

# OpenTheo

## Amos: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

February 18, 2022



**Alastair Roberts**

\*CONTENTS\*

00:00:00 - Chapter 1: Judgment on Neighbouring Nations

00:13:57 - Chapter 2: Judgment on Judah and Israel

00:22:03 - Chapter 3: Israel's Guilt and Coming Punishment

00:30:36 - Chapter 4: You Did Not Return to Me

00:41:44 - Chapter 5: Seek Good, and Not Evil, that You May Live

00:56:05 - Chapter 6: Woe to Those Who Are at Ease in Zion

01:03:57 - Chapter 7: Amos Pleads with the Lord to Relent

01:13:59 - Chapter 8: The Coming Day of the Lord

01:26:09 - Chapter 9: The Destruction and Restoration of Israel

If you have enjoyed my videos and podcasts, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share)).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

The Book of the Prophet Amos is the third book within the Book of the Twelve, the

collection of the writing of the figures commonly referred to as the Minor Prophets. It almost certainly predates its predecessor in the collection, Joel, although it can be connected with it thematically and on a literary level. In Joel 3.16, at the end of that book, we read, The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem.

And in verse 2 of this first chapter of Amos, the same language is taken up. Marvin Sweeney, in his treatment of the Book of the Twelve, notes that Amos also contains reference to a locust plague in chapter 7 verses 1-3, and that Amos' vision of the restoration of the people also contains the sorts of references to the extreme fertility and fruitfulness of the land that we see at the end of the Book of Joel. Furthermore, he argues, it leads naturally to the Book of Obadiah which follows it, through its focus upon the need to punish Edom at its beginning and end.

The ministry of Amos is set in the context of the days of Uzziah and Jeroboam II, both of whom had lengthy reigns beginning around the 780s BC, depending on the chronology that you follow. The prophecy is dated more specifically to two years before the earthquake, a massive natural disaster which archaeological work has dated to approximately 760 BC. Some geologists have argued that this was the largest earthquake in the region within the last 4,000 years, likely around an 8 in magnitude.

While it is not mentioned in the books of the kings or chronicles, it was a memorable enough event in the nation's life that Zechariah could refer to it over 200 years later, in Zechariah 14 verse 5. And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azel. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

It is difficult to date some of the minor prophets with any certainty. However, while Hosea also ministered during the reign of these kings, as did Jonah, Amos' ministry was probably among the earliest of the pre-exilic prophets in the book of the Twelve. During the period of Amos' ministry, the northern kingdom of Israel was in the ascendancy under Jeroboam II and dominated the southern kingdom of Judah, which was his place of origin.

Assyria was not at this point the power in the region that it would soon become, and had recently been under Adad-Nurari III. This left something of a regional power vacuum, which Israel was well positioned to fill. The Arameans or Syrians, who had previously troubled Israel, declined after Adad-Nurari III defeated Damascus in 796 BC, a defeat followed up by other significant losses in the decades that followed.

With the Syrians greatly weakened, and Assyria's involvement in the region limited after the death of Adad-Nurari, Israel was then able to recover much of the land that it had formerly lost. This is described in 2 Kings 14 verses 25-27. He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-Hemath as far as the Sea of the Araba, according to the word of the

Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath-Hepha.

For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. But the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash. However, many of the gains made by Israel at this time during the reign of Jeroboam II were hollow, and they would all be short-lived.

Already some of them seemed to be chipped away in the latter half of his reign. Within a generation Israel would fall to the Assyrians, and the entire nation extinguished. What appeared to be a great flourishing of the nation was not the cause for confidence that some might have thought that it was, and as we read through Amos, it becomes clear that various cracks were already appearing.

One could imagine people saying forty years later, looking back on the time of Amos' ministry, that the signs of the coming national disaster were already starting to appear. Among these cracks, as Daniel Carroll observes, was the growing oppression and injustice within the land of Israel itself. Pushing back against some earlier over-confident accounts that posited a sharper, polarised distinction between rich urban elites and poorer rural peasants within a tributary system, he suggests that, while such a reconstruction might better fit the situation in Judah in the second half of the 8th century BC, the situation at the time of the Book of Amos likely didn't operate with such a clear, centre-periphery opposition.

