the swift, the strong will be unable to exert his strength and the mighty or brave warrior will be even unable to save his own life.

Secondly, neither shall the חַפְּשֵׁי הַקֶּשֶׁת, "archers" provide any protection. They too "*shall not hold their ground*" (לא יעמד) in battle.

Thirdly, neither shall the "fleet-footed" (קל ברגליו) flee. The verb מלט, "to escape" in negative form emphasizes the impossibility of escape. The immobility of the fleet-footed seems to duplicate what was already stated in v. 14.

Nor shall the cavalry fare any better. But Wolff remarked that the existence of a mounted cavalry begun only in Persian times, and thereby he translated as רכב הסוס "chariot warriors".<sup>41</sup> This point is denied by Shalom who held that even though the mounted cavalry probably did not play an important part in the Israelite army of the eighth century, it already existed.<sup>42</sup> Even they will not escape with their lives.

<sup>38</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 171.

<sup>39</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 54.

<sup>40</sup> See the similar theme in Ps 33: 16- 17: No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior (גבור) escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save.

<sup>41</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 172.

<sup>42</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 98. The cavalry are known to have been introduced into the Assyrian army already by the time of Assurnasirpal II (BC 883- 859).

The verse 16 talks about the “stouthearted of warriors” who will find himself in a desperate state of panic and rout on that day of battle. The Hebrew word לב here denotes the vital center of a human being, the locus of strength and courage.<sup>43</sup> On that day (ביום־ההוא), the courage of the heartiest warrior will fail him, and the gravity of the situation is shown in the fact that he shall flee naked (ערום). This expression does not necessarily mean naked in the full sense, but can be used of one who has taken off his outer clothes, and is only dressed in a tunic (1Sam 19: 24; Jn 21: 7).<sup>44</sup> It also, as has been correctly interpreted by T and some medieval commentators, means to “flee unarmed”.<sup>45</sup> The warriors throw away their heavy cloaks, or perhaps their weapons, to be able to flee without impediments.

In conclusion, this pericope contains oracles of judgment against Israel, YHWH’s elected people. Israel is punished because of its peacetime transgressions which are comparable to those of cruelty cited in the oracles against the foreign nations. They are transgressions against fellow countrymen, and especially those in need of help and protection. The very extent of the indictment shows that Amos considers Israel to be considerably more guilty than her foreign neighbors. Israel has no excuse; she has expected to recall that YHWH intervenes on behalf of the weak, since precisely such an act of intervention had established her own historical existence (2: 9). Israel alone was in a position to know, from the fact of YHWH’s prior intervention, that the cause of the needy is the cause of God himself. Therefore Israel is of all the most guilty.

## 2.2.2 The oracles of judgment in Am 8: 4- 14

### 2.2.2.1 Text and Translation

v. 4: *Hear this, you who trample upon the needy, exterminating the poor of the land,*

v. 5: *Saying, “When will the new moon be over, so that we may sell corn; and the Sabbath, so that we may open the grain” making the ephah small and the shekel large, and distorting with false scales,*

v. 6: *buying the poor for silver, the needy for a perquisite and selling the chaff of the wheat”.*

v. 7: *The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: “I will never forget any of their actions.*

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<sup>43</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 172.

<sup>44</sup> Erling Hammershåmb, p. 55.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

v. 8: *On account of this shall not the earth quake, and all who dwell on it mourn, and all of it surge like the Nile, and swirl and subside like the Nile of Egypt?*

v. 9: *And on that day, declares the Lord, I will make the sun set at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight.*

v. 10: *I will transform your festivals into mourning and your songs into lamentation; I will put sackcloth on all loins and on every head baldness. I will make it like mourning for an only child, and the end of it like a bitter day.*

v. 11: *Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will cast famine on the land, not hunger for bread or thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord.*

v. 12: *They shall stagger from sea to sea, and from north to east. They shall roam all over, seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.*

v. 13: *On that day the beautiful maidens and the young men shall faint from thirst*

v. 14: *They who swear by the guilt of Samaria, and say, "by the life of your god Dan!" And "by the life of the way of Beer-Sheba!" They shall fall and never rise again.*

### **2.2.2.2 Interpretation**

This group of oracles has been inserted between the fourth and the fifth visions, just as 7: 10-17 was placed between the third and the fourth. In 8: 4- 14, various oracles interpret the theme of the fourth vision, which is spelled out in 8: 3, that is, the end of Israel and the mourning which that entails.

The first section vv. 4- 8 is directed against those who deal dishonestly and in form and in tone is reminiscent of the oracles of punishment in chapters 3- 6. Vv 4 and 6 show a special similarity to 2: 6 and 7. The prophet attracts his audience's attention by introducing the oracles by the usual prophetic formula *שמעו-זאת*, "hear this!" Those addressed are immediately characterized in the vocative as oppressors of the poor. The verb *שאף*, literally meaning "persecute", can be taken in the first half-verse as having the same sense as *שוף*, "crush", where the prophet protests against injustice to the *דלים* and the *עניים* in a similar way to that found here of the *אביון* and *(ענוי-ארץ)*, the latter can be derived from either with the kethibh from *עני* or with the qere from *(עני)*.<sup>46</sup> Both words are used without much perceptible difference of those who are the worst placed in the social system. The needy are trampled in order to suppress them.

<sup>46</sup> Erling Hammershaimb, p. 121.

Before attention is directed again to the offenses against the helpless (v. 6), a new theme is raised in v. 5, namely that of deceit in the realm of trade. It is emphasized here that the proof of Israel's injustice is found in their speech itself. They pursue their evil dealings with such zeal that they begrudge the time taken away from business. The celebration of the New Moon happened once every four weeks, and the Sabbath every seventh day. They are no longer capable of sharing in the joy of these festive occasions. It is especially the Sabbath which is here regarded as strictly a day of rest and in Israel and such commercial activity is forbidden on the Sabbath. Commercial activity was forbidden on that day along with many other prohibitions (Jer 17: 21- 27; Neh 13: 15- 22). The two holidays are often paired together (See for example, 2 Kgs 4: 23; Is 1: 13- 14; Hos 2: 13). Amos then delineates their unethical practices by describing their corrupt employment of false weights and measures: "making the ephah small (Hebrew) and the shekel large" (Hebrew). They sell short measures of grain and use oversize weights for payment. Their ephah, a unit of dry measure a bit over thirty-nine liters, was smaller than standard, and their shekel, the basic unit of weight a bit over eleven grams, was heavier than standard.<sup>47</sup> Even the very scales themselves are tampered and rigged: "distorting with false scales" (Hebrew). The buyer was always deceived because he received too little and paid too much. Honest scales, weights, measures, and balances are strictly demanded throughout the Bible (for example, Lev 19: 35- 36; Deut 25: 13- 15; Ez 45: 10- 11; Prov 16: 11) and dishonest ones are reprimanded (Hos 12: 8; Pro 11: 1; 20: 23).

v. 6: These unscrupulous traders in grain also trade in human traffic: "buying the poor for silver, the needy for a perquisite". The expression has already appeared in 2: 6. There the vice was selling (מכר) the poor into debt slavery; here it refers to the actual buying (קנה) of human beings.<sup>48</sup> For a trifle they purchase the impoverished who cannot afford to buy their own barest necessities. They boast that they sell the chaff of the wheat.

V. 7: Here an oath dramatically introduces the declaration of the forthcoming punishment. The Israelites' corrupt and malevolent practices evoke an equally vehement reaction on YHWH's part. The Lord swears (שבט) not to forget any of their actions. The expression "the pride of Jacob" by which God swears is difficult. Some has interpreted it as a divine epithet, comparing 1 Sam 15: 29 (נצח ישראל), the glory of Israel). Amos may very well be presenting the oath in an ironic manner.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> R. B. Y. Scott, "Weights and Measures in the Bible", BA 22 (1959): 22- 40.

<sup>48</sup> See my comments on 2: 6.

<sup>49</sup> H. W. Wolff, p. 238; W. Rudolph, p. 264.

v. 8: The forthcoming punishment, which describes the cosmic consequences of Israel's immoral behavior, is introduced by means of a rhetorical question (העל). God's wrath shall be concretized by the convulsion of the earth's surface: on account of this (העל זאת) shall not the earth quake (תרנז) and all who dwell on it mourn (אבל)? An earthquake is a familiar portent of YHWH's anger.<sup>50</sup> It is often expressed by the verb רנז (for example, 1 Sam 14: 15; Joe 2: 10; Ps 77: 19; Prov 30: 21). Just as both nature and people themselves will experience God's wrath, so, too, in the next two verses, both the elements of nature (v. 9) and the people (V. 10) will feel the effects of God's punishment.

v. 9: In general usage the temporal phrase "in that day" would point to a time identified in the context. Here the context offers only the coming deeds of YHWH as a specification of the time in question. ביום ההוא is more a matter of what than when.<sup>51</sup> The term appears in Amos' sayings consistently in connection with descriptions of events which will occur in the time of YHWH's punishment of Israel (2: 16; 8: 3, 13) and in 9: 11, a pericope that is judged to be unauthentic, it introduces an oracle of salvation. The eclipse is directly brought about by YHWH: "I will make the sun set (והבאתי) at noon (בצהריים), and I will darken (והחשכת) the earth (לארץ) in broad daylight (ביום אור)". The darkness caused by the eclipse is part of the vocabulary of the Day of the Lord (see 5: 18, 20). Eclipses were considered portents of disaster throughout the entire ancient world because they were seen as reflexes of the anger of the gods.<sup>52</sup> A text from an Akkadian clay reports the following eclipse narrative: "An eclipse of the moon (Akk. attal□) took place on the fourteenth, and this occurrence of an eclipse is ill portending (Akk. marsu□), they sing dirges, wailings, and laments for Sin during the eclipse".<sup>53</sup> As the above Akkadian announcement of doom is followed by the theme of mourning (אבל) in v. 8, so here, as well, mourning rites follow the eclipse.

v. 10: As the earthquake results in mourning and lamentation, so, too, the aftermath of the eclipse. YHWH will turn (הפכתי) Israel's festivals (חג, a Hebrew term which denotes procession, round dance, festival and often connected with pilgrimage)<sup>54</sup> into mourning (אבל) and all their songs (שיר) into dirges (קינה). The mourning and lamentation motif connects these literary units with the fourth vision in 8: 3. The religious festivals marked by

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Hab. 3: 6; Zech 14: 4, 5.

<sup>51</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 146.

<sup>52</sup> Shalom M. Paul, pp. 262-3.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> BDB, p. 291.

singing and rejoicing will turn into occasion for mourning and threnodies (see for example, 5: 1, 16- 17; 8: 3). And these will be accompanied by the customary mourning practices: wearing of sackcloth (שֵׂק) and baldness (קִרְחָה). These two rites are an expression of a national calamity and disaster (see for example, Is 3: 24; 15: 2- 3; 22: 12; Jer 48: 37; Ez 7: 18; 27: 31). The pain and the sorrow will be so intense that it could be compared only to “the mourning for an only child (אֲבֵל יְחִיד)”. This idea is symbolic of the greatest and most grievous of all misfortunes (see for example, 6: 26; Zech 12: 10). The entire event is then designated as “a bitter day” (כִּיּוֹם מָר) for “bitter” is the weeping (Is 33: 7), the crying (Ez 27: 30), and the mourning (Ez 27: 31). Here the climactic point would seem to be that at the end of the funerary lamentation with its heavy grief, the bitter day of death itself comes even for the mourners.

v. 11: An oracle is introduced by means of a formula which is not very familiar to Amos’ language, probably, according to Wolff, from Amos’ school.<sup>55</sup> The verb שָׁלַח occurs in the hiphil only five times in the entire Old Testament. YHWH is always the subject in these cases and the object is a plague or disaster. The hunger (רָעַב) which YHWH will send is immediately from the craving for even the most essential means of sustenance, bread and water. The new affliction of hunger and thirst about to come upon Israel was the longing “to hear” (שָׁמַע) the words of YHWH (דְּבַר יְהוָה). The notion that man lives by “that which proceeds from the mouth of YHWH”, and not “by bread alone” appears first in Deuteronomic preaching (Deut 8: 3). The longing to hear the words of YHWH is a famine decreed by YHWH himself. Famine was one of the catastrophes which YHWH used against Israel as a manifestation of his anger. In 4: 6ff the prophet Amos speaks of the famine and drought which YHWH had brought on Israel, but the nation had not returned to their God. Now YHWH announces the coming of a different type of famine, that is, the absence of his words. “Words of YHWH” refers specifically to the oracle of a prophet which persons in need of information and help received when they inquired after YHWH through the prophet (1 Sam 3: 1; 28: 6; 1 Kgs 22: 5; 2 Sam 21: 1). The divine answer would bring assurance that their God was paying attention to their need, and it would often come as an oracle of salvation promising help. In times of national crisis the people would come to shrines to seek YHWH’s response through the cult (Cf. Hos 5: 6). The failure of prophetic vision and word would mean that YHWH had turned away from them and abandoned them to their troubles (Ps 74:

<sup>55</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 330. Wolff assumes that this language is from Amos’ school.

9; Lam 2: 9; Jer 37: 17; Ez 7: 26). The absence of YHWH's words simply means the absence of God for Israel (Cf. Hos 5: 15).

v. 12: In wandering from sea to sea and from north to east, the Israelites would make a complete circuit of Israel's territory in search of someone to answer their laments with a word from YHWH. "From sea to sea" means from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea. They represent the western and southern frontiers. The end of the verse testifies the fact that their efforts will be in vain.

Vv. 13- 14: the expression **ביום ההוא** (on that day) begins a new oracle that has been attached here because of the catchword **צמא** (thirst) in v. 11.<sup>56</sup> In its present position, it seems that it provides a climax to the previous oracle, that is, the total spiritual collapse of those who have not been able to discover the word of YHWH. The strongest and the most beautiful of both male (**הבחורים**) and female (**הבתולה היפוחה**) shall languish away and faint (**תחלפנה**) from thirst.

