

SUPPLEMENT TO SESSION TWENTY-THREE

AMOS

Structural Features of the Book

I. MACRO-STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Several scholars have concluded that the book is composed of three main sections: 1:3—2:16, 3:1—6:14, 7:1—9:15. This is confirmed by the literary structural devices within. Quite obviously, chapters 1—2 are a major unit of the book, as these chapters are composed of eight judgment oracles based on the numerical pattern 3+1 ("for three transgressions . . . and for four"). As explained in the notes, the arrangement is deliberately meant to focus attention on the eighth and final oracle, namely, that with Israel.

The second major unit of the book consists of 3:1—6:14. This unit consists of five sections. The first three (3:1-15, 4:1-13, and 5:1-17) are initiated by the warning "Hear this word" (שָׁמְעוּ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הַהֵלֵךְ), the latter two (5:18-27 and 6:1-14) are initiated by the warning "Woe" (הוֹי). The "introversion structure" of the middle section in 5:1-17 confirms the break between 5:17 and 5:18. This overall structure is further confirmed by the focus on the name of Yahweh. Sections two and four end with the same expression (in the Hebrew text). At 4:13 and 5:27 we have the concluding remark, "Yahweh God of hosts is His name!" In the middle section (5:1-17), we have centrally located at 5:8 the statement "Yahweh is His name."

The third major unit (7:1—9:15) is united by its focus on *visionary elements*, in which the Hebrew word for "seeing" (רָאָה) plays a crucial role. Hence, we have a series of four quick visions in 7:1—8:3, each of which begins with the expression "Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold" (כֹּה הִרְאֵנִי אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הַיְהוָה וְהִגִּידָהּ). Between the third and the fourth vision, however, there is an interruption to the series in which is placed a narrative recounting Amaziah's personal attack upon Amos.

The second half of the final unit is 8:4—9:15, composed of two parts. The first part begins in 8:4 with the admonition to heed, "Hear this" (שָׁמְעוּ־זֶה), similar to the sectional headings of 5:18 and 6:1. The second part begins in 9:1 with the visionary notice "I saw the LORD" (רָאִיתִי אֶת־אֲדֹנָי). In the initial visions of the third unit, it was the LORD showing visions to Amos (e.g., 7:1). In the final section beginning in 9:1, the prophet actually sees the LORD Himself by way of vision (thus eclipsing what had been seen before).

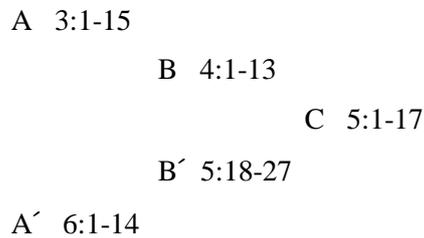
II. MICRO-STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Since sufficient comments about the first two chapters have already been given in the notes on Amos, I will only treat units two and three at this time.

A. Words (of warning) and Woes (3:1—6:14)

There is reason to believe that the five sections delineated above in the discussion of the macro-structure have been composed in a type of chiasmic structure in which 3:1-15 parallels 6:1-14,

and 4:1-13 parallels 5:18-27. This would leave the middle section (5:1-17) standing as the focal point. This can be depicted by the following diagram:



1. Common elements for 3:1-15 and 6:1-14
 - a. Both of these sections have no mention of the repentance theme, in contrast to the other three which do.
 - b. Israel's privileged position as God's covenant people is highlighted near the beginning of both sections.
 - (1) "You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth" (3:2)
 - (2) "the distinguished men of the foremost of nations" (6:1)
 - c. Comments are made about the luxury of "ivory"
 - (1) "the houses of ivory will also perish" (3:15)
 - (2) "those who recline on beds of ivory" (6:4)
 - d. God's disdain for Israel's citadels (outside of ch 1 & 2, citadels are not mentioned elsewhere in the book)
 - (1) "these who hoard up violence and devastation in their citadels" (3:10)
"and your citadels will be looted" (3:11)
 - (2) "and I detest his citadels" (6:8)
 - e. There is a focus on the *houses*
 - (1) "'I will also smite the winter house together with the summer house; the houses of ivory will also perish and the great houses will come to an end,' declares the LORD" (3:15)
 - (2) "for behold, the LORD is going to command that the great house be smashed to pieces and the small house to fragments" (6:11)
2. Common elements for 4:1-13 and 5:18-27
 - a. Denouncement of Israel's apostate religious centers
 - (1) In 4:4-5, this is worded in irony:
"Enter Bethel and transgress; in Gilgal multiply transgression! . . ."
 - (2) In 5:21-22, this is worded as a hatred for their hypocritical worship:
"I hate, I reject your festivals; nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your

grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings."

- b. Rebuke in terms of the repentance motif
 - (1) 4:6-11 - Israel has failed to exercise repentance in response to curses
 - (2) 5:23-24 - Israel's hypocritical worship is no substitute for true repentance
- 3. The central focus on Amos 5:1-17

When we come to the center section of the chiasmic structure, we find that this *focal chapter* is developed in a carefully styled "introversion pattern":

A 5:1-3

B 5:4-6

C 5:7-9

C' 5:10-13

B' 5:14-15

A' 5:16-17

- a. 5:1-3 with 5:16-17

The first unit opens with the announcement of a "dirge" (Heb נִינְיָה). This means a lamentation poem to be sung in times of mourning (e.g., at a funeral or when someone is dying). Balancing the opening unit is 5:16-17 with its heavy emphasis upon wailing, mourning and lamentation. So, both units are united in their emphasis upon lamentation.

- b. 5:4-6 with 5:14-15

- (1) Both of these units urge repentance by calling upon the people to *seek the LORD* that they might live (in 5:14, it is slightly altered to "seek good and not evil, that you may live").
- (2) Both units hold forth a word of hope that total calamity can be avoided, with Israel being addressed as the house/remnant of Joseph:
 - (a) "Seek the LORD . . . lest He break forth like a fire, O house of Joseph" (5:6)
 - (b) "Perhaps the LORD God of hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (5:15)
- (3) Along with the call to seek the LORD, advice is given as to how to make the repentance effective:
 - (a) In 5:5, the advice is to turn away from the apostate religious centers of Bethel and Gilgal.
 - (b) In 5:15, the advice is to exercise true inner righteousness: "Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate!"

c. 5:7-9 with 5:10-13

These units may not appear to parallel one another at first glance, but there are some very sophisticated connections between them.

(1) First, each is carefully structured in a chiastic pattern:

A 5:7	the evil abusers in society - their corruption
B 5:8	the God of heavens/seas - His name is Yahweh
A' 5:9	the evil abusers in society - their destruction
A 5:10	the righteous/prudent man - his integrity hated
B 5:11a	the poor and needy are abused
C 5:11b	destruction upon the evil abusers in society
B' 5:12	the poor and needy are abused
A' 5:13	the righteous/prudent man – forced to keep silent

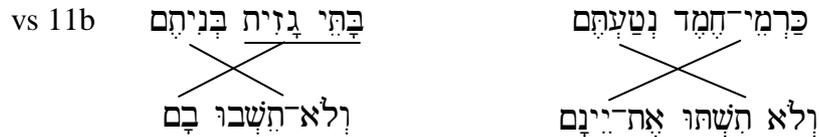
In the first unit of 5:7-9, the outer elements concern the evil abusers of society, whereas the innermost element focuses on the righteous LORD, the author of justice and righteousness. In the second unit of 5:10-13, we notice a *reverse direction*. The outer elements concern the righteous who are faithful to the LORD, whereas the innermost element focuses upon the evil abusers of society upon whom the LORD is going to bring destruction. Thus, the righteous Creator God (*this is who Yahweh is!*) stands in contrast to the evil abusers of justice and righteousness in society.

