

## SESSION TWENTY-THREE

### THE BOOK OF AMOS

#### *A Cry for Social Righteousness*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Date

According to Amos 1:1, he ministered in the days of Uzziah (the king of the Southern Kingdom; r 767-739 BC) and in the days of Jeroboam II (the king of the Northern Kingdom; r 782-753). Since much of the book is addressed to the Northern Kingdom, it is clear that the book was written prior to the Assyrian invasion and exile of 722 BC. A date of about 762 BC is probably a good working date for the book.<sup>1</sup>

### B. Author

According to his own testimony, Amos was not a prophet nor from a family of prophets (Amos 7:14). Rather, he was a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. God did not have to have a member of the religious leaders to speak to His people. He raised up a righteous man, whom we might say was a "lay person" rather than among the clergy. He was from Tekoa, a small town about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. Thus, he was part of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Although God does use him to rebuke Judah, most of the book deals with the sins of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

### C. Setting

The fact that Amos writes during the reign of Jeroboam II is quite significant, for this was a time of prosperity in the Northern Kingdom. Jeroboam's lengthy reign of 30 years contributed to this. Stability, prosperity, and expansion characterized the day. Amos 5:11 speaks of their nice houses built from well hewn stone. Amos 6:1 speaks of those who are "at ease" in Zion and those who "feel secure" in the mountain of Samaria. Amos 3:15 spoke of their houses of ivory (this was literally true of the palace at the capital city of Samaria). Overall, this was a time when everything seemed to be going well, and many were prospering. But this also fostered an attitude of complacent indifference toward God. The lust for material wealth was part of the problem. Many were getting rich at the expense of the less fortunate. Amos 5:11 talks of those who impose heavy rent on the poor. Amos 5:12 rebukes those who

*"distress the righteous and accept bribes, and turn aside the poor in the gate."*

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<sup>1</sup>Hill dates the book about 750-748 BC, but before the death of Jeroboam II (see Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* [Zondervan, 1991], 370). However, the date of Jeroboam II's death is 753 BC (see Leslie McFall, "A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles," *BibSac* 148:589 (Jan-Mar 1991): 3-45. Yigael Yadin has suggested on the basis of archaeological excavations at Hazor that the earthquake mentioned in Amos 1:1 may have occurred between 765 and 760 BC (*Hazor*, Schweich Lectures, 1970 [London: Oxford, 1972], 151; cf. Yohanan Aharoni, "The History of the City and Its Significance," in *Beer-Sheba I: Excavations at Tel Beer-Sheba, 1969-1971 Seasons* [Tel Aviv Univ.: Givatayim-Ramat Gan, 1973], 107-8).

As a result of all this abuse and other disobedience, God summons the enemies of the nation to watch what he is going to do:

*"Proclaim on the citadels in Ashdod and on the citadels in the land of Egypt and say, 'Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see the great tumults within her and the oppressions in her midst'" (3:9).*

You would need to understand the geographical setting of the capital city of Samaria to appreciate this statement. Samaria was set on an elevated hill, surrounded on all sides by flat plains. From the base of the hill, the flat plains extended for at least a half a mile in every direction. Because of this, the city was virtually impossible to destroy or attack. The only way to effectively conquer the city was to lay siege to it and starve it out. Furthermore, the city was positioned perfectly in relation to important trade routes (which helped its prosperity). Even the land all around the city was very fertile for agriculture. About a half a mile or so from the city, however, mountains rose up from the plains to completely encompass the city. This is the image that we need for understanding Amos 3:9. In effect, God is saying to the pagan Gentile nations (the enemies of Israel): "Come, gather round; get a ring side seat, and watch closely what I am going to do to My city when I destroy them." One can almost imagine all these Gentiles taking their seats on the surrounding mountain ridges to watch what happens. Furthermore, Israel is rebuked for not yet having repented: "Yet you have not returned to Me" (4:8). Hence, their doom is sure. In 5:27, we read: "'Therefore, I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus,' says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts." Again in 7:17, God says "Israel will certainly go from its land into exile!"

## II. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

See chart on page "*Suppl. 23.1*" and insights into the literary structural techniques, "*Suppl. 23.2*."

## III. THE POINT OF BRINGING IN THE SINS OF THE OTHER NATIONS

Chapters one and two serve as a preamble to the prophet's thesis: If Israel were to compare herself with the other nations from God's point of view, she would have nothing to be encouraged about! Damascus is cited for her brutality. Gaza, Tyre and Edom are cited for their involvement in slave trade and deportation. Ammon is noted for ripping open pregnant women (senseless brutality). Moab is noted for shocking and vindictive hatred (she even burned the bones of kings).