The reason for the punishment is the idolatry. The indicted are those who are found guilty of swearing by three different oath formulas. To swear by a god means as to honor and worship him.<sup>57</sup> The verse contains three different oath formulas, which probably each corresponds to the god of a local sanctuary. According to Shalom, the expression **באשמת שמרון** (the guilt of Samaria) may very well refer to the worship of the Lord at the national sanctuary of Samaria in Bethel with its image of a calf.<sup>58</sup> Hosea also mentions "the calf of Samaria" (8: 6), which he, on another occasion (10: 8a), alludes to as the "sin of Israel". This appellation may probably derive from the fact that "the golden calf" is called "your sin" in Deut 9: 21. Amos is probably asserting that the people sin by worshipping YHWH in this manner. The second oath formula is **חי אלהיך דן** (by the life of your god of Dan). It likely refers as well to the worship of YHWH in form of a bull image set up in Dan by Jeroboam I (cf. 1 Kgs 12: 28-30).<sup>59</sup> According to Amos such a cult is actually a defection from the true worship of YHWH. The third oath formula is **חי דרך באר־שבע** (by the life of the way of Beer-Sheba). Once again the prophet recalls the participation of northern Israel in the cult that took place in Judah at Beer-Sheba (5: 5). The phrase **באר־שבע דרך** is very problematical and gives different ways of interpretations: some suggest reading **דרךך** ("your uncle" or "your darling"), which means

<sup>56</sup> Shalom M. Paul, pp. 268.

<sup>57</sup> Erling Hammershaimb, p. 128.

<sup>58</sup> Shalom M. Paul, pp. 270.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



“your patron god / your tutelary god”.<sup>60</sup> But we are convinced that דָּרָךְ may refer to the taking an oath by the life of the “way”, that is, by the “pilgrimage to Beer-Sheba”.<sup>61</sup> Those who take the oath will fall and will never to rise again.

The whole passage would then allude on the most probable interpretation to the worship of YHWH at three different sanctuaries. The mention of these sanctuaries, at which it appears there were images of YHWH, must not be treated as an isolated attack by Amos on the worship of images. The god they worship and swear by is therefore not the true YHWH, but a god that they have fashioned to their own desires.

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<sup>60</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p 270.

<sup>61</sup> W. Rudolph, p. 268, 270- 71; Hans Walter Wolff, p. 332.

## **Chapter 3: The Exile**

In this chapter, through an interpretation of different texts from different places in the book of Amos, I will show how serious are YHWH's sayings concerning the judgment against Israel which ends up with the people's deportations into exile. I choose these texts in this sense that they could display at the same time the reasons for the exile and the exile itself. These sayings consist of judgments against individuals as well as the entire Israel's nation as a whole. Thus, my study will be based on the following texts: Am 3: 9- 11, 13- 15; Am 4: 1- 3; Am 5: 1- 3, 12- 13, 16- 17, 21- 24, 27; Am 6: 7; 7: 11, 17; 9: 4, 9

### **3.1 Study of Exile Materials**

#### **3.1.1. Am 3: 9- 11, 13- 15**

##### **3.1.1.1. Text and Translation**

*v. 9: Call out to the strongholds in Ashdod, and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt, (and say:) Assemble upon the mountains of Samaria and see the great tumults within her, the oppressors in her midst.*

*v. 10: They do not know to do what is right, [a saying of YHWH] they who store up violence and destruction in their strongholds.*

*v. 11: Therefore this is what the Lord YHWH has said: "An enemy will surround the land; he will bring down your defences, and your strongholds will be plundered."*

*v. 13: "Hear and testify against the house of Jacob," a saying of the Lord YHWH, God of Hosts,*

*v. 14: that on the day when I punish Israel for his crimes, I will punish the altar of Bethel. The horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the earth.*

*v. 15: "I will smite the winter-house with the summer-house. The houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses come to an end," a saying of YHWH.*

##### **3.1.1.2 Interpretation**

The oracle in vv. 9- 11 is addressed to the prominent citizens of Samaria and announces that what they have done to others will be done to them. The urban culture which they have built through violence will come to a violent end. The plunderers will be plundered. The oracle has the form of an announcement of judgment with indictment (vv. 9ff) and announcement of

punishment (v. 11). The indictment is spoken by the prophet; the oracular formula (a saying of YHWH) in 10a is an editorial insertion to emphasize the sentence which it concludes.<sup>1</sup>

v. 9: Amos pretends to issue a summons to heralds authorizing them to carry an invitation to the city-state of Ashdod and the great empire of Egypt as a highly dramatic and ironic method of commanding the attention of his listeners. The invitation is to be carried to the **אַרְמוֹת** (strongholds) of Ashdod and Egypt. This architectural term is the theme-word of the saying, appearing three times in the same verse. This term denotes buildings that could be constructed to be defensible (Pro 18: 19; Lam 2: 7) and often part of the defense system of a city (Pss 48: 13; 122: 7). The king's house or the palace could include in this term (1 Kgs 16: 18; 2 Kgs 15: 25). These residential strongholds also were a particular object of YHWH's wrath in Amos' prophecy (1: 4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 22: 5) and are associated with the pride of Jacob in 6: 8. Such buildings obviously would be the residences of the richer and the ruling class in a city. The real purpose of the invitation is to show the visitors what was happened in Samaria: a city full of "tumult, deadly panic" (**מְהוֹמָה**) instead of order, oppression (**עֲשׂוּקִים**) instead of justice. The mountaintops surrounding Samaria are higher in altitude and thereby provide an excellent vantage point from which they can look down into Samaria to gather their eyewitness reports.

v. 10: They are "incapable of doing right" (**לֹא־יִדְעוּ עֲשׂוֹת־נִכְחָה**), the abstract **נִכְחָה** designates what is "straight, straightforward, honest, just, correct".<sup>2</sup> The accused are the upper class in Samaria who "pile up and store away" (**אַצַּר**) in their fortress both "violence" (**חַמָּס**) and "destruction" (**שָׂר**). Both terms are well-known substantives, often occurring together (see, for example, Is 60: 18; Jer 6: 7; 20: 8; Ez 45: 9; Hab 1: 3; 2: 17), representing the lawlessness and corruption of the society. **חַמָּס** usually pertains to crimes committed against persons and also appears alongside **דַּמִּים** (bloody crimes).<sup>3</sup> **שָׂר**, commonly paired with **שָׁבַר**, refers to crimes against property (Hos 9: 6; 10: 14; Ob 5; Mic 2: 4). The upper class of Samaria is rich in violence, injustice and oppression of the poor.

v. 11: Then comes the punishment. The expression **לְכֵן** (therefore) binds the city's deed to its doom. The punishment is described by a little narrative of defeat. The divine word which announces the punishment repeats literally at the end the catchword concerning the

<sup>1</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> BDB, p. 647.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, Ez 7: 23; 9: 9; Hab 2: 8, 17.

“strongholds” which stood similarly at the conclusion of the accusation in v. 10b, and which is also found in the opening where the witness from abroad are summoned (v. 9a). The houses of the robbers will themselves be robbed; the scene of the guilt becomes the place of punishment. With the fourth and climactic reference to the catchword **אֲרַמְנוֹת**, the prophet pronounces the retaliation that is to overtake Samaria. What they have plundered shall be plundered in return.

The next pericope vv. 13- 15 commences with imperative **שְׁמַעוּ** (hear!) The identification of the parties involved is dependent upon the understanding of the following imperative **הִעִידוּ ב**. this verbal has been interpreted in two different ways: as a denominative of **עֵד** (witness) meaning “to witness against”<sup>4</sup>, or “to warn”<sup>5</sup>. According to the second interpretation, which seems to me to be preferable, the prophet Amos’ intention here is not to bear witness to what has already happened, but “to warn” Israel about the forthcoming punishment for their actions.

v. 14: **כִּי** (indeed) introduces those facts to which the witness are to bear testimony. First of all, the date of the impending events is given: they will occur at the time when YHWH punishes the crime of Israel. The first evidence for the total judgment will be that the horns (**קַרְנוֹת**) of the altar get hewn off (**נִבְלָו**). According to Israel’s religious tradition, in case of blood vengeance and punitive pursuit, a fugitive could grasp and hold on to these horns. Since the altar also functions as a place of asylum, the fugitive was thereby safe from his pursuers (Ex 21: 13- 14; see also 1 Kgs 1: 50; 2: 28). One could see that now all Israel has become guilty of such grave crimes that YHWH himself destroys the place of refuge. Wolff mentions that “if the contemporaries of Amos already looked upon the altar as a place of expiation and atonement, then Israel is to be deprived also of this means of deliverance”.<sup>6</sup> This sacral security of last resort would be removed. The horns of the altar which have been hewn off and fallen down on the ground provide the witness for the total judgment and punishment.

v. 15: the first-person speech at the opening of the v. 15, once again expresses the fact that it is YHWH himself who brings about the destruction. The verb **נִכְהָ** (be battered, ruined, destroyed) in hiphil indicates the destructive state of buildings which leaves nothing but

<sup>4</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 200- 201; W. Rudolph, p. 158; J. Alberto Soggin, *The Prophet Amos* (London: SCM, 1987), p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> Erling Hammershaimb, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 201.

broken pieces. The wonderfully built residences of the upper class of Samaria are also destined for demolition. Not only “the house of God” but also the houses of men were doomed. Kings built houses whose architecture was adapted to the two climatic seasons of the Palestinian year (see Jer 36: 22). “Ivory houses” (בתי השן) were mansions decorated with ivory inlay.<sup>7</sup> They were luxury villas with interior furnishings of ivory (cf. 6: 4). Ahab built such a house and all the Old Testament references about the term are to a royal residence (1 Kgs 22: 39; Ps 45: 8). It is possible that with these terms Amos refers only to royal buildings. It is also strongly probable, in view of the collectives (winter and summer house) and the plurals, that the prosperity of the rich had allowed them to fulfill their pride by constructing residences like those which earlier kings could build.<sup>8</sup>

In summary, through the proclamation of his prophet, YHWH appoints for himself witnesses who will attest to the fact that he himself executes punishment upon his chosen people. Because of its crimes, Israel is to be deprived of all its foci of security and well-being, be they sacred or profane.

### **3.1.2. Am 4: 1-3**

#### **3.1.2.1. Text and Translation**

*v. 1: Hear this word you Bashan-cows on mount Samaria, who oppress the needy, crush the poor, saying to their lords, “Bring that we may drink.”*

*v. 2: Lord YHWH has sworn by his holiness: “Behold! Days come upon you when they will remove you with hooks, the last of you with fish hooks”.*

*v. 3: Through breaches you shall go out, one after another, and you will be cast out on Hermon, a saying of YHWH”*

#### **3.1.2.2. Interpretation**

The v.1 indicates to whom the punishment is directed. Bashan was a geographical region in Transjordan, a fertile elevated plain spanning both sides of the Yarmuk River.<sup>9</sup> The area was famous of its fine pastureland from which came highly valued cattle (see Deut 32: 14; Ps 22: 12; Jer 50: 19; Ez 39: 18). But what group in Samaria is Amos describing with this title and how is the designation to be understood? Opinions have varied and here are some of the

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<sup>7</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 70.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> John H. Hayes, *Amos: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), p. 138.

interpretations proposed: “the noble princesses” of the Northern Kingdom<sup>10</sup>, “the women of quality in Samaria, the pampered darlings of society in Israel’s royalist culture”<sup>11</sup>, “the elite social stratum of the capital city”<sup>12</sup>, “voluptuously endowed maidens”<sup>13</sup>, “a paraphrase for the whole of the Israelite people/inhabitants of Samaria” who were engaging in non-Yahwistic, Canaanite cults<sup>14</sup>. It seems that the v.1 suggests that the expression “cows of Bashan” refers to indulged opulent class of women in the capital city. The wording of the verse seems to imply that they were women closely associated with the royal court and monarchical administration. The charges Amos leveled against them indicate economic and governmental exploitation (see above on 2: 6- 8). In addition, the women are said to address “their lords.” The term “lords” (אֲדֹנָיִם) implies a special status and should not be translated as “husbands”. Accordingly, I am of Hayes’ opinion that these “cows of Bashan” are to be understood as the women associated with the royal court in Samaria. These would have included the daughters, wives, and concubines of the kings and his sons and perhaps their social circle including women of the government officials who may not have been the king’s kin.<sup>15</sup>

The use of the oath (v. 2) as a way to announce the verdict upon the women of Samaria shows the vehemence of YHWH’s reaction. Their punishment is certain because YHWH has sworn by his holiness. “Holiness” (קִדְּוָה) is the dynamic, awesome, threatening power of the divine; the oath in 6: 8, which YHWH takes upon himself, bears the same meaning. Three accusations are made against the cows of Bashan, all stated in participial form: they are denounced for exploitation (עֲשֶׂה, “to exploit”) of the poor (דֹּלִיִּם) and crushing (רִצֵּץ) them. These two verbs occur together elsewhere in the Old Testament (see for example, Deut 28: 33; 1 Sam 12: 3- 4; Hos 5: 11). The oppression and crushing the poor or the needy were already mentioned in 2: 6- 7. This accusation is about the unethical behavior made by the Israelite upperclass. The third accusation concerns the demands made upon the lords: “bring that we may drink”. The luxury and debauchery of urban affluence in Israel was a scandalous offence to the God for whom Amos spoke. They make their lords the instruments of their own desire, ruling the society from behind the scenes with petulant nagging for wealth to support their indolent dalliance. The women “are depicted as a major stimulus for the extravagant and

<sup>10</sup> William Rainey Harper, p. 86.

<sup>11</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 205.

<sup>13</sup> S. Speier, “Bemerkungen zu Amos,” *VT* 3 (1953): p. 306-7.

<sup>14</sup> Hans M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> John H. Hayes, p. 138.

hence oppressive court lifestyle which Amos condemns.”<sup>16</sup> This means that the women are depicted as demanding a lifestyle leading to oppression.