(2) In the Hebrew text, it is much more apparent that 5:7-9 forms a distinctive unit. First, vs 7 is linked with vs 8 by virtue of the play upon the Hebrew word הִפְּךָ (translated "turn" in vs 7, but "changes" in vs 8 by the *NASB*). Second, the outer elements, i.e., verse 7 and verse 9, are themselves expressed in a chiastic formation. That is, the two lines of verse 7 are chiastically arranged, and the two lines of verse 9 are chiastically arranged. In verse 7, for instance, the verbs are placed at the beginning and end of the verse, whereas the divine attributes of justice and righteousness are placed in the center. In verse 9, the verbs are also placed at the beginning and end, with "destruction" (שָׂדֵה) in the center:

vs 7	הַחֲפֹכִים לְלַעֲנָה מִשְׁפָּט	vs 9	הַמְבַלִּיג שָׂדֵה עַל-עֵז
	וְצִדְקָה לְאֶרֶץ הַנִּיחֹר		וְשָׂדֵה עַל-מִבְצָר יָבוֹא

In the corresponding section of 5:10-13, the innermost element (5:11b) is also chiastically arranged in two couplets. In this case, however, the verbs

are placed as the innermost parts of the chiasm (the exact reverse of verses 7 and 9):



B. Visions of Judgment and Salvation (7:1–9:15)

This third major unit divides into two primary sections, 7:1–8:3 and 8:4–9:15. Each has its own structural style.

1. Visions (7:1–8:3)

As pointed out in the discussion concerning the macro-structure, this unit is composed of four visions, each beginning with the *stock expression* "Thus the LORD God showed me, and behold." However, there is an insertion between the third and fourth visions of a biographical narrative depicting Amaziah's hostile attack upon Amos (7:10-17). Thus, we have three visions in succession with a fourth suspended (analogous to the judgment oracle against Israel in 2:6-16 of three transgressions and four). There is a connection, however, between the third vision and the narrative insertion. The reference to the "sword" in the third vision (7:9) becomes a feature of the biographical narrative in which Amaziah claims that Amos had declared that "Jeroboam will die by the sword" (7:11).

2. Final Confrontation (8:4–9:15)

This material is divided into two parts (distinguished by the *headings* at 8:4 and 9:1), with parallels between the first part corresponding to those of the second. Thus, 8:4-10 parallels 9:1-10, and 8:11-14 parallels 9:11-15.

A	B	A'	B'
8:4-10	8:11-14	9:1-10	9:11-15

a. Correspondence between 8:4-10 and 9:1-10

The primary correspondence is between verse 8:8 in section A and verse 9:5 in section A':

8:8	9:5
Because of this will not the land quake? And everyone who dwells in it mourn? Indeed, all of it will rise up like the Nile, And it will be tossed about, And subside like the Nile of Egypt.	The One who touches the land so that it totters, And all those who dwell in it mourn, And all of it rises up like the Nile And subsides like the Nile of Egypt.

Note: I have used the word "totters" in 9:5a rather than "melts" (so *NASB* and *NIV*). The Hebrew word *נרג* can be translated "tremble, totter" as we see with Ps 75:3 (Heb, vs 4). The parallel with "quake" in 8:8 validates my suggestion.

b. Correspondence between 8:11-14 and 9:11-15

These sections seem to have inverted correspondences. What I mean by that is that 8:11-13 corresponds to 9:13-15, and 8:14 corresponds to 9:11-12.

(1) 8:11-13 and 9:13-15

- a) Both begin with similar expressions ("Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord God")
- b) 8:11-13 depicts spiritual hunger as a famine, whereas 9:11-15 depicts a future restoration as a bountiful harvest.

(2) 8:14 and 9:11-12

The thought about "fall" (*נפל*) and "rise" (*קום*) in 8:14 is balanced by "rise" (*קום*) and "fall" (*נפל*) in 9:11 (notice the reverse order). Those connected with the cult centers in Israel will fall and not rise, whereas the *fallen* booth of David will rise.