Rather, the problems identified by Amos may have been more pervasive within the society, operating on every single level, with abuse of a system of patronage which would have had many localised expressions, with not only magnificently wealthy oppressors, but smaller landowners oppressing those who are under them also. Amos is identified as a shepherd from Tekoa, a town in Judah about ten miles south of Jerusalem. The word for shepherd used of him here is not the regular word, however.

We learn more about him in chapter 7, verses 14-15. Determining Amos' social status is not easy. It is quite likely that he was a man of at least some means.

He seems to be well educated and likely owned flocks and property, where he grew his sycamores. As his own testimony states, he was not born into a prophetic vocation, but he was called out of his former life to prophesy to the people. The dating of Amos' ministry to two years before the earthquake likely implies that his prophetic ministry was of short duration.

Furthermore, various of his prophecies seem to look forward to the earthquake, which would have served as an initial sign vindicating his message. See, for instance, chapter 8, verse 8. Some scholars have suggested that the darkening of the sun at noon,

described in the next verse, refers to an eclipse that occurred in 763 BC. Also, in chapter 9, verse 1. I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said, Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people, and those who are left of them I will kill with the sword.

Not one of them shall flee away, not one of them shall escape. In chapter 9, verse 5. The Lord God of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile and sinks again like the Nile of Egypt. The prophecy begins with the voice of the Lord roaring from Zion, causing the land to wither and mourn.

He is about to enter into judgement with the nations, and then with Judah and Israel. This opening chapter focuses on the oracles to the nations, statements of judgement against Damascus and the Syrians, Gaza and the Philistines, Tyre, Edom and Ammon. Moab will follow in the beginning of chapter 2. Such oracles against the nations might have been delivered in the context of conflict and holy war.

We might think of the attempts of Balak to get Balaam to curse the children of Israel, for instance. However, the prophecies concerning the nations that we find in scripture, while resembling such oracles on many occasions, break the mould in others. First, Israel and Judah are often themselves included as recipients of these words of judgement.

Second, prophecies to the nations are not purely condemnations, or messages designed to favour Israel and Judah over them. The Lord also addresses foreign nations with words of grace on occasions, and speaks of raising up foreign nations to judge his people. Such oracles bear witness to the increasingly international scope of the Lord's message and redemptive work.

The Lord is also a concern for the nations, not just for Israel. They also illustrate the existence of more general moral standards, a sort of natural law knowable by people of every nation, offenders against which the Lord, as creator and God of all, would bring into judgement. Furthermore, the nations here had all had dealings with the Lord and his people over their history, so they weren't ignorant of him, nor without their more particular obligations to him and to his people.

Sweeney makes the suggestion that all of these nations would have been allies or vassals of Jeroboam II, giving their transgressions a political overtone. As the Lord was the king of Israel, the master of their ally or suzerain, by their actions they were acting unfaithfully or even treacherously. He makes the further intriguing suggestion that the order of the nations presents an itinerary by which Israel, presuming itself to be surrounded by buffer powers against whom their God was avenging historic wrongs, would actually discover that the Lord had been encircling them and was about to go for the jugular.

An interesting feature of the literary form of the oracles against the nations here in Amos

is his use of a numerical  $x, x + 1$  formula, more familiar from the end of the book of Proverbs. Here the use takes a for three transgressions and for four form. The actual transgressions mentioned, however, don't match the number as they do in Proverbs.

Carroll speculates that the whole series of the oracles against the nations might be read itself as an  $x, x + 1$  pattern, with Judah being the seventh and Israel the eighth, or that perhaps we could divide it into two, three, four patterns, with the accent falling upon Edom, the most significant of the opposing nations in the wider book, in the first sequence and then Israel in the second. The first of the oracles against the nations is addressed to Damascus, to the Syrians or the Arameans. They had cruelly treated Gilead, Israel's possession in the Transjordan, threshing it with threshing sledges of iron.