Verses 2b- 3 contain ambiguous words. Commentators have been almost unanimous in seeing in these verses a reference to the deportation of exiles from Samaria. This is because they think that the instruments noted in verse 2b (צְנוּתָה) do not suggest deportation. Following are some suggestions proposed by some commentators concerning the word צְנוּתָה:

- “shield”: this translation is favored by Snaith and Driver.<sup>17</sup>
- “Ropes”: this translation is suggested by Schwantes based on the interpretation of G, “ὄπλον” and the Akkadian noun sinnatu (“halter, nose-rope”).<sup>18</sup>
- “Thorns”: Ibn Ezra, Rudolph prefer this translation
- “Boats”: this translation, supported by Kimschi, is alluding to a naval deportation.<sup>19</sup>
- “Hooks”: this is the most favored of interpretations.<sup>20</sup>

In sum, this passage is difficult. Nevertheless, the two feminine nouns translated by “hooks” do not appear elsewhere in the Old Testament with this meaning. The first (צְנוּתָה) usually means “shields”; it occurs in a masculine form (Pro 22: 5; Job 5: 5) which probably means “thorns”. The second (סִירוֹתָה) means “pots”, and has a masculine form which also means “thorns” (Is 34: 13; Hos 2: 6). But the image of the prophet is most likely to be understood in the light of the common practice of catching, packing, and transporting fish in such receptacles. This image is also well employed in Mesopotamian sources. The god of Dagan, in the course of delivering his message through a “prophet” to the king Zimrilim, states: “Then I, Dagan, will make the Benjaminite sheiks wriggle / writhe in a fisherman’s basket and deliver them in front of you”.<sup>21</sup> Then the translation “and you will be transported in baskets, and the very last one of you, in fishermen’s pots” seems to me more relevant and fits the context. Accordingly, my suggestion is that this symbol of catching of fish is employed in connection with captive Israel.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> G. R. Driver, “Babylonian and Hebrew Notes”, *WO* 2 (1954): 20- 21.

<sup>18</sup> S. J. Schwantes, “note on Amos 4: 2b”, *ZAW* 79 (1967): 82-83.

<sup>19</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 133.

<sup>20</sup> William Rainey Harper, p. 86; E. Hammershaimb, p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> J.-G. Heintz, “Oracles prophétiques et ‘guerre sainte’ selon les archives royales de Mari et l’Ancien Testament,” *SVT* 17 (1968): pp. 129- 30.

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Jer 16: 16; Hab 1: 14.

The v. 3 tells about what shall happen after the destruction of the city. The “breaches” (פרצים) will be numerous that each inhabitant shall be brought straight out, straight ahead through the breach directly “in front of her”. Shalom states that “the intention of the prophet is not that the residents of the city will escape by the shortest and fastest route but that they will be carried off (in their baskets) as captives without any difficulty.”<sup>23</sup>

Here again, we have the same reason of judgment and punishment: oppression and crushing of the poor. Although the pericope contains words that are still difficult to interpret, one thing is clear: the women whose present is enriched by the suffering of the poor have a future more terrible than the agony of the needy.

### **3.1.3. Am 5: 1- 3, 12- 13, 16- 17, 21- 24, 27**

#### **3.1.3.1. Text and Translation**

*v. 1: Hear this word which I deliver against you, a lament, O house of Israel!*

*v. 2: She has fallen! She shall never arise, the virgin Israel. She is left prostrate upon her land; there is none to raise her up.*

*v. 3: For this is what Lord YHWH has said: “the city that goes forth with a thousand, shall have left a hundred; and the one that goes forth with hundred shall have left ten to the house of Israel”*

*v. 12: For I know how many are your crimes, how numerous your sins, opposing the innocent, taking bribes, and turning away the poor in the gate.*

*v. 13: Therefore the prudent will keep quiet in such a time, for it is an evil time.*

*v. 16: Therefore this is what YHWH, God of hosts, Lord, has said: “In every square there shall be wailing and in every street they shall say, ‘Ah! Ah!’ The farm workers shall be summoned to mourning, to wailing the skilled at lament.*

*v. 17: Among all the vineyard workers there shall be wailing, for I will pass through the midst of you”, has said YHWH.*

*v. 21: “I hate, I despise your festivals; I take no pleasures in your assemblies:*

*v. 22: For, though you present burnt offerings to me your offerings I will not accept; your communion meals of fatted calves I will not notice.*

*v. 23: Spare me the noise of your hymns; the music of your harps I will not hear.*

*v. 24: But let justice roll on like waters, righteousness like an unfailing stream!”*

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<sup>23</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 135.



v. 27: *And I will send you in exile beyond Damascus, has said YHWH God of hosts is his name.*

### 3.1.3.2. Interpretation

The v.1 introduces the lament. It is introduced by the messenger's summons to his audience, but the word is sung in the form of a lament. The fall of Israel, usually announced as coming in the future, is treated as a judgment already executed; the calamity is celebrated as though it had already occurred by singing a funeral song for the nation (v. 2). The mourning song (קינה) is the chief funeral ceremony in Israel. It was a poem of grief portraying the death of a kinsman, friend, or leader, traditionally cast in the 3+2 metre.<sup>24</sup> The choice of the form testifies to the prophet's own grief at what his words foretell. He foresees the doom hanging over the people of God with concern and a deep grief. In the visions threatening Israel, he twice besought YHWH to spare a Jacob so weak and small (7: 1- 6).

The v. 2 contains Amos' *qinah*. He employs the expression "fallen" (נפלה), which is "characteristically used of one who had died tragically or unnecessarily rather than from disease or age."<sup>25</sup> Israel is "fallen" that she "shall never arise" (לאִתְּוֹסֶיף קוּם). The fall is so great that she can neither raise herself by her own power, nor is there anyone else to lift her. She is completely powerless and shattered. In such a situation, the Lord is the only one who could rise her but the use of negation means that even Himself, would "abandon" (נטש) her to fall. The *qinah's Sitz im Leben* is most likely a cultic center where the people have congregated for some festival.<sup>26</sup> On such festive occasions the worshipers were expecting to hear and participate in words of joy. Paradoxically, Amos overwhelms them with an unexpected funerary lament.<sup>27</sup> Shalom noticed that the prophet Amos is the first to utter a lament to the entire nation.<sup>28</sup> One should mention that his funerary lament is more shocking in this sense that he is actually mourning the death of his own listeners. Amos depicts the future lament in the past tense in order to intensify the threat of the catastrophe.<sup>29</sup> The lament is intoned in the perfect tense. In the prophet's eyes, the forthcoming catastrophe is already a

<sup>24</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> John H. Hayes, p. 154. See 2 Sam 1: 19; 3: 34.

<sup>26</sup> Erling Hammershåim, p. 76; Rudolph, p. 187.

<sup>27</sup> S. Amsler, p. 203, n. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 159.

<sup>29</sup> E. Sellin, G. Fohrer, *Introduction of the Old Testament*, trans. D. E. Green (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 276.

past event. Eissfeldt, states that: “the prophetic political dirge is older, a lament, that is to say, over something still in the future, but represented as a downfall, already in the past, of the people or some community.”<sup>30</sup> This fact means that the destruction of Israel is certain and inevitable. The prophet foresaw it as an event already happened before his eyes. For him it is a fait accompli.

The v. 3 contains the words of the Lord which explicate and clarify the reason for the dirge. Israel will suffer a serious military defeat from which only a tenth of its troops will survive. Of an army contingent of one thousand men that “goes forth”, only hundred shall be “left” (שאַר), and of a detachment of one hundred soldiers, only ten shall be left. The remnants will be ten percent and this scanty residue is meaningless for the future of the nation. Thus Amos, once again, denounces their present ill-founded hopes of national immunity and false sense of security. Israel is on the brink of almost total destruction, no matter how much they rely on their armed forces.

With the v. 12, a new oracle containing the element of accusation begins. Probably the prophet is the subject of “I know”. Amos affirms in a summary statement that he has indeed learned of “numerous crimes and formidable wrongdoings” (פּשָׁע). The assertion that the numerous crimes of his audience are well known to him has the ring of a response to claims of innocence on their part.<sup>31</sup> Against such protestations he answers that their deeds are crimes (פּשָׁע) and sins (חַטָּאת) meaning that they are rebellious against YHWH and disobedient to his requirements. The three specifications of conduct in 12b all belong to the sphere of judicial practice.<sup>32</sup> The addressees are men who appear in court as the enemies of the innocent (צַדִּיק). This term designates the man in a legal case whose status is right, who is in accord with the social norms which the court ought to support (Ex 23: 7; Deut 25: 1). The accused take bribes and decide the cases on the basis of the profit instead of right (Ex 23: 8; cf. 1Sam 12: 3). When the poor come to court seeking protection, they are turned away from their only source of help (Ex 23: 6; cf. Is 10: 2; 29: 21; Mal 3: 5). YHWH is a God who protects the right of the weak and poor, the widow and orphan (Pss 68: 5; 85: 3f; 146: 9; Deut 10: 18). Where those rights are denied, he intervenes himself as judge, and the word of that judgment is precisely the commission of Amos.

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<sup>30</sup> O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (New York: 1965), p. 95- 96.

<sup>31</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 97.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

The verse 13 is a judicious comment of a follower of Wisdom. “The prudent man” (משכיל) is a figure beloved in wisdom sayings (Pro 10: 5, 19; 17: 2; 21: 11). Mays remarks that “in a time when the courts are corrupt and the powerful have their way without restraint, the man of wise judgment will keep quiet, knowing that to raise complaint or plead his case will only lead to trouble for him.”<sup>33</sup> Once again Israel is condemned of oppressing the poor and the helpless.

v. 16- 17: The punishment of the oppressors is portrayed by a word-picture of a time when the land will be filled with funerals. The description of rites for the dead to be held in the future was one of the prophetic devices for painting the terrible reality of coming judgment. The Hebrew technical term מִסְפָּד (lamentation) occurs three times in vv. 16- 17. The wailing and mourning will pervade the land. The word רַחְבּוֹתָה (squares) designates the more spacious areas where people can assemble, such as before the gate, at the sanctuary, or upon the local threshing floor.<sup>34</sup> It also happens in the narrow “streets” (חוֹצוֹתָה). This word designates the small streets between the houses of the city.<sup>35</sup> City and countryside will both be involved. From professional mourners (יֹדְעֵי נִהֵי) to the farmers, all shall in the wailing and weeping. Amos emphasizes the fact that the lamentation will spread even to the vineyards, the very place where rejoicing is usually the greatest (cp. Judg 9: 27; 21: 20- 21; Jer 48: 33). This place par excellence of joy will turn into a place of mourning. The calamity and the mourning to come are attributed to a work of YHWH who will pass through (עָבַר) their midst. This language is strongly reminiscent of Ex 12: 12, 23.<sup>36</sup> One should notice that in these verses YHWH “went through” Egypt and struck down all their firstborn, but here the object of his attack is Israel, his elected people. Amos once more leaves the exact nature of the imminent and ominous catastrophic confrontation between YHWH and Israel.

In vv. 21- 23 the essential elements of Israel’s worship are taken up one after another: festivals (v. 21), sacrifice (v. 22), and praise (v. 23). YHWH’s announcement proceeds category by category so as to make it unmistakably clear that all Israel’s worship is totally rejected. Festival (חַג) is the term used in the old festival lists as the common name for “unleavened bread”, “weeks”, and “harvest”, the three annual pilgrimage festivals (Ex 23:

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> BDB, p. 932.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 300.

<sup>36</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 180.

15- 18; 34: 22, 25; Deut 16: 10- 16). Feast-day (עֲצֵרָה) is a term for festive times (Is 1: 13; Joe 1: 14; 2 Kgs 10: 20) when the people took a holiday from work to celebrate (Lev 23: 36; Deut 16: 8; Num 29: 35). The burnt offering (עֹלָה) is the sacrifice in which the entire animal is consumed on the altar and “sent up” to God by smoke (Lev 3: 1- 7). The communion sacrifice (שֶׁלֶם), commonly called זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים in the Old Testament, is a sacrifice in which only a part of the specially prepared animal is burnt on the altar; the rest is eaten by the devotee and so God and people share a meal which re-establishes the wholeness and vitality of their relationship. Offering (מִנְחָה) is here a comprehensive term for any sacrifice brought as a gift, presented as the tribute of an inferior to superior; the name was later specialized as a designation for vegetable offerings (Lev 2).<sup>37</sup>

Hymn (שִׁיר) is the cultic song, the praise of exaltation and joy sung to the music of the נָבֵל a harp with its sounding box at the top after the Assyrian fashion.<sup>38</sup> All these items add up to a picture of the richness and vigorous enthusiasm of the cult of Bethel in the eighth century. The first-person verbs in which YHWH discloses his reaction to their worship of him reiterate nauseated disgust and vehement rejection. The first verb is the strongest; “I hate” (שָׂנֵאתִי); YHWH typically hates the cult of Canaan (Deut 12: 31; 16: 22), Israel’s cult is now on the level with that of Canaan before him. The negated verbs (take pleasure in, accept, notice, hear) are those which normally YHWH’s positive reaction to Israel’s own cultic vocabulary. “Take pleasure in” (רִיחַ), literally means “smell, savor” (Gen 8: 27; 1 Sam 26: 19); “accept” (Ps 51: 18), is a priestly declaratory formula by which a sacrifice is denominated as efficacious; “regard” (Pss 13: 4; 80: 15; 142: 5); “hear”, generally in the Psalter as YHWH’s response to lament and prayer. These denials of the expected response undermine the fundamental purpose of the cult. They run in contradiction to precisely what Israel understood their ritual to be. Cult for them was “the socially established and regulated holy acts and words in which the encounter and communion of the Deity is established, developed, and brought to its ultimate goal”.<sup>39</sup>

The basis of YHWH’s “no” is first explicitly implied in the instruction at the end of the saying: the demand for justice (מִשְׁפָּט) and righteousness (צְדָקָה) in the v. 4. Amos uses

<sup>37</sup> W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament I*, 1961, pp. 141- 72.

<sup>38</sup> A. Sellers, *BA IV 3*, (1941): pp. 33f.

<sup>39</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship I*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 15.

righteousness and justice as terms for qualities which ought to be present in the social order (cf. 6: 12; 5: 7, 15). In Amos,

משפט is specifically associated with the court in the gates and means the judicial process and its decisions by which right order is maintained in social relations, and especially the protection of weak and poor through the help of the court. צדקה is rightness that belongs to those who fulfill the responsibilities which their relationships to others involve.<sup>40</sup>

YHWH is of course included in the dimension of these terms because they are comprehensive concepts which summarize the content of his will for Israel, but their execution belongs to the horizontal sphere of society. In effect Amos is saying that the worship of the cultic community is unacceptable because Israel does not live as the community of YHWH. They are to renew righteousness by recognizing and fulfilling their responsibilities to their neighbors, and see that that rightness bears fruit in the justice of the courts.

To describe what that renewal must be like, Amos uses another of the metaphors drawn from his familiarity with the open country (v. 24). Justice and righteousness must roll down like the floods after the winter rains, and persist like those few wadis whose streams do not fail in the summer drought (Deut 21: 4; Ps 74: 15).