To highlight Israel's guilt in comparison with her surrounding nations, Amos employs an interesting technique of a 3+1 numerical pattern.<sup>2</sup> Notice that each condemnation oracle in chapters 1 and 2 begins with the same statement: "Thus says the LORD, for three transgressions of (the nation) and for four, I will not revoke its punishment" (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). There are eight of these in total, although the first seven must be distinguished from the final eighth one. Notice that the first seven (though having minor variations) reflect the same basic pattern:

- 1) Divine authority: "Thus says the LORD"

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<sup>2</sup>Numerical patterns based on the formula  $x / x+1$  are attested elsewhere in the Old Testament. An inductive study of these indicates that they are varied in their composition and purpose. For several of these, however, a list of items corresponding to one of the numbers (usually the second) is attached (e.g., Ps 62:11-12; Prov 30:15-16, 18-19, 21-23, 29-31; Job 5:19-22; and Prov 6:16-19).

- 2) "For three transgressions . . . and for four"
- 3) God's refusal to relent ("I will not revoke its punishment")
- 4) Reason given: "because they . . ."
- 5) Judgment announced (each beginning with "So I will send fire . . . and it will consume . . . citadels")

The eighth oracle is distinctive from the others in three ways:

- 1) it omits the element of the announcement of the judgment (in particular the recurring "So I will send fire . . . and it will consume her citadels");
- 2) it has additional features and elaboration which are not found in the preceding seven (the reminder of God's past grace [9-11], God's burden with them [13], and the warning that judgment will be inescapable [14-16]); and
- 3) more of her sins and guilt are listed (four conceptual sins!)

As the reader patiently began to read through these oracles, he would certainly notice the 3+1 pattern, though observing that in each case only one fundamental sin was highlighted.<sup>3</sup> As he came to the seventh oracle (that concerning Judah), he might be tempted to think that this was the finale of the confrontation oracles, since seven often signifies finality or completeness. Instead, he is met with an eighth (concerning Israel), and it is the eighth that is so distinctive and obviously the *target* of these two chapters. The reader would also notice that God began with three unrelated foreign powers (Syria, Philistines, and Phoenicians), then treats Israel's three "related" neighbors (Edom, Ammon, and Moab), and finally Israel's sister-nation Judah. As the circle began to be drawn in more tightly, those of the Northern Kingdom of Israel would realize through the use of this ingenious *entrapment technique* that they were the chief offender in God's eyes! In her case (in contrast to the other nations), the 3+1 formula finds true expression, for three sins are listed and then even a fourth.<sup>4</sup> Chisholm concludes that Amos

purposely altered the normal enumerative form of the x/x +1 pattern for rhetorical purposes. His adaptation of the pattern contributed to the overall theme of chapters 1–2, namely, that Israel would be the focal point of divine judgment because its sins surpassed those of its neighbors.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, chapters 1–2 become an effective introduction to the book. The book is primarily about Israel's sin and the judgment that God warns will fall on her.<sup>6</sup> Though Israel was God's unique people by virtue of the Mosaic

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<sup>3</sup>In some cases, there may appear to be more than one sin/crime listed, but when we take into account synonymous paralleling lines there is usually just one fundamental "conceptual" sin/crime. In some cases, a crime may be followed by its *motive* (but still there is just one crime in view).

<sup>4</sup>Scholars are divided about the identification of Israel's sins in 2:6ff. The enumeration certainly begins with the words "because they" in verse six. It may be possible to identify all four in vv 6-8. Robert Chisholm, on the other hand, suggests that we have three listed in 2:6-8 and then a fourth suspended in 2:12 (*Interpreting the Minor Prophets* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1990], 81-82). According to his suggestion, these would be (1) the oppression of the poor & needy in 2:6-7a; (2) an illicit sexual sin (possibly engaging in pagan cultic prostitution) in 2:7b; (3) the exploitation of debtors and the misuse of their property in 2:8; and (4) the disregard of God's Word and rejection of his godly representatives whom He had raised up for the nation's spiritual welfare in 2:12.

<sup>5</sup>Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., "For Three Sins . . . Even for Four': The Numerical Sayings in Amos," *BSac* 147:586 (Apr-Jun 1990), 196.

<sup>6</sup>Although the book is primarily about Israel, these opening chapters are certainly instructive for all these nations. They must realize that (1) power must be used righteously; (2) justice cannot be sacrificed for expediency; and (3) justice is antecedent to the peace and prosperity of the state.