This is likely an image of utterly crushing and opposing people. On account of their sin, their city and its rulers would be brought down and consumed by fire, the Arameans being sent back to Ker, the place of their origin. With Ashdod, Ekron, Gath and Ashkelon, Gaza was one of the five historic cities of the Philistines.

While Gaza is perhaps treated as the lead city here, all of the other historic cities of the Philistines are mentioned in the verses that follow, save Gath, which had probably ceased to be a major city by this time. The Philistines had been a thorn in Israel's side for centuries, especially during the period of the judges and the early kingdom period. Samson, Saul and David had each had significant conflict with the Philistines.

The Philistines had also dealt Israel a defeat at the battle of Aphek at the end of Eli's life that was a watershed moment in its history. Gaza and the Philistines are here condemned for carrying a people into exile and delivering them over to Edom. Verse 9 refers to Tyre doing the same, and it seems likely that the three nations were united in this particular crime.

Perhaps they had taken captive a whole town, likely of Israel or Judah, in a raid and sold them to the Edomites, with the Phoenicians from Tyre as intermediaries. Such man-stealing was punishable with the death penalty under the law, and this international trade in forcibly captured slaves was an abomination to the Lord. Sweeney wonders whether the historical context behind this was the revolt of the city of Libna and Edom against the rule of Judah, mentioned in 2 Kings chapter 8, with the Philistines assisting Edom in encroaching into former territory of Judah.

The Philistines would suffer a similar judgement to the Arameans. Fire would also be sent against them, and they too would be cut off. They would be crushed, albeit not completely destroyed, by the Assyrians a few decades later.

The judgement upon Tyre that follows is a shorter one, but it is very similar to the one that precedes it, the one addressed to the Philistines. Perhaps the most significant detail is its reference to the covenant of brotherhood. Perhaps this might refer to the relations

between Israel under David and Tyre under Hiram.

Tyre had subsequently betrayed and acted against its historical ally. This, it seems to me, is a more likely interpretation of the expression here than many of the others that have been proposed. Edom, the fourth nation in the sequence, was, as we should remember, descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob.

At the height of Israel's power, Edom had been under its rule, and also during many periods of Judah's prosperity. Perhaps Israel is the brother that is in view in verse 11, or perhaps the brother is a covenant partner that Edom betrayed. Whatever the historical events behind the condemnations here, once again Edom is being judged on account of its brutality, and possibly also on account of its practice of man-stealing and the slave trade.

Its two chief cities, Teman and Bozrah, would be judged as a result. They would suffer the same fate as the other cities that have been judged to this point. The Lord would send a fire upon them and devour the strongholds.

Gilead was the victim of the predations of Damascus with which this chapter began. Gilead also suffered the cruelty of the Ammonites, the fifth of the nations in the sequence. In warfare, they had performed the most abominable of acts, cutting open pregnant women, all for the sake of their territorial expansion.

Like the other nations in the oracles, their punishment for their cruelty and their wickedness was sure. It would not be revoked. While the other sentences speak of the Lord's sending a fire upon the walls of certain cities, here it speaks about the Lord kindling a fire in the Wall of Rabba.

It too would have its strongholds devoured, its rulers being sent away into exile. A question to consider. Can you think about ways in which each of these nations mentioned in the oracles against the nations in this opening chapter had had previous dealings with the Lord? The book of Amos opened with a series of oracles against the nations, which continue in chapter 2. The oracles began in the north-east with Damascus and the Syrians, moved south-west to Gaza and the Philistines, then up to the Phoenicians in Tyre in the north-west, then to the Edomites in the south and the Ammonites in the east.

The next in the series is Moab, which was to the east of the Dead Sea. Its southern boundary was the Zered River, but the northern boundaries of the nation varied significantly. At certain times in its history, its territory extended into land that at other times belonged to Transjordanian tribes of Reuben and Gad.