The rejection of cult is total and unqualified. He calls the existing cult sinful (4: 4), useless (5: 21- 23), and doomed (5: 4f). YHWH delivers through Amos a pronouncement on the acceptability of Israel's cult, and the evaluation is negative and the message is "no".

The v. 27 proves the YHWH's "no" in this sense that he is ready to send his people into exile. The oracle reaches its climax with the announcement of the imminent punishment of exile, a theme often repeated through the book. But to where precisely will Israel be exiled? Deportation beyond Damascus could only mean that the Assyrians would carry away the population of the Northern Kingdom.<sup>41</sup>

In summary, YHWH's "no" against Israel is obvious in this periscope. This fact is summarized by YHWH's readiness to send Israel in exile. All the basic props and supports of the nation will utterly fail them: neither their lavish cult, nor their extensive wealth, nor even their military success will offset their destined fate of deportation. YHWH had decided, nothing could change his mind.

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<sup>40</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 108.

<sup>41</sup> Erling Hammershåmb, p. 94.

### 3.1.4. Am 6: 7; 7: 11, 17; 9: 4, 9

#### 3.1.4.1. Text and Translation

6: 7: *Therefore, they now shall go into exile at the head of the exiles, and the reverly of the sprawlers shall vanish.*

7: 11: *For this is what Amos said: “By the sword shall Jeroboam die, and Israel shall surely go away from its land into exile”.*

7: 17: *Therefore this is what YHWH said : “Your wife shall become a harlot in the city; your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword; your land shall be portioned out by the measuring line. You shall die on unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land”*

#### 3.1.4.2. Interpretation:

In the v. 7 Amos concludes his woe-oracle with an irony. It is directed against the elitist leaders who deem themselves the ראשית (leader, choicest) of the nations. The prophet assures them that in the near future they shall continue to maintain their leading position “at the head (בראש) of the exiles”.<sup>42</sup> The leaders, who considered themselves ראשית הגוים (chief of the nations) shall retain primacy of position as they proceed into exile בראש גלים (first of that go into exile). Note the Amos’ clever pun in Hebrew: the ראשית הגוים will be בראש גלים. They are the first who go into exile because they are the ultime cause of the ruin of Israel.

The v. 11 of the chapter 7 is part of the insertion that contains the narrative concerning the dramatic encounter that takes place between the acknowledged head of the intititional religion, the priest Amaziah and the prophet Amos (7: 10- 17). As I have mentioned earlier, the series of visions is interrupted in the v. 10. This famous patentthesis tells us the chain of conflicts between the priest Amaziah and the prophet Amos. In the v. 11, Amaziah cites two utterances of Amos: Jeroboam shall die “by sword (בחרב)” and “Israel shall surely be exiled (גולה יגלה)”. Note the use of emphatic infinitive which emphasizes the fact that Israel will surely be exiled. What is important here, as Shalom mentioned it, is what Amaziah does not report. He does not report that these oracles were “the word of the Lord,” but rather that they were the words of Amos (כה אמר עמוס). This means that Amos was considered as speaking on his own intiative and not delivering a divine message. Amaziah is concerned with the social and political impact of the oracles and does not mention the most important thing that is the reason for the the threats, the sins of the people. Israel is corrupted from the top into the

<sup>42</sup> W. Rudolph, p. 215.

bottom, either religious or secular leader; YHWH is ready to put an end to his people by sending them into exile.

The v. 17 concludes the narratives by fivefold curses uttered by Amos in the name of the Lord. The first curse is directed against Amaziah's wife: "your wife shall become a harlot in the city" (בעיר תינה). The interpretation of עיר as meaning "enemy" seems to me irrelevant.<sup>43</sup> She will be shamed and disgraced into practicing the profession of a prostitute in order to make her living, and she will do it publicly. The next curse is leveled against Amaziah's sons and daughters (בניך ובנותיך) who shall fall by the sword (בהרב). His heirs will be slain; this means that the end of his line is foretold. His land "shall be portioned out with a measuring line". This phrase means that no one will cast a measuring line on a piece of land, thus acquiring title to it (See Ps 16: 6). Thus the loss of his property spells the end of inheritance. Both heirs and heritage will be terminated.

And for Amaziah himself, "you shall die on an unclean land (ארמה טמאה)". "Unclean land" refers to any foreign soil where the Lord of Israel is not present.<sup>44</sup> Amos may refer to Assyria because in other passage, it applies to Assyria: "They shall not be able remain in the land of the Lord. But Ephraim shall return to Egypt and shall eat unclean food (טמא) in Assyria (Hos 9: 3)". Such a punishment is extremely severe to a priest, for he thereby becomes contaminated, polluted, and must suffer the indignity of eating "unclean food" in "unclean land". The fifth curse tells about Amaziah's deportation into exile and of Israel as a whole. Once again the recurrent theme of exile is inveighed against the corporate body of Israel. Israel will be sent into exile; once again YHWH had decided to accomplish his plan to put an end to Israel.

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<sup>43</sup> G. R. Driver, p. 309.

<sup>44</sup> See the same idea in Deut 4: 28; 1 Sam 26: 19; Jer 16: 13; Ps 137: 4.

## **Chapter 4: YHWH's patience and Israel's incorrigibility (4: 6- 13)**

### **4.1. Text and Translation**

v. 6: *I myself gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of food in all your settlements; but you did not return to me, a saying of YHWH.*

v. 7: *I withheld the rain from you while it was yet three months till harvest. I would send rain on one town, but on another town I would not send rain. One field would be rained upon, and a field on which it did not rain would dry up.*

v. 8: *Several cities would stagger to another city to drink water and not be satisfied; but you did not return to me, a saying of YHWH.*

v. 9: *I smote you with withering and blight; I ravaged your gardens and vineyards; the locust ate your fig and olive trees; but you did not return to me, a saying of YHWH.*

v. 10: *I sent on you a pestilence in the manner of Egypt; I slew your young men with the sword along with capture of your horses; I let the stench of your camps rise in your nostrils, but you did not return to me, a saying of YHWH.*

v. 11: *I overthrew some of you as Elohim overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah; you were like a log snatched from burning; but you did not return to me, a saying of YHWH.*

v. 12: *Therefore, thus I will deal with you, O Israel! Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.*

v. 13: *For behold ! he who forms mountains and creates wind, and declares his work to man; who makes the dawn to darkness, and treads on earth's high places—YHWH, God of hosts, is his name.*

### **4.2 Form**

In prophetic writings and in the imprecatory series in Lev 26, the formula “I for my part” usually attaches the element of punishment to an accusation.<sup>1</sup> Am 4: 6ff probably “presupposes that this punishment has in the meantime already taken place, specifically in the form of a withdrawal of blessing of the sort the worship services are supposed to secure”.<sup>2</sup> Verses 6- 11, formulated in prose, view in retrospect YHWH's five acts of disaster, acts which although certainly punishing the worship transgressions of vv. 4f, simultaneously were to serve pedagogical purposes; these acts always met, however, with the same obstinacy on

<sup>1</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 213, n. 11. In the Book of Leviticus it occurs 6 times.

<sup>2</sup> Jörg Jeremias, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p. 69.



Israel's part. The identical refrain "yet you did not return to me" testifies it. The five strophes are constructed in parallel fashion (God's action in the first-person singular perfect, followed by a particle with suffix of the second-person plural and an accusative object or an adverbial expression), but are not equal in length.

### 4.3 Interpretation

In Am 2: 6- 16 the people's immoral and unethical behavior was contrasted to God's goodness and grace toward them throughout their history (Heilsgeschichte). Here, however, their cultic and ritual behavior is followed by a section that delineates YHWH's punitive and retributive actions (Unheilsgeschichte).<sup>3</sup> They expected commensurate blessings of bounty and fertility. Indeed, they are struck by curses and maledictions.

The first in the series of seven curse plagues was famine (v. 6). Two different expressions are used, first the unusual נקיין שנים, "cleanness of teeth" and חסר לחם, "lack of food". When one has nothing to bite into or chew upon, one's teeth remain "clean".<sup>4</sup> The extent of this famine covered the entire land (בכל-עריכם, "all your towns") and בכל מקומתיכם "all your settlements"). The purpose of inflicting the famine was twofold: to punish the people for breaking the covenant and to make them return or repent. Shalom noticed that the unusual expression ער שוב is a bit more intense than the common אל שוב. The latter indicates direction (אל, "toward"), whereas the former signifies the actual attainment of purpose (ער, "unto") and is limited to references to a return to God.<sup>5</sup> Yet they did not return (לא-שבתם) to YHWH and remain obstinate.

v. 7: the second plague was a calamitous drought. The harvest season, first barley and then wheat, takes place during the months of May and June.<sup>6</sup> Because the latter rains were held back (מונע) some three months prior the harvest, that is probably in March and April, the total yield of crops for that year failed. The results were lamentable for the entire people. The expression "one town" which would repeatedly be rained upon but another not, is used by the prophet Amos to emphasize the fact that the source of the natural disaster is YHWH himself.<sup>7</sup> The selective raining is uncommon and the people should have realized that something peculiar was occurring that could not be accounted for by the natural order. So, too, when

<sup>3</sup> W. Rudolph, p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 144.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Deut 4: 30; 30: 2; Is 9: 12; 19: 22; Hos 14: 2; Joe 2: 12; Job 22: 23; Lam 3: 40.

<sup>6</sup> Gezer Calendar, lines 4- 5, KAI, I. 34.

<sup>7</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 145.

only חלקה אחת, “one field” would be תמטר, “rained upon” while another “on which it did not rain”.

v. 8: The drought spelled disaster not only for the farmer but for the residents in the cities and towns as well. Owing to the lack of rain, the wells and cisterns had dried up, causing people from several different towns to search for drinking water in other places but they are unable to quench their thirst.<sup>8</sup> “Two or three towns” is an example of the well-known stair-case numerical parallelism in the book of Amos. In this case, according to Roth, “2 / 3” represents an indefinite small number, that is, “several”.<sup>9</sup> Their search of water is described by the verb נוטע, which literally means “shake, tremble, totter”. Here the verb should be translated as “to reel, to stagger” as it describe the tipsy tottering of a drunkard.<sup>10</sup> This happened because of their dehydration. In Israel’s history the drought plague would result in prayer and repentance, but the people of the Northern Kingdom remained constantly obstinate and they did not return to YHWH (לא־שבתם עדי, “you did not return to me”).<sup>11</sup>

The third plague is given as the parching of the corn (v. 9). The cereal crops, the blast and the blight, were struck. The first of the two שרפון, denotes a desiccation caused by the sirocco, whereas the second ירקון, refers to the brownish yellow withering color of the grain. When the hot desert wind (the sirocco) blows, the grass and the corn wither.<sup>12</sup> In place of their natural green they both acquire a sickly yellow color; this is the allusion in ירקון, which is related to the root ירק, “to be yellow-green.” The word properly means “becoming yellow”, that is, “withering”. The trouble was made worse by a plague of locusts, which devastated the orchards and vineyards. Wine, figs and olives are the most important products of the land after corn. The devastation of the olive-trees in particular is felt in many spheres, because olive oil is used as a food, a cosmetic and a medicament, and is used as a fuel in lamps.<sup>13</sup> But unfortunately, neither do these harvest damages call forth repentance. Israel did not return to YHWH their God.

v. 10: The fourth plague is pestilence and war. The pestilence (דבר) is a common punishment in the Old Testament (see for example, Lev 26: 25; Num 14: 12; Deut 28: 21; 2 Sam 24: 15;

<sup>8</sup> Erling Hammershaïmb, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> W. M. Roth, “The Numerical Sequence X/X+1 in the Old Testament,” *VT* 12 (1962): 300- 311.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Ps 109: 10; Lam 4: 14.

<sup>11</sup> See for example the case recorded in Jer 14.

<sup>12</sup> Erling Hammershaïmb, p. 72.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Ez 14: 19). This plague was inflicted “in the manner of Egypt” (בְּדֶרֶךְ מִצְרַיִם). This expression is also found in Is 10: 24, 26, which alludes to the similar disaster that struck both the livestock and the population of Egypt just before Israel’s departure (Ex 9: 3- 7; 15). Although the MT בְּדֶרֶךְ, “in the manner / way of” is supported by LXX, ἐν ὁδῶ “in the way”, many exegetes still prefer the emended reading כְּדֶרֶךְ, “like the manner of”.<sup>14</sup> The rendering of both LXX (θάνατον) and V (mortem) shows that the scourge of the pestilence was considered so severe.

This plague is followed by the “sword”, that is, war. In the course of a disastrous military carnage, the בְּחֹרֵיכֶם were put to death by sword. This term designates young man who is “fully grown, vigorous, still unmarried”, and belongs to the elite troops.<sup>15</sup>

The next event might be interpreted in two different ways. According to the Massoretic pointing, the substantive בְּאֵשׁ means “stench”. In this context מַחֲנֵה would refer to the army, whose corpses, lying unburied in the fields, foul the air with their bad smell. However, in light of LXX, ἐν πυρὶ, “in fire”, many exegetes favor revocalizing the word to בְּאֵשׁ: “I shall make the stench of your camp rise unto your nostrils”. The reference then would be to the smoke of the burning camps that entered one’s nostrils. Despite this disastrous martial plague, Israel did not return to YHWH.

The seventh plague recorded in the v. 11 is the most disastrous of all plagues. It is a major earthquake comparable to that which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. The root הִפָּךְ, which also appears in that narrative (Gen 19: 25, 29), denotes a radical change and is frequently employed to describe an immediate and complete annihilation.<sup>16</sup> The comparison between the narrative in Genesis and here is made to show the suddenness and the thoroughness of the destruction. The description is intensified by the use of the particle מִהִפְכָּה, “overthrow, demolishing, destruction” and the name of God as אֱלֹהִים. This particle is also used together with אֱלֹהִים in Is 13: 19 when referring to a violent destruction. It shows the incomparable enormity and immensity of the catastrophe.<sup>17</sup> The destruction in Genesis 19 is described as somewhat like an earthquake accompanied by a volcanic eruption with a hail of sulphur and a

<sup>14</sup> A. Weiser, p. 153; Cripps, p. 174.

<sup>15</sup> BDB, p. 104.

<sup>16</sup> Greenfield, “The Background and Parallel to a Proverb of Ahiqar,” *Hommage a Andre Dupont-Sommer* (Paris: Adrien-Maison-neuve, 1971): 51- 52.