Covenant, she is no better than the others—in fact she is even more guilt-worthy and her judgment cannot be forestalled. Through her, God's *holy name* (i.e., the name of Yahweh) has been profaned in the sight of the nations (2:7). Therefore, God has no choice but to act for the honor and sanctity of His name. This will be the central issue for the remainder of the book.

#### IV. THE ISSUE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Obviously, the book is full of condemnation for the abuses of social justice. The defenseless, the poor, the widow, and the orphan are all victims of exploitation. Since this is addressed to the covenant nation, the question may be asked as to how far this can be applied today. The opening two chapters are the best answer. All nations, not just Israel and Judah, are held accountable for sin and abuse of power! The message of Amos strikes right at the jugular of many modern day societies! In *appropriate ways*, Christians should stand up for social justice and seek to curb social abuses (especially those who are exploited by the "power clique"). However, we must also remember that the societies we live in today are not like Israel (which was a covenant nation).<sup>7</sup>

If we follow the example of the first century apostles—who also lived in a world of social abuses—whatever action we take would stop short of anything like attempting to overthrow oppressive governments. We need to pray, speak up, and do what we can by peaceful means. Most of all, we need to first be obedient at the individual level!

#### V. THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

##### A. 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" (שִׁמְעוּ אֶת-הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה), 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

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<sup>7</sup>For some helpful interaction on the applicability of Amos to today, see Thomas J. Finley, "Contemporary Context," in *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 121-23; and Thomas J. Finley, "An Evangelical Response to the Preaching of Amos," *JETS* 28 (1985): 411-20.

begins with the expression "Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold" (כִּי הִרְאֵנִי אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה וַהֲגִידָהּ).

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.

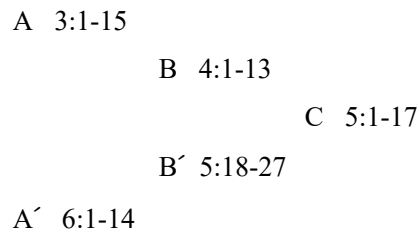
The second half of the final unit is 8:4–9:15, composed of two parts. The first part begins in 8:4 with the admonition to heed, "Hear this" (שָׁמְעוּ-זֵאת), similar to the sectional headings of 5:18 and 6:1. The second part begins in 9:1 with the visionary notice "I saw the Lord" (רָאִיתִי אֶת-אֲדֹנָי). In the initial visions of the third unit, the LORD God showed (הִרְאֵנִי אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה) 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).

## B. 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.

### 1. 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:



#### A. Common elements for 3:1-15 and 6:1-14

- i. Both of these sections have no mention of the repentance theme, in contrast to the other three which do.
- ii. 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)
- iii. 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)
- iv. 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)
- v. 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)
- B. Common elements for 4:1-13 and 5:18-27
- i. 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."*
- ii. 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
- C. 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

## i. 5:1-3 with 5:16-17

The first unit opens with the announcement of a "dirge" (Heb קִינָה). 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.

## ii. 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!"

## iii. 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 chiasmic 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 **הִפָּךְ** (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 chiasmic formation. That is, the two lines of verse 7 are chiasmically arranged, and the two lines of verse 9 are chiasmically 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" (**שָׂד**) in the center:

vs 7	הַהִפְּכִים לְלַעֲנָה מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה לְאַרְץ הַנִּיחָה	vs 9	הַמְּבַלִּיג שָׂד עַל-עֵז וְשָׂד עַל-מִבְצָר יָבֹוא

In the corresponding section of 5:10-13, the innermost element (5:11b) is also chiasmically 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):

vs 11b	בָּתִּי גְזִית בְּנִיחָם וְלֹא-תִשְׁבֹּו בָם	כְּרַמֵּי-חֶמֶד נִטְעָתָם וְלֹא תִשְׁתּוּ אֶת-יַיִנָם

## 2. 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.

### a. 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).



b. *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.

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>A'</b>	<b>B'</b>
8:4-10	8:11-14	9:1-10	9:11-15

i. 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':

<b>8:8</b>	<b>9:5</b>
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 **נָזַח** can be translated "tremble, totter" as we see with Psalm 75:3 (Heb, vs 4). The parallel with "quake" in 8:8 validates my suggestion.

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

These sections seem to have inverted correspondences, meaning 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" (**נָפַל**) and "rise" (**קָוַם**) in 8:14 is balanced by "rise" (**קָוַם**) and "fall" (**נָפַל**) 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
<u>The One who builds</u> His upper chambers in the heavens, And has founded His vaulted dome over the earth,	<u>The One who made</u> the Pleiades and Orion And changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day into night,
<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.	<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.

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.

### **C. 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!