Israel had first entered into the Promised Land via the plains of Moab, opposite Jericho and north of the Dead Sea. The Moabite king Balak had sought Balaam the mercenary

prophet to curse Israel when they had first entered the land. Naomi and Elimelech had gone to Moab to seek bread, and their son Malon had married Ruth, who later returned to Israel with her mother-in-law after their husbands' deaths.

Israel had also fought against the Moabites at various points in their history. For instance, in 2 Kings chapter 3, Jehoshaphat and Jehoram had joined forces with the king of Edom to fight Mesha and the Moabites. The sin for which Moab was condemned was their desecration of the bones of a king of Edom.

As Daniel Carroll notes, it isn't clear whether they had burned his bones to lime, or for the purpose of lime. In the former case, they might have been thoroughly burned in order to disrupt the king's passage to the afterlife. In the latter, the purpose might have been thoroughly to defile his remains, employing them as material for plaster.

Following the pattern of the oracles against the nations to this point, the Lord declares that he will send a fire upon Moab and devour their strongholds. We should probably not see the reference to this particular sin as suggesting that the judgement of Moab is exclusively on its account. Rather, such an abomination, like the Ammonites tearing open pregnant women, is a high-water mark, an especially egregious sin that typifies the character of the nation that has committed it.

Moab was reduced to a vassal kingdom of the Assyrians later that century, and then overcome by the Babylonians in the 6th century. Amos was a man of Judah, from the town of Tekoa, 10 miles south of Jerusalem. His prophecy had begun with the Lord's voice roaring from Zion, and speaking from Jerusalem.

However, the cycle of judgement that he had been given to declare included Judah as one of its recipients. Judah's specific sin concerned their rejection of the law of the Lord and his statutes, in contrast to the surrounding nations, who had, in their cruelty and dehumanising practices, violated the natural law, common to all men. Judah had the special privilege of revelation of the divine will and the law given through Moses.

This, however, entailed a greater level of culpability for its offences. They are held accountable to a higher standard. They had followed lies, presumably the words of false and flattering prophets, a matter in which they followed in the footsteps of their unfaithful ancestors.

Judah would suffer the same judgement as the other nations. The Lord would send a fire against it, and its strongholds would be devoured. The series of oracles concludes and climaxes with the oracle against Israel in verses 6-16.

The 4-3 transgressions and 4-4 suggest an X, X plus 1 pattern that might even be operating on the larger level of the oracles themselves. With oracles delivered to seven nations, we might think that the sequence was complete, but Israel is then added as the

eighth. Carol questions a common reading, which suggests that, leaving Israel to last, the Lord springs a surprise upon his people, who would merely have expected condemnations of the surrounding nations.

Rather, he argues, this is finally the conclusion of the suspense that has been building to this point. Israel knew that judgement was coming for it, and perhaps, in this litany of judgements against its neighbours, it recognised many of its own sins. Considering, however, the extent of flattering false prophecy at this time, perhaps there was an element of surprise here.

While typical oracles of judgement may have been connected with holy war, and would not very strongly condemn the sins of the prophet's own people, the genuine word of the Lord is one that challenges his own people's sins. The judgement upon Israel is by far the longest to this point, underlining the fact that it is set apart from other nations, as they are the people of the Lord. The nature of their crimes is difficult to determine in certain cases.

Selling the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals might be a matter of the injustice of the courts, within which even the smallest of bribes could pervert the justice due to the destitute. Alternatively, it might refer to the utter lack of mercy in an oppressive society, where the smallest debt, even of a mere pair of sandals, could end up with someone being sold into slavery. The portrait of Israelite society given in these verses is one of cruel greed, oppression and injustice.

Several parts of the law instructed Israel concerning ongoing provision and care for the poor. Such provision was supposed to be built into many of its practices, institutions and customs. Likewise, the danger of bribery perverting judgement concerning the poor was an issue that was highlighted at many points in the law and the wisdom literature.