<sup>17</sup> BDB, p. 43.

fire.<sup>18</sup> Amos, subsequently, compares the people with a brand which is saved from the fire.<sup>19</sup> This fact indicates that they were scorched and were rescued only at the very last moment, but still obstinate and did not return to YHWH their God.

The prophet Amos reaches the climax of his *catalogus calamitatum*, according to Rudolph's expression in the v. 12.<sup>20</sup> It is not said in what the punishment consists. All that is said is "I will do this to you, O Israel". Some have said that "the punishment has been omitted because it offended a later copyist, and has been replaced with the imprecise כֹּה".<sup>21</sup> But this idea undermines the thrust of the prophet's message, in this sense that, all that would remain would be a list of curses fulfilled in the past without any indication of what will happen to the people of Israel in the future. This culminating catastrophe is even the more intimidating and terrifying because of "its indefinite and unspecified nature".<sup>22</sup> Because Israel has not returned to YHWH and has not taken the necessary steps toward reconciliation; Amos now declares that the Lord himself shall take the matters in his hands. The people are urged to prepare to meet their God who, surely, does not come to save as they had expected, but to judge. The imperative הִכּוּן, "prepare" which appears elsewhere only in Ez 38: 7 represents a summon to a final battle.<sup>23</sup> Judgment day is near at hand and the terminal encounter is imminent. Applying the title of the article of Amsler ("Amos, prophete de la onzieme heure,") it appears that the clock now seems to be striking the very last minute before midnight.

In the v. 13, Amos concludes his threat of an imminent confrontation with YHWH by a doxology. The doxology begins by reciting the acts of God in creation by using the three participial verbs for creation: יוֹצֵר , בִּרְא , עֹשֶׂה found in the creation narratives in Gen 1- 3. the first verb belongs to the picture of the potter who forms his vessel of clay (Is 45: 9), but used also of God's capacity to form living beings from dead material (Gen 2: 7, 8, 19). The second verb is used in the Old Testament to express God's sovereign power to create what he wanted without a pattern in anything already existing (creation ex-nihilo).

The theme of the doxology returns to the praise of God as revealed in nature. YHWH is creator of "mountains" (הַרִימִים) and "wind" (רוּחַ). Rudolph gives an interesting explanation

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<sup>18</sup> Erling Hammershaïmb, p. 73.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> W. Rudolph, p. 180.

<sup>21</sup> Erling Hammershaïmb, p. 74.

<sup>22</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 149.

<sup>23</sup> BDB, p. 467.

about the choice of these two elements of the nature.<sup>24</sup> If YHWH is the creator of the mountains and the wind, namely, the most stable and the most moveable, then at the same time are juxtaposed that which cannot be overlooked and that which is invisible. The combination of opposites, however, always expresses the totality, meaning that YHWH is creator of everything.

YHWH makes the dawn (שחר) into darkness (עיפה), that is, God is the one who turns blackness into daybreak and this is similar to 5: 8. YHWH is also extolled as the one who “treads on earth’s high places”, that is the hills (see for example Deut 32:13; Is 58: 14; Mic 1: 3). The expression (refrain) יהוה אלהי־צבאות שמו, “YHWH, God of hosts, is his name” is put here as a polemic against the sanctuary in Bethel.<sup>25</sup>

In conclusion, we could say that Israel repeatedly has had opportunities to learn from its past calamities. The *catalogus calamitatum* contains seven plagues: (1) famine, (2) drought, (3) agricultural blights, (4) locusts, (5) pestilence, (6) sword, and (7) earthquake. This means that God’s cup of patience is full. The curses were inflicted not merely to punish them, not merely to exact retribution for their immoral ways, but also to goal them on to final repentance. Because they refused to take the past lesson to heart, they no longer will be plagued by an additional warning. God’s patience has worn thin. Frustrated over and over again, YHWH declares that the final hour is at hand. The opportunity to repent has passed. The series of plagues executed upon Pharaoh in Exodus reminds us of how God closed the gate into repentance because he hardened his heart instead of repenting. YHWH closed the way into repentance but call his people to meet him in judgment and disaster, because the time for patience has passed.

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<sup>24</sup> W. Rudolph, p. 182.

<sup>25</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 156.

## Chapter 5: The Day of YHWH (Am.5: 18- 20)

### 5.1 Brief Survey of Perceptions of the “day of YHWH” in 5: 18- 20

The pivotal passage in the debate about the eschatological nature of the message of Amos is the first usage in the Old Testament of the expression יום יהוה “Day of YHWH” in 5: 18- 20.

Hugo Gressmann argues that the beginning of eschatology is found in this very passage.<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, who sees the matrix of eschatology in the cult, understands “the day of YHWH” in Amos as eschatological.<sup>2</sup> For Gerhard von Rad, who argues that eschatology is rooted in the holy war tradition, “the day of YHWH” is likewise eschatological.<sup>3</sup>

Klaus Koch has a slightly different view. He holds that “the day of YHWH” is an “important expression of popular eschatology”.<sup>4</sup> In a similar way J. Alberto Soggin has recently noted that “this (Am 5: 18- 20) is probably the earliest datable discussion of an eschatological theme, a theme which... cannot have just emerged then.”<sup>5</sup> Koch and Soggin refrain from concluding that Amos’ own saying on “the day of YHWH” is eschatological.

Scholars such as Meir Weiss and C. Carniti see the expression and concept of “day of YHWH” as an invention of Amos himself.<sup>6</sup>

Other scholars, among them John H. Hayes, assert that Amos has no eschatological message whatsoever.<sup>7</sup> Hayes was preceded by Wolff, who suggests that “the day of YHWH” in Amos is derived by him from the thought patterns of clan wisdom and the wandering shepherds.<sup>8</sup>

Werner H Schmidt, A. J. Everson, and H. M. Barstad deny any eschatological connections in their discussions on “the day of YHWH”.<sup>9</sup> Andersen and Freedman refrain from explicitly linking “the day of YHWH” in 5: 18- 20 to eschatology, while otherwise the authors maintain with fervor that the message of Amos in its fourth stage is thoroughly eschatological.<sup>10</sup> Y. Hofmann supports that “the day of YHWH” in 5: 18- 20 is noneschatological in its meaning,

<sup>1</sup> Hugo Gressmann, *Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1905), pp. 143- 58.

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, “Jahves dag”, *NTT* 59 (1958): 1- 56, 209- 29.

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard von Rad, “The Origin of Day of Yahweh,” *JSS* 4 (1959): 97- 108.

<sup>4</sup> Klaus Koch, *The Prophets vol. 2.* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> J. Alberto Soggin, *The Prophet Amos* (London: SCM, 1987), p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> Meir Weiss, “The Origin of the ‘Day of the Lord’- Reconsidered,” *HUCA* 37 (1966): 29- 60.

<sup>7</sup> John H. Hayes, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, pp. 253- 57.

<sup>9</sup> Werner H Schmidt, *Alttestamentlicher Glaube und seine Umwelt* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), pp. 95- 97; A. J. Everson, “The Day of Yahweh,” *JBL* 93 (1974): 329- 37; Hans M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), pp. 89- 94.

<sup>10</sup> Francis I. Andersen, David Noel Freedman, pp. 519- 22.

and this argument is also shared by Barstad, who believes as does Hofmann that eschatology is a postexilic Israelite phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> It is important to understand that the concept of eschatology is differently perceived by these interpreters. Many who hold that the expression “the day of YHWH” is noneschatological take eschatology in a narrow sense of referring only to the end of history.

## 5.2. Study of Am 5: 18- 20

### 5.2.1. Text and Translation

v. 18: *Woe to you who long for the day of YHWH! What indeed will the day of YHWH be for you? It is darkness, not light.*

v. 19: *As a man flees from a lion and a bear confronts him, and when he reaches home and leans his hands on the wall, a snake bites him.*

v. 20: *Is not the day of YHWH darkness, not light, gloomy, without brightness?*

### 5.2.1 Interpretation

Amos’ famous saying on the day of YHWH is one of the speeches in which he takes up a central theme of Israel’s faith and turns it against his audience (3: 2; 9: 7). The prophet, knowing the decision of YHWH, contests the piety of his hearers, warning against the disastrous outcome of their piety.

V. 18: The woe is directed against those who earnestly believe and long for (הַמְתַאֲוִיִּים, “want, yearn, long for”) the יוֹם יְהוָה, “day of YHWH”. This term is repeated three times in these verses: 5: 18a, 18b, 20. Although Amos is the first to employ this expression in the Old Testament, “obviously the popular conception of victory and salvation that will be brought about by the Lord’s defeating the enemies of Israel was well established and central to their thoughts.”<sup>12</sup> Thus once again Amos directly confronts, challenges, and dramatically reverses another pillar of popular belief and hope (see, for example, 3: 1- 2; 5: 4- 6; 9: 7). Contrary to the prevailing and predominating opinion and belief, it will be a time of defeat and disaster for Israel and not one of victory and salvation.

Amos, abruptly changes the tone and address with a second-person plural and confronts his audience: “What indeed will the day of YHWH be for you?”. The day of YHWH will be one

<sup>11</sup> Y. Hofmann, “The Day of the Lord as Concept and a Term in the Prophetic Literature,” ZAW 93 (1981): 37-50.

<sup>12</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 185.

of the darkness, not light (הויה־השך ול־אֶרֶב), that is, one of disaster, not salvation.<sup>13</sup> It is worth to notice that the motif of darkness, either literally (8: 9) or figuratively (Is 9: 1), becomes a part of the description of the “day of YHWH” in prophetic literature.<sup>14</sup> Here the contrasting “darkness, not light” comes to emphasize the doom and calamity.

v. 19: Amos once again uses simile drawn from his own background experience to dramatize his message. The images employed here are used to show that even if a man were lucky enough to escape the danger on the first occasion; fate would nevertheless catch up with him later. Amos draws upon the image of the onslaught, one after the other, of a lion (הַאֲרִי) and a bear (הַדָּב) whose attacks are ferocious and fatal.<sup>15</sup> Even if a man is safe from the frightening consecutive attacks of both of these fearsome animals and successfully manage to reach home alive, the moment he leans his hand upon the wall, he would be fatally bitten by a venomous snake (הַנָּחָשׁ).

Paul’s interpretation of these images seems helpful in understanding what Amos really means:

Even if Israel has escaped with its life intact in all previous encounters with its enemies, this time deliverance will not be forthcoming. Precisely when Israel feels itself secure, more than ever will the deadly “bite” of the “Day of the Lord” take place.<sup>16</sup>

The disaster is inescapable. The people yearn for YHWH’s intervention against their foes as their way to security, and thereby invoke their doom. They flee into danger; the salvation they desire is in fact their death, for they are enemies of YHWH.

V. 20: this verse repeats the conclusion of v. 18, but adds two other words for light and darkness: אֶפֶל, “darkness”, נֶגַה, “brightness”. This language of “light / darkness” is the same which, on the first day of creation, distinguishes the condition for life (the created “light”) from the previous chaos (“darkness”), from which that “light” is expressly separated (Gen 1: 2- 4).<sup>17</sup> So the concluding statement in v. 20 extinguishes any nascent glimmer of hope.

In conclusion, the idea that the “day of YHWH” was a part of popular theology of some Israelites may be sustained on the assumption that the “you” in the 5: 18c refers to the people

<sup>13</sup> W. Rudolph, p. 203.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Is 13: 10; Ez 30: 3; Joe 2: 1- 2; Zeph 1: 15.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, 1 Sam 17: 34, 36, 37; 2 Kgs 2: 24; Hos 13: 7- 8; Pro 28: 15.

<sup>16</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 186.

<sup>17</sup> Jörg Jeremias, p. 100.



of Israel.<sup>18</sup> It seems that the “day of YHWH” was considered by at least some Israelites as a day when YHWH would intervene in behalf of his people. This “popular eschatology” which understands the “day of YHWH” as a day of YHWH’s saving intervention, is reversed by Amos into a day of doom for Israel. Israel has become like one of the other nations and thus is in no better position to avert the coming calamity.

## 6 Conclusion

This first chapter contains undeniable data testifying to the radical “no” of YHWH against Israel. First of all, the five vision narratives culminates with the statement that “the end of my people Israel is come”. This radical statement closes all possible ways of salvation, and YHWH is eager to put an end to his sinful and obstinate people.

Apart from that, the oracles of judgment leveled against Israel are numerous. Disastrous military defeat and catastrophic end of both people and leaders testifies their social sins, which are qualified by YHWH himself as crimes. The rich people belonging to the upper class oppress and take profit from the poor and the needy. Everyday life is full of dishonest and robbery. YHWH sees his chosen people as worse than the nations.

YHWH tried to call Israel’s attention into repentance by sending several plagues, but in vain, Israel remained obstinate and unrepentant. The popular hope of victorious “day of YHWH” is reversed into a day of disaster and death. The day of YHWH will come but it will be an event of God’s retribution which will strike Israel into an end.

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<sup>18</sup> We do not agree with Smelik that those who long for the day of YHWH are the false prophets. See K. A. D. Smelik, “The meaning of Amos V 18- 20,” *VT* 36 (1986): 247.

## Part Two: TEXTS WITNESSING TO A POSSIBLE HOPE FOR ISRAEL

### **Chapter 1: The Exhortations in Am 5: 4- 6, 14- 15**

In the book of Amos only a few utterances come under considerations as exhortations, namely in chapter 5 and the obscure v. 12 of chapter 4. In Am 5: 4- 6, 14- 15 we have several utterances that have the formal characteristics and the appropriate content to be classified as prophetic exhortations. Raitt regards these passages as separate but parallel calls for repentance.<sup>1</sup> Along with Jer 3: 12- 13, 22 and 4: 1- 2, 3- 4, they comprise for him the only calls to repentance which are independent literary genres. Let us now overview 5: 1- 17, the pericope that contains our interested exhortations.