The resemblance of 8:8 with 9:5 serves another important purpose. It calls our attention to verses 5-6 of chapter nine which are composed in chiasmic form:

- A And the Lord, Yahweh of hosts,
 B The One who touches [*ptc vb*] the land so that it totters,
 And all those who dwell in it mourn,
 And all of it rises up like the Nile
 And subsides like the Nile of Egypt;
- B' The One who builds [*ptc vb*] His upper chambers in the heavens,
 And has founded His vaulted dome over the earth,
 He who calls for the waters of the sea
 And pours them out on the face of the earth,
- A' Yahweh is His name.

The significance of this section must not be overlooked. Notice carefully the striking correspondences of the B and B' elements. Both begin with a participle. The first mentions the land and then moves to consider water (the Nile). The second mentions the heavens and then moves to consider water (the sea). The main point, however, is that the One doing these things is Yahweh. The One who *touches* the land is none other than the One who is the Creator. The significance of this is underscored all the more when we observe that the latter half of the chiasm is strikingly similar to 5:8-9.

9:6	5:8-9
<p><u>The One who builds</u> His upper chambers in the heavens, And has founded His vaulted dome over the earth,</p> <p><u>He who calls</u> for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the face of the earth, Yahweh is His name.</p>	<p><u>The One who made</u> the Pleiades and Orion And changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day into night,</p> <p><u>He who calls</u> for the waters of the sea, And pours them out on the face of the earth, Yahweh is His name.</p>

Note: I have taken a few liberties to alter the text of the *NASB* to better reflect the Hebrew original.

When we recall that verses 5:8-9 were part of the crucial central section of the middle chapters of the book, we should realize that the close association is not accidental. They both highlight the "Yahweh is His name" motif of the book.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF STRUCTURE TO THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK

From the first two chapters, we understand that the book is aimed at the northern kingdom of Israel. Though she is privileged to be the object of God's special affection (i.e., with her alone did He enter into covenant), she has abused that calling. In fact, she has profaned His Holy name (2:7). Israel's covenant God (named Yahweh) is dishonored through her.

Since Israel has dishonored His name, He will have to act to sanctify His holy name. He will do this by bringing punishment and destruction upon the northern kingdom. Since they have grossly violated His moral virtues of righteousness and justice (especially in regard to the poor and needy of the land), he will destroy those things in which they have looked for security. Thus, in those things in which they have made themselves rich and comfortable through abusing the poor and helpless (such as their lavish houses and vineyards), he will destroy.

Furthermore, past opportunities to avoid God's discipline through repentance were ignored (4:6-11). Yet, hypocritical worship at cult centers like Dan, Bethel and Gilgal were no substitute for true repentance (5:21-26). Nevertheless, God in His grace still offers the opportunity of repentance in the middle section of the book (5:4-6 and 5:14-15). If there is to be repentance, however, it must be genuine—a hating of evil, loving good, and enacting justice in the land (5:15).

Yet the "day of the Lord" is coming upon the nation in the form of foreign invasion, devastation of the land, and exile. Through this, God will forcefully declare that He is Yahweh, the Creator God and covenant God who overturns the rich and powerful who have abused the poor and helpless. This message is carefully constructed to highlight it in 5:1-17 of the middle unit of the book, and then again in the closing at 9:5-6.

Yet, He always remains a God of grace. In the prologue of the book (1:2), we were told that the "pasture grounds mourn" (reflecting God's discipline on the land through the Deuteronomic curse of withholding the rain). By way of contrast, the final section of the book (9:13-15) depicts a wonderful time of harvest and bountiful blessing upon the land—a figurative depiction of Israel's restoration in the land. Furthermore, as He raises up the fallen booth of David at some future day (9:11), we are also told of Gentiles who call upon His name (9:12). They will also become part of God's covenant people!