Beyond such economic and legal injustice, Israel was a place of sexual immorality, with violations of the laws of consanguinity in incestuous sexual relations. Others believe that a cult prostitute might be in view in the condemnation here. Such abominations defiled the people and the land, and led to the name of the Lord being profaned among his people and the surrounding nations.

Verse 8 might refer to seemingly common practices whereby property confiscated from debtors or taxed by corrupt officials became means of decadent behaviour. Perhaps what is in view here is an exacerbation of injustice and oppression, by using the expropriated property of poor debtors for decadent excess in the presence of the Lord. We might think of Deuteronomy chapter 23 verse 18 here.

You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a dog into the house of the Lord in payment for any vow, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God. The fee of a prostitute was bad enough, but to bring such a thing before the Lord as an



offering compounded the offence. Perhaps a similar point is being made here about money and property gained through oppression and injustice.

In verses 9 to 12, the Lord recalls his great deeds for his people Israel in the past. He had uprooted the Amorites and the Canaanites from the land, defeating the giants and giving the people a possession in the land despite the greatness and the strength of their adversaries. He had delivered his people from Egypt in the Exodus, and he had guided them through the wilderness to the promised land.

The Lord had raised up members of the people who were his dedicated servants, Nazarites who had taken the vow of Numbers chapter 6, and prophets with a divine commission. The Israelites, however, had sought to pervert and undermine the vocations of these persons, seeking to defile them, getting the Nazarites to break their vow by drinking wine, and shutting up the prophets who had been given the word of the Lord to proclaim. The sentence upon this wicked nation is declared in verses 13 to 16.

It differs from the typical form of the sentences that preceded it. The Israelites would be pressed or weighed down so that they could not freely move. The fastest, strongest, mightiest, most skilled, and the bravest among them would all be utterly humiliated.

None of their might or courage would be sufficient to save them in that day, nor would the strength of weapon or beast. They are condemned to shameful and utter defeat. A question to consider.

Where else can we get a characterization of the national life of Israel at this juncture in their history? In Amos chapter 3 we arrive at the beginning of a new section of the prophecy with a dramatic summons to attention. Both Judah and Israel are addressed in the preceding chapter in the series of the eight oracles against the nations that climaxes with them. In this new chapter the people of Israel are addressed, but here defined as the whole family brought out of Egypt at the Exodus.

Israel and Judah are thereby connected. They are, despite the division between the two kingdoms, a single family sharing in the same spiritual condition. The Lord here grounds the punishment that they will receive in the uniqueness of his relationship with them.

The Lord had not known any other nation in the way that he had known them. He had heard their cries. He had plagued and delivered them from the hands of their oppressors.

He had led and provided for them in the wilderness. He had brought them into the promised land and given them victory over those within it. With no other nation had he acted in such a fashion.

Israel was, according to the book of Exodus, the Lord's firstborn son, and as a father will punish his son in a way that he would not punish a child who was not his own, so Israel's special relationship with the Lord is the reason why they must expect judgment for their

iniquities. Israel's election was all too often treated as a basis for presumption and complacency. However, this statement shows that it must be exactly the opposite.

Because Israel alone among the nations has the Lord as their God, with them being his people, they must expect to face the severer judgment. In verses 3-6 we are given seven rhetorical questions, which are then followed by a further two questions that are set apart from them. Perhaps once again we are seeing something of an X, X plus 1 pattern, with a complete sequence of seven being followed by extra elements that provide the climax to the sequence.

The first question concerns two people walking together. Do two people walk together in that manner unless they belong together? The second question, does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Daniel Carroll suggests that on the basis of what we know about lions and the way that we could translate this verse, it should be better read as snarl or growl, the same is the case with the question that follows. In both cases we have lions who are in possession of their prey, and they do not want to have it taken from them, and so they snarl or growl at anyone who might approach them.

The fourth and fifth questions are also a pairing, presenting us with the same event from two different perspectives. Once again a cause is being inferred from a particular perceived effect. The bird doesn't fall in a snare unless there has been a trap set for it.

Looking at that event from the other perspective, from