#### **1.1 An Overview of Am 5: 1- 17**

Am 5: 1- 17 is often taken as a rhetorical unit, “but the ordering of the material in this chapter of Amos seems peculiar at the first glance, particularly because the several sayings beginning with ‘seek’, which we might have expected to cluster together within the tradition, are separated into two positions, vv. 4- 6 and 14- 15”.<sup>2</sup> After the introductory phrase “hear this word”, the unit begins with a funeral dirge and announcement of destruction in 5: 1- 3, followed by the two exhortations in vv. 4- 5, 6. Vv. 8- 9 comprise a hymnic fragment which bisects the conjectured “woe” oracle in vv. 7, 10- 12, although in these latter verses there is suspected later or foreign material.<sup>3</sup> V. 13 is almost universally accepted as a gloss.<sup>4</sup> And then the other exhortatory couplet in vv. 14- 15 appears. Vv. 16- 17 would suit very well as the announcement of judgment that might be expected to follow integrally upon the accusation in v. 12.

Various attempts have been made to account for the present order of the material, particularly the odd placement of vv. 14- 15. Neither Artur Weiser nor Wolff accepts the authenticity of vv. 6, 14- 15, so that they can attribute the growth of the chapter to the somewhat random

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas M. Raitt, “The Prophetic Summons to Repentance,” ZAW 83 (1971): p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> A. Vanlier Hunter, *Seek the Lord: A Study of the Meaning and Function of the Exhortations in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Zephaniah* (Baltimore, Maryland: St. Mary’s Seminary & University, 1981), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Richard S. Cripps, p. 183.

<sup>4</sup> Erling Hammershåmb, p. 84.

additions of non-Amos material.<sup>5</sup> Wilhelm Rudolph assumes that the present order stems from the redactional work of the compilers of the original Amos tradition.<sup>6</sup> Jan de Waard has diagrammed 5: 1- 17 as exhibiting a readily discernable chiasmic structure, with the exhortations of vv. 4- 6 and vv. 14- 15 being aligned as corresponding elements within the chiasm.<sup>7</sup> While his analysis lends important support to seeing a useful ordering in the rhetorical unit, he does not try to show how the structure relates to the meaning of the whole or of its parts. Karl W. Neubauer assigns the location of vv. 14- 15 to Amos himself, who intentionally used vv. 7, 10- 12 to contribute to the meaning of vv. 4- 6, 14- 15.<sup>8</sup> We think that there is merit in using the context to gain an understanding of vv. 4- 6, 14- 15. That is why my own interpretation of these verses will diverge significantly from Neubauer's.

It seems to me that elements of the studies of Rudolph, de Waard, and Neubauer provide a basic framework in which we can proceed. I agree with Hunter that if we assume that the unit was compiled rather early by the followers of Amos, we are still left with the question of whether the compilers preserved the original intention of the individual utterances or already altered the original intention by placing the utterances together in this particular order.<sup>9</sup> I will argue, as he did, that the compilers did indeed preserve the original intention of the individual utterances of Amos. But it is also possible that later users of this unit may have read other meanings into the passages to meet their own needs. Let us now see briefly the problem concerning the intention in Amos 5: 1- 17.

## 1.2 The Intention of Am 5: 1- 17

In a quick reading, the exhortatory passages in Am 5 seem to clash violently with the bulk of Amos' prophecy. The usual oracles that Amos delivers from YHWH resound with the conviction of impending doom for Israel. Any hope of a remaining possibility for repentance on the part of the people or for YHWH's changing his mind seems past as the series of visions and the litany of lost chances to repent (4: 6- 11) clearly show. YHWH's judgment is sealed and about to be unleashed on Israel, and no one could stop it. Such seems to be the centre of Amos' judgment prophecy.

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<sup>5</sup> Artur Weiser, *Die Profetie des Amos*, BZAW 53 (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1929), pp. 149ff; Hans Walter Wolff, pp. 271ff.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Rudolph, *Joel- Amos- Obadja- Jona*, KAT XIII/2 (Güterlson: Gerd Mohn, 1971), pp. 183ff.

<sup>7</sup> Jan de Waard, "The Chiasmic Structure of Amos V: 1- 17," VT 27 (1977): pp. 170- 177.

<sup>8</sup> Karl W. Neubauer, "Erwägungen zu Amos 5: 4- 15," ZAW 78 (1966): 316.

<sup>9</sup> A. Vanlier Hunter, p. 60.

Yet in 5: 4- 6, 14- 15 we find exhortatory utterances that are hard to harmonize with the unconditional judgment in the rest of Amos's message. A number of ways have been put forward to explain this tension created by the presence of exhortations in Amos.

- One solution is to see really no problem at all, since the real purpose of judgment prophecy is to bring Israel to the decision of repentance. Heschel stated that "Indeed, every prediction of disaster is in itself an exhortation to repentance."<sup>10</sup> The effect of this interpretation is to discount radically the announcements of judgment by regarding them only as threats that are supposed to move the hearers to obedience. In the last chapter this is "precisely how the Deuteronomistic authors resolved the problem, and certainly many later generations have used the judgment prophecy in this way, since it would then have relevance to their own situations."<sup>11</sup> And the view continues to persist, particularly in more popular treatments of the prophets.<sup>12</sup>

- Another solution is given by those who recognize the preponderance of judgment prophecy and give it its due weight but hold that Amos offers a last chance for repentance that would cancel the judgment, if the nation as a whole repented, or at least would yield a remnant, if only a small portion repented. This position usually also maintains either that such a response on the part of the whole people is very unlikely or repentance will be limited to the very few (see Am 5: 15b). According to Mays, for example, "Exhortation is a marginal feature of Amos' prophecy, but it is present and offers an alternative to those Israelites who will hear its instructions."<sup>13</sup>

- The third solution emphasizes the unconditional nature of the announcements that no alteration in the coming disaster could possibly be affected by the repentance of the people. Ward stated that "It is legitimate to infer from Amos' oracles that his purpose was partly to elicit repentance on the part of his hearers. However, it is never said, nor even implied, that their repentance would avert the calamity he prophesied".<sup>14</sup> Rudolph Smend, in his famous article "Das Nein des Amos", emphasizes the radical "no of Amos".<sup>15</sup> Instead, repentance is at best an accompanying response to God's judgment that may make possible the establishment of a new community after the inevitable fall of the kingdom and its cult.

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<sup>10</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> A. Vanlier Hunter, p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Arvid S. Kapelrud, "New Ideas in Amos," *VT 15* (1966): pp. 196f.

<sup>13</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> James M. Ward, *Amos and Isaiah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolph Smend, "Das Nein des Amos," *EvTh 23* (1963): pp. 404- 423.

- Some scholars speculate that a limited time frame or a limited audience explains the presence of the exhortations. Such utterances come from a time in Amos' ministry, often thought to be the early period, when the possibility of repentance was much more real than later on.<sup>16</sup> Whitley maintains that all of the so-called judgment prophets "at first entertained the hope of a penitent Israel turning from their sins, but on her persistent refusal to heed their warnings they represented Yahweh's judgment as issuing in final and irrevocable doom." Or, these exhortations were spoken to a restricted audience for whom Amos had hopes of repentance, even up to the end. Von Rad thinks in terms of occasions when Amos was in the company of a few chosen men.<sup>17</sup> Bruce Vawter holds that Amos was speaking only to the faithful remnant.<sup>18</sup> These explanations would be reasonably satisfactory if only we had some evidence in the text that would support these hypotheses, such as chronological indications or specific mention of addressees. But, unfortunately, these are lacking.

- Franz Hesse stresses the distinction between the word of YHWH (5: 4- 5) and the words of Amos (vv. 6, 14- 15).<sup>19</sup> Amos was called to announce total judgment, but at one point receives from YHWH an exhortation leading to salvation: "Seek me and live" (v. 4b). But Amos tries to make sense of this inexplicable word of YHWH by combining it first with a threat (v. 6) and then by toning down the promised salvation with several qualifiers: the jussive "YHWH may be with you," "perhaps," and the remnant (vv. 14- 15). For Hesse, the tension created by the exhortation derives from YHWH himself, who is always experienced as a God of both judgment and salvation. Hesse sees Amos trying to overcome the contradiction by appealing to the preservation of a remnant which will survive the destruction of the guilty masses and form the kernel of a new, sinless, true people of God.

Karl Neubauer perceives the intention of 5: 4- 6, 14- 15 to be a polemic against the cult.<sup>20</sup> Not only is the phrase "seek me and live" derived from the cult but also the phrases behind v. 14b ("YHWH will be with you") and v. 15b ("YHWH Will be gracious to you"). These latter phrases stem from the salvation oracle associated with laments in the cult. The purpose of these verses is predominantly to expose the easy cultic expectations of salvations as deceptive. Neubauer feels that the cult polemic in vv. 4- 6, 14- 15 combined with the "woe"

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Gordis, "The Composition and Structure of Amos," *HTR* 33 (1940): p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament theology* 2, p. 134.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Vawter, *The Conscience of Israel: Pre-exilic Prophets and Prophecy* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), pp. 91-2.

<sup>19</sup> Franz Hesse, "Amos 5: 4- 6. 14f," *ZAW* 68 (1956): pp. 1- 17.

<sup>20</sup> Karl W. Neubauer, pp. 292- 316.

accusation in vv. 7, 10- 12 produces a unit whose fundamental purpose is to exhort. But Hunter contradicts him by stating that “To attribute an exhortatory purpose to the ‘woe’ accusation (vv. 7, 10- 12) and then fail to see the relation of the accusation (at least v. 12) to the announcement in vv. 16- 17 is to mistake the intention of the whole unit.”<sup>21</sup>

- All of the above have maintained the authenticity of Am 5: 4- 6, 14- 15. One way of eliminating any problem with the exhortations is to deny some or all of them to Amos. Warmuth denies v. 6 to Amos but accepts vv. 14- 15 as genuine.<sup>22</sup> Weiser reads vv. 4- 5 with such irony that it is for him not a serious exhortation and he rejects vv. 6, 14- 15 as coming from Amos.<sup>23</sup> Wolff likewise accepts only vv. 4- 5 as genuine.<sup>24</sup> The positive exhortation in v. 4b is taken to be a serious demand and not just an ironic use of a cultic phrase, but it is, according to Wolff, almost completely overshadowed by the warnings in v. 5a and the announcement in v. 5b. V. 6 is most probably from the time of destruction of the sanctuary at Bethel during the reign of Josiah and vv. 14- 15 probably come from Amos’ disciples a few decades after the prophet’s time.<sup>25</sup> He qualifies 5: 4- 5 as insignificant and does not compromise the judgment prophecy of Amos.

But it seems to me that it is a wonder that Wolff emphasizes so much the fact that in this passage we meet for the first time the form critical genre prophetic exhortation. He holds that the motivating clause in 5: 5b comes from a future act of God and not from a past expression of God’s will (as in the priestly torah) nor from the demonstration of the consequences (as in wisdom).<sup>26</sup>

After this short overview of different perspectives on the intention of the vv. 5: 4- 6, 14- 15, I will now focus on the pericope itself by interpreting these verses.

### 1.2.1. Translation of Am 5: 4- 6, 14- 15

v. 4: *For thus says YHWH to the house of Israel: “Seek me and live (or if you seek me you shall live),*

v. 5: *But do not seek Bethel, and Gilgal you shall not enter, and Beersheba you shall not cross over. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will come to nothing.”*

<sup>21</sup> A. Vanlier Hunter, p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> George Warmuth, “Das mahnwort. Seine Bedeutung für die Verkündigung der vorexilischen Propheten Amos, Hosea, Micha, Jesaia und Jeremia,” *BET 1* (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1976), pp. 31- 32.

<sup>23</sup> Artur Weiser, *Die Prophetie des Amos*, pp. 183ff.

<sup>24</sup> Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, p. 232.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

v. 6: *Seek YHWH and live (or if you seek YHWH you shall live) lest he burst forth like fire in the house of Joseph and devour it, and there be none to quench it for Bethel.*

v. 14: *Seek good and not evil, so that you may live; then it may be so, that YHWH of hosts may be with you, as you say.*

v. 15: *Hate evil and love good, in order to produce justice in the gate; perhaps YHWH of hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*

### 1.2.2. Interpretation

In 5: 4- 5 Amos conveys a word from YHWH introduced by the messenger formula. This utterance begins with imperatives: דרשוני וחי, “seek me and live”. It seems that it stands in contradiction with the previous verses. Some commentators resolve the problem by contending that the words of the prophet are meant to be ironical, or that the prophet Amos is addressing the masses and not the official religious and political leadership as previously.<sup>27</sup> Shalom denies this fact by emphasizing the seriousness of the imperative call in this sense that it is repeated thrice in the whole pericope (vv. 4, 6, 14).<sup>28</sup> It is widely recognized that this phrase stems from a cultic setting, but “Since no exact parallel to this phrase occurs in the Old Testament, there cannot be, however, absolute certainty that this is a cultic genre.”<sup>29</sup> Wolff tends to make the form to derive from wisdom traditions.<sup>30</sup> For him the consequence “and live” elsewhere is non-cultic.

Anyway, Hunter gives an interesting clarification with regard to the use of the verb דרש.<sup>31</sup> He, at the same time, demonstrates the fact that without rejecting the possible wisdom connections of the phrase in arguing that linguistic and formal characteristics of the phrase do have points of contact with cultic expressions. He argues that Ps 27: 8 affords a seemingly close parallel to the first element of the phrase: “You have said, ‘seek my face...your face, O YHWH, do I seek,” although the verb here is בקש and not דרש. But he continues in arguing that both verbs occur in Ps 105: 4: “Seek (דרש) YHWH and his strength, seek (בקש) his face continually.” And in Ps 24: 6 we read: “Such is the generation of those who seek (דרש) him, those who seek (בקש) the face of the God of Jacob” (Cf also Ps 9: 11; 69: 33). The second

<sup>27</sup> Artur Weiser, pp. 190- 92.

<sup>28</sup> Shalom M. Paul, pp. 161- 62.

<sup>29</sup> A. Vanlier Hunter, p. 71.

<sup>30</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Amos the Prophet: The Man and his Background* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 44- 53.

<sup>31</sup> A. Vanlier Hunter, p. 71.

element promising life can also be very much from a cultic setting, even it is also central to wisdom teaching.<sup>32</sup>

Those who accept the cultic background of the phrase in 5: 4b usually assume that a similar phrase may have been part of the priestly instruction used in connection with participation in the cult, including the sacrificial system.<sup>33</sup> But it is also possible that *דרש* with YHWH as its object reflects, not a priestly usage, but the practice of consulting a prophet for an oracle in time of need (for example, 1 Sam 9: 9; 1 Kgs 14: 5; 2 Kgs 3: 11; 8: 8).<sup>34</sup> If this is the case, then the people would have understood “seek me and live” to be directing them to consult a prophet, that is, a cult prophet associated with one of the major sanctuaries.

But let us specify more precisely what “seeking YHWH” through a prophet entailed. The second imperative “and live” is rightly interpreted as a direct consequence of the first, so that we might paraphrase the full clause: “seek me so that you may live”.<sup>35</sup> Then the phrase “seek me and live” must refer to some cultic activity in which the prophet played a role where there always a promise and assurance of salvation, but there was no guarantee that one would always of necessity receives a favorable response from the prophet.<sup>36</sup> This could be the liturgies of individual or national lament, in which the petitioner asks for YHWH’s favor and help for his need and then receives a salvation oracle, announced with “liturgical certainty.”<sup>37</sup>

The motivating clause in v. 5b, which announces the end of Gilgal and Bethel, instead proclaims the extinction of the cult at these sanctuaries as typifying the punishment YHWH is meting out for the total failure of the people, as outlined in the accusations throughout Amos’ prophecy.<sup>38</sup> Notice that the sanctuaries are going to be destroyed, whether Amos’ hearers stop going to them or not.

I would conclude that the imperative “seek me and live” in v. 4b are an ironic usage of a cultic phrase with no real positive meaning, for what the people take it to mean is negated by the prohibitions of v. 5a and the announcement in v. 5b. Therefore I must agree with Weiser

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<sup>32</sup> James Luther Mays, pp. 86- 88.

<sup>33</sup> George Warmuth, pp. 28- 29.

<sup>34</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 88.

<sup>35</sup> Franz Hesse, p. pp. 4- 5.

<sup>36</sup> See the story of Ahijah in 1 Kgs 14: 1ff.

<sup>37</sup> A. Vanlier Hunter, p. 73.

<sup>38</sup> Artur Weiser, p. 190.



and Warmuth that the force of this YHWH utterance is not exhortation but a combination of accusation and announcement of judgment.<sup>39</sup>

V. 6 contains an utterance that is not a word from YHWH but a word of the prophet, as it is stated in third person. It begins with a repetition of the opening exhortation from v. 4b; once again the insistent connection between turning to YHWH and life is heard. But this time instead of the prohibition of the sanctuaries and announcement of judgment, there follows the threat that YHWH may destroy the entire people.

The ׀-clause portrays the consequence of not seeking YHWH. By its very nature, ׀-clause sets up a conditional alternative. The majority of ׀-clauses in the Old Testament follow an imperative or prohibition. And very often it spells out the very serious, life-endangering or life-losing consequences that will ensue if the demand of the imperative is not met.<sup>40</sup> In psalms, the word ׀, “lest” occurs only nine times in seven psalms: 2: 12; 7: 3; 13: 4, 5 (twice); 28: 1; 38: 17; 50: 22 and 91: 12. It is worth to notice that a majority of these occurrences are in psalms of individual lament. Just as occurrences of ׀-clauses in the psalms of lament may prove helpful in assessing the full intention of Am 5: 6, so too the presence of “there-is-none”-clause (אין) in the laments may give evidence that Amos is imitating language and form from the lament liturgies. The usage of describing a bad situation followed by אין and a participle indicating that there is no relief is found several times in the book of Psalms, especially in the context of lament: for example 7: 3; 22: 12; 50: 22; 69: 21; 71: 11; 107: 12. In the lament psalms the petitioner delivers an ultimatum to YHWH: Help me, or else my enemies will destroy me; but in Am 5: 6 the prophet delivers an ultimatum to the people: Seek YHWH, or else he will destroy you.

In sum, the prophet’s words in v. 6 delivers an ultimatum insisting that the people seek YHWH, or else suffer the terrible consequences (fire). Here there is in form a kind of conditional exhortation, and it is no longer ironic but to be taken seriously. But up to now we do not have any clear indication of what “seeking YHWH” really means.

vv. 14- 15: The two verses consist of imperatives and consequence clauses. It is evident here that the phrase “seeking YHWH” means “seeking good and not evil”. The use of למען, “in order that” is confirming evidence that the second imperative “and live” had indeed a purpose

<sup>39</sup> Artur Weiser, pp. 191- 192; Warmuth, pp. 29, 35.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Gen 3: 3; 19: 15, 17; Ex 19: 21, 22, 24; 20: 19; Jos 2: 15; Jdg 14: 15; 18: 25; 1 Sam 15: 6; 2 Sam 15: 14.

or final sense. Apparently the two words “seek” and “live” were so closely connected in the original cultic phrase that both continue to appear in v. 14a, but when “seek” is reinterpreted by other verbs in v. 15a, so also is “live” given a new explanation. There are two ways of assessing the phrase **הציגו בשער משפט**:

(1)- Either in the imperative sense “(hate evil and love good) -- and produce justice in the gate”

(2)- Or in the final sense “in order that you may produce justice in the gate.”

The latter is certainly possible and may even be probable here. But either way, a just society is the goal here and not prosperity and health.

For Amos, “seeking” means a total dedication to and concern with the “good”.<sup>41</sup> One finds the Lord, according to the prophet, not in the observance of ritual, but in one’s undivided devotion to the moral dimension of human relations.

The imperatives, “hate” and “love” intensify the exhortation and emphasize the personal involvement which is called for. For “the Hebrew ‘hate’ and ‘love’ are not only powerful emotions, but also actions in which a person sets himself for or against...”<sup>42</sup> Loving and hating mean bringing into force all the resources and powers of feeling, will, and thought in devotion to or rejection of a person or value.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, the decision about good and evil is a decision for or against YHWH and therefore an invocation of his blessing or his judgment. The normative values which make up the structure of good are those belonging to righteousness in the social order, those protected and maintained by the **משפט** of the court. The court is the place where the poor are protected, the widow and orphan receive help, right is advocated and righteousness bears its fruit.<sup>44</sup>

Each of the exhortation is followed by a promise (14b, 15b). They are subordinate to the exhortations, meaning that, their fulfillment depends on obedience to the exhortations. It is evident here that the prophet Amos sets the salvation that Israel took for granted under the condition of reform in Israel’s life. The phrase **יהוה אלהי־צבאות אתכם**, “YHWH of hosts may be with you” has its root in the good fortune, prosperity, military and economic success of the Northern Kingdom.<sup>45</sup> The Israelite believed that their success is due to the fact that the Lord

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<sup>41</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 176.

<sup>42</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 100.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

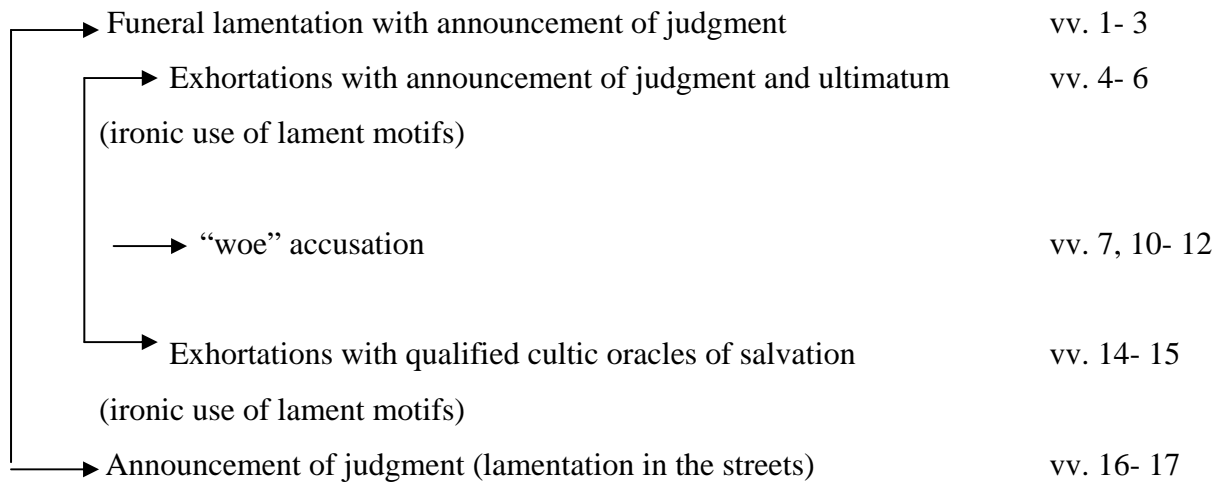
<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>45</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 176.

is with them. The prophet, however, makes this state of affairs entirely contingent: YHWH's presence is conditioned by solely on their behavior. In the second promise (15b) there is a sharp reservation in favor of YHWH's sovereign freedom on his relation to Israel. I will develop this point in the next chapter.

### 1.2.3. Summary and Conclusions

As I have stated earlier, these exhortations seem to clash with the rest of Amos' prophecy which is full of judgment and announcement of doom. It seems to me that a careful structure analysis of the whole unit (5: 1- 17) could give us more clarification about the function and the role they play in the prophecy of Amos. So, before concluding, I want to present shortly the chiasmic structure suggested by Hunter and his opinion about the intention lying behind the unit.<sup>46</sup> The structure of 5: 1- 17 is presented as follows:



The placement of the exhortation shows how they contribute to the overall judgment of the unit, which starts and ends with an unconditional announcement of judgment. The centre of the chiasm, that is “woe”, testifies to the fact that Israel is not seeking the good but still living in all sorts of injustice. So, what we face here are simply judgments under the form and content of exhortations. Israel's salvation is conditioned by what the so-called exhortations required, but YHWH himself knew that these requirements will never be reached in this sense that the social injustice grew worst. Israel is under judgment and death, but the only question we should ask is concerning the notion of the “rest”. Is there any hope that a portion of the people will not be touched by the coming judgment?

<sup>46</sup> A. Vanlier Hunter, p. 104.

## **Chapter 2: The motif of “remnant” in Am 3: 12 and 5: 15**

Would there be or could there be hope, at least some genuine hope? This inquiry invites us to consider the remnant motif in Amos.

### **2.1. Brief Survey of Views of Am 3: 12 and 5: 15**

Many scholars contend that the remnant motif in Amos is not cancelled out by the finality of the judgment message, including the coming reality of the “day of YHWH”. The essential question is whether Amos’ message demands an interpretation of a radical either/or. Since Amos announces the end of the nation as a nation, is it true that there cannot be any future whatsoever for any entity? Does Amos’ message contain some genuine hope for the future?

Some scholars feel that to make Amos into a consistent prophet of doom is to put him into a straitjacket of our own making.<sup>1</sup> If Amos had no future hope whatsoever, his message would stand totally unique among the prophets of the eighth century B.C. Why would YHWH reveal himself through Amos in a totally negative way?

Since 1970s a number of major studies have been produced on the remnant idea in the Old Testament. The remnant idea in the book of Amos does not originate in the sociopolitical sphere of warfare but is deeply rooted in Israel’s history. It is known from ancient Near Eastern texts prior to the establishment of Israel in contexts of natural catastrophes, economic hardships, physical difficulties, and military-political strife.<sup>2</sup>

There is a twofold usage of the remnant in Amos. In a negative sense the remnant heightens the picture of judgment (3: 12; 4: 1- 3; 5: 3; 6: 9- 10; 9: 1- 4), because of the meaninglessness of the remnant. The positive aspect of the remnant theme holds out hope for a faithful remnant from within the nation (5: 3, 14- 15; 9: 11- 12) and defines more closely the message of doom. The remnant is a remnant from Israel, sifted along ethical-religious lines.<sup>3</sup> F. Dreyfus essentially supports the twofold picture of the remnant in Amos, but points out how various commentators on critical grounds redate some or all passages with a positive notion of the remnant.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Philip Hyatt, *Prophetic Religion* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1947), p. 100. See also Arvid, S. Kapelrud, “New Ideas in Amos,” *VTS 15* (1965): p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: A History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1980), pp. 50- 134.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173- 215.

<sup>4</sup> F. Dreyfus, “Reste d’Israel,” *DBS 10* (1981): pp. 422- 23.

Jutta Hausmann takes a radically different perspective.<sup>5</sup> She allows for but a most minimalist idea of the remnant in pre-exilic prophetic writings. She dates most of the major texts to exilic times and later and only acknowledges 5: 14- 15 to come from Amos. According to her, the remnant is not a national possibility, but a religious notion conditioned by the “perhaps”, which expresses a vague hope in a direct manner. It is part of Amos’ future expectation.<sup>6</sup>

Recent scholar like Wolff denies 5: 14- 15 to Amos and sees there a negative sense of remnant.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2. Translation of Am 3: 12 and 5: 15

3: 12: *Thus said YHWH: As the shepherd rescues out of the mouth of a lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be snatched away - those dwelling in Samaria on splendid beds and couches from Damascus.*

5: 15: *Hate evil and love good, in order to produce justice in the gate; perhaps YHWH of hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*

## 2.3. Interpretation

V. 12 is a *masal*, a saying which illuminates one thing by comparing it to another whose character is generally known. The formulation of comparison is a feature of Amos’ style. Frequently he takes images from everyday life to make his message vivid and clear (2: 13; 5: 24; 6: 12; 5: 7; 9: 9). But here a messenger formula introduces the comparison as a divine saying. The message of YHWH is clothed in the style of Amos. The voice is the voice of the shepherd from Tekoa but the word is the word YHWH.

The imagery of the comparison is drawn from the work of the shepherd who, in pasturing his flocks across wide, uninhabited hill country, had frequently to face the raids of marauding wild beasts (see for example 1 Sam. 17: 34f). According to the customary legal tradition of Israel and the surrounding cultures, a shepherd had to give evidence to the owner of the sheep, when any of the flock had to been captured, by producing what was left of the carcass.<sup>8</sup> If the shepherd fails to do so, he must pay the penalty: “If it (the animal) was torn to

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<sup>5</sup> Jutta Hausmann, *Israel's Rest. Studien zum Selbstverständnis der nachexilischen Gemeinde* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1987), p. 184 n. 227.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186, 187.

<sup>7</sup> Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, p. 250.

<sup>8</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 118.

pieces by a wild animal, he shall bring in the remains as evidence and he will not be required to pay for the torn animal.” (NIV translation) This is the legal background of the image employed here by Amos. The point is that the shepherd, in order to verify his innocence, must prove that the animal under his care was killed by an attack of a ravenous beast and that there was no negligence on his part. This he does by “snatching away” (יציל) from the very “mouth of the lion” (מפי הארי) any small remains of the devoured animal. Amos mentions first “two legs” (שתי כרעים), an expression denoting exactly the part of leg of an animal which is between knee and fetlock.<sup>9</sup> The other remnant is ברל-אין, a hapax legomenon, which T translates חסחום, “cartilage forming the ear”. Amos selected these very two parts of the animal’s body to create a merism, that is, from top (ear) to bottom (leg), almost nothing whatsoever will be saved.

The verb נצל from which derives the hiphil imperfect יציל means “snatch away, take away, pull out, extricate, rescue”.<sup>10</sup> It is very unfortunate that Israel’s deliverance will be like that of the poor beast whose remains only serve as evidence of destruction. The rescue of evidence proves that rescue came too late. It is obviously an ironic thrust. It is clear that “the saying does not promise the survival of a remnant, however small and wounded, after the coming judgment, but rather shatters any hope of rescue.”<sup>11</sup> And Mays continues in stating that “they (the Israelites) could loll on their couches and dismiss Amos’ message with a prattle about a theology of redemption. But the divine shepherd, on whose protection they presumed, now only wanted the evidence of their death.”<sup>12</sup> There is no hope of any rescue on YHWH’s part, the motif of the remnant is obviously an evidence of the death and the end of Israel.

5: 15: I have already talked about the vv. 14- 15 earlier, but here I will focus on the motif of remnant in the v. 15. Of utmost importance for the interpretation of Am 5: 14- 15 is the manner in which the consequence clauses are connected to the imperatives. V. 14 begins with the jussive “it may be so” (ויהי-כן), just as v. 15b begins with “perhaps” (אולי). According to Hunter, “these both serve the purpose of dissociating the seeming promise in the consequence clauses from any certain connection with the heeding of the exhortations.”<sup>13</sup> Amos hereby rejects the notion that salvation from YHWH can be absolutely declared or given in the cult.

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<sup>9</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 119.

<sup>10</sup> BDB, p. 665.

<sup>11</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 67- 8

<sup>13</sup> A. Vanlier Hunter, p. 84.

In fact, in light of his judgment prophecy, Amos was certain that the demand to seek YHWH had to be set forth and that adherence to this demand did not guarantee in any way that YHWH would show favor on Israel.<sup>14</sup> So the accent is on the self-contained exhortations, with only possible consequences of a promise: “seek the good, YHWH’s favor may or may not follow.”

The meaning of v. 15b depends considerably on the interpretation of the phrase “remnant of Joseph” (שְׂאֵרֵי יוֹסֵף). It is common nowadays to use this reference to a remnant to get out of the bind exegetes find themselves in when they try to reconcile the exhortations with the unconditional judgment prophecy. The argument goes as follows: Amos proclaims the unconditional collapse of Israel, but he means Israel’s governmental, economic, social, and religious institutions, the leaders of the country, and the palaces, cities, and temples supported by them. But Amos does not necessarily envision the total annihilation of every individual Israelite. This remnant, however, will consist only of those who seek YHWH by their concern for goodness and justice. This kind of argument is also supported by Hasel.<sup>15</sup> He states that “The tension which Amos’ message produced through the juxtaposition of doom and salvation is bridged by the prophet by means of the remnant motif. The mass of Israelites who refused to return to YHWH would perish in the judgment to come upon the nation, but a remnant, those who returned to YHWH, would ‘perhaps’ be spared”.

According to this interpretation, Amos attacks the popular conception of the phrase “remnant of Joseph”, which would have taken one of two forms in common usage: either Israel felt that with the coming Day of YHWH the nations would be destroyed and Israel as a whole would survive as the remnant,<sup>16</sup> or they had hopes that in any catastrophe some Israelites would survive to carry on as YHWH’s people.<sup>17</sup> If the former, Amos counters with the view that Israel as a whole will not survive but possibly only a remnant.<sup>18</sup> And if the latter, he maintains that the precondition for a possible remnant is not cultic righteousness but ethical righteousness. Such a reversal of popular view is very common in Amos’ prophecy. I am very interested in what Wolff says about the presence of the phrase “remnant of Joseph” in v. 15b. He thinks that since the term just “pops up” and without any attempt of explanation, it is

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<sup>14</sup> A. Vanlier Hunter, p. 85.

<sup>15</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant*, p. 203.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>17</sup> V. Maag, *Text, Wortschatz und Begriffswelt des Buches Amos*, p. 200.

<sup>18</sup> George Warmuth, p. 31

evidence that Amos did not invent the phrase but is using a “term that was understandable to his audience.”<sup>19</sup>

It is entirely conceivable that Gen 45: 7 provides us with the clue to the most probable background for the phrase *שְׂאֵרֵיהֶם יוֹסֵף* as it occurs in Am 5: 15.<sup>20</sup> It is easy to see how the phrase might have been fostered within Israel, especially by the Joseph tribes Ephraim and Manasseh, which formed the centre of the Northern Kingdom. The reference then in 5: 15 could be to the present Israel as perceived from the aspect of the providential care YHWH has graciously supplied since the time of the patriarch Joseph.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the phrase points backward to the special preservation for Joseph’s family provided by God. The phrase might “consequently have been used both in time of need as a stimulus for hope for the future or in time of abundance as a confirmation of special favor from God, both perspectives being based on the remembered past traditions of Joseph in Egypt.”<sup>22</sup> It is clear that this latter connotation would suit the middle part of the reign of Jeroboam II, since it was a period of strength and prosperity for Israel.

Amos then is not countering the positive popular eschatological interpretation of the phrase “remnant of Joseph”, but he overturns their assurance and confidence with one ominous word: “perhaps” (*אולי*). It seems that Amos does not want to presume on the freedom and sovereignty of YHWH.<sup>23</sup> The word *אולי* is employed there because of what Amos knows about YHWH’s prior decision for judgment and not because of his own sympathy and hope for his people nor because of his negative evaluation of his people’s willingness or ability to repent.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.4 Summary and Conclusions

Amos delivered many oracles of doom from YHWH. Then the presence of the exhortations in 5: 4- 6, 14- 15 seems clash with the numerous judgment oracles Amos has delivered. Some interpretations of these exhortations yield a more hopeful tone, one even that seems to contradict the judgment prophecy in the book of Amos. But I would agree with Marmuth that

<sup>19</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, p. 251.

<sup>20</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant*, p. 201.

<sup>21</sup> A. Vanlier Hunter, p. 91.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant*, p. 204.

<sup>24</sup> Franz Hesse, “Amos 5: 4- 6. 14f,” p. 16



the disputation character of these utterances takes away any overly positive assessment.<sup>25</sup> These utterances constitute a disputation in which Amos takes up trusted statements and refutes their intention. Amos is trying to contest the cultic phrase “YHWH will be with you,” and the “perhaps” destroyed any assured consequences of the exhortations even of proper ethical behavior. Amos is in fact exhorting his audience by setting forth what YHWH really expects from Israel in no uncertain terms. What is missing, though, is a solid link between the imperatives and the motivation or consequence clauses. Even in 5: 4- 5 the inference is that the sanctuaries are going to be destroyed whether the people stop going to them or not. And in 5: 14- 15 the expected consequences of heeding the exhortations are restricted by “it may be” and “perhaps.” Only 5: 6 exhibits a more substantial motivating clause, but what is lacking is a clear statement that heeding the exhortations will cause YHWH to cancel or at least greatly modify the coming judgment. In sum, Israel’s salvation is uncertain and is even impossible, in this sense that these so-called exhortations do not guarantee any glimpse of unconditional hope.

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<sup>25</sup> George Warmuth, p. 36.

## **CONCLUSION**

As I have stated in the introduction, my interest is to find out the intention of Amos' prophetic message through the study of different passages representing both the positive and the negative elements in the book of Amos.

I have begun with the five vision reports since they actually contain the most undeniable evidences of the “no” of YHWH in Amos' message. We showed that they are made up of five vision narratives. Other sayings are inserted within the block: an oracle against the priest Amaziah in 7: 16ff and two fragmentary announcements of punishment in 7: 9 and 8: 3. The passages 7: 1-3, 4- 6, 7- 9; 8: 1- 3 contain four vision reports and are written in first-person verbs, meaning that they are composed in autobiographical style. 7: 7- 10 is inserted between the third and the fourth vision reports, having as subject the clash between Amos and the priest of Bethel and it is told in biographical style (third-person verb). We have concluded that this difference in style indicates the fact that the block containing these vision narratives is not an original oral or literary unit.<sup>319</sup> Two major points lead us to conclude that according to these vision narratives, the prophet Amos was only sent to announce doom and the end of Israel: first, it is obvious that in the structure of chapter 7, 7: 10-17 is inserted just after the absence of the intercession of the prophet and before the final decision of YHWH issuing the end of Israel in 8: 2. We agree with Paul that it has been set here directly after the third vision on the basis of the catchword “Jeroboam”.<sup>320</sup> And Amsler makes an interesting remark in stating that it is placed here in order to switch from the total destruction of the people towards an individual punishment (Amaziah, Jeroboam).<sup>321</sup> Later redactor, probably deuteronomic, added some passages, including 9: 11- 15, in order to adapt Amos' judgment prophecy into a more or less salvation prophecy during the post-exilic period. Secondly, the structural study of the visions reports shows clearly that they are set according to a logical thematic progress. In the first two visions, the prophet was allowed to intercede for the Israelites, whereas in the two others that follow, he is there only to answer YHWH's questions. The fifth vision is pointing clearly to the end of Israel with YHWH's statement “the end is come for my people Israel” in 8: 2. YHWH has decided to put an end to his people Israel, probably even before showing the first vision, meaning that Amos' commission was to announce that decision.

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<sup>319</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 123.

<sup>320</sup> Shalom M. Paul, p. 238.

<sup>321</sup> Samuel Amsler, p. 231.

Judgment oracles are numerous throughout the book of Amos, either it is leveled against individuals or Israel as a nation. Amos directed his message to the wealthy people, belonging to the upper class, who oppressed the poor. These people were wealthy and enjoyed great luxury, but they took their profit from the helpless poor. However, they were morally, religiously and politically corrupt. Amos preached his message because the people of Israel were at the summit of worldly prosperity, but rapidly filling up the measure of their sins. The mission of Amos was therefore, rather to threaten than to console. Amos rebuked, among other things, the corruption of their manners, which kept pace with their prosperity. He charged the great men with partiality as judges, and violence towards the poor. Amos' message is largely a "cry for justice". Through his message, Amos says that the Lord abominates processions, sacrifices, and hymns that do not come from sincere hearts. Justice is not being served. Disastrous military defeat and catastrophic end of both people and leaders testifies to YHWH's anger and their social sins are qualified by YHWH himself as crimes. Everyday life is full of dishonest and robbery. YHWH sees his chosen people as worse than the nations.

YHWH tried to call Israel's attention into repentance by sending several plagues, but in vain, Israel remained obstinate and unrepentant. Amos was mourning the death of his listeners, an evidence testifying to their imminent death. The popular hope of victorious "day of YHWH" (5: 18- 20) is reversed into a day of disaster and death. The "day of YHWH" will come but it will be an event of God's retribution which will strike Israel into an end. YHWH decided to send his people Israel into exile.

Apart from these negative elements, we agree with the fact that Amos' prophecy contains some exhortations especially in 5: 4- 6 and 5: 14- 15. But we have shown that the exhortations (in imperative) in 5: 4- 6 stem from a cultic setting and are rather a combination of judgment and condemnation than a call for repentance, in this sense that they are merely ironic. The condemnation is heightened by the use of the  $\text{׃}$ -clause which is commonly used in a life-endangering or life-losing consequences if the demand of the imperative is not met. Israel is under threat of death since they failed to meet YHWH's requirements. Some interpretations of these exhortations yield a more hopeful tone, one even that seems to contradict the judgment prophecy in the book of Amos. In his article "Amos, prophète de la onzième heure", through a skilful interpretation of different passages in Amos, Amsler concluded that Amos' oracles of judgment were delivered to unmask Israel's arrogance and

behind them laying a positive call for repentance.<sup>322</sup> I do not have any wish to criticize him but through the study I have undertaken, no clear reference in Amos' judgment prophecy could be considered as pointing out to a possible salvation. I would agree with Marmuth that the disputation character of these utterances takes away any overly positive assessment.<sup>323</sup> These utterances constitute a disputation in which Amos takes up trusted statements and refutes their intention. Amos is trying to contest the cultic phrase "YHWH will be with you," and the "perhaps" destroyed any assured consequences of the exhortations even of proper ethical behavior. Amos is in fact exhorting his audience by setting forth what YHWH really expects from Israel in no uncertain terms. And in 5: 14- 15 the expected consequences of heeding the exhortations are restricted by "it may be" and "perhaps." Only 5: 6 exhibits a more substantial motivating clause, but what is lacking is a clear statement that heeding the exhortations will cause YHWH to cancel or at least greatly modify the coming judgment. In sum, Israel's salvation is uncertain and is even impossible, in this sense that these so-called exhortations do not guarantee any trace of unconditional hope.

Finally, the remnant motif in 3: 12 and 5: 15 do not give any hopeful salvation for Israel. The *masal* in 3: 12 has the verb נָצַל which means "snatch away, take away, pull out, extricate, rescue".<sup>324</sup> It is very unfortunate that Israel's deliverance will be like that of the poor beast whose remains only serve as evidence of destruction. The rescue of evidence proves that rescue came too late. It is obviously an ironic thrust. Here, there is no promise of survival of a remnant, however small and wounded, after the coming judgment, but rather shatters any hope of rescue.<sup>325</sup> There is no hope of any rescue on YHWH's part; the motif of the remnant is obviously an evidence of the death and the end of Israel. In 5: 15 a possible hope of rescue hangs on the "perhaps" which is probably another way of saying "no".

I would say, according to my research and study, that Amos was commissioned mainly to announce the coming doom which will come upon the obstinate and unrepentant Israel and to proclaim their end. In fact, historically, all that Amos predicted about Israel's end and doom came true when the Assyrians invaded the Northern Kingdom and put its existence into an end in BC 720.

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<sup>322</sup> Samuel Amsler, "Amos, Prophète de la Onzième Heure," *ThZ* (July- August, 1965) : 318- 328.

<sup>323</sup> George Warmuth, p. 36.

<sup>324</sup> BDB, p. 665.

<sup>325</sup> James Luther Mays, p. 67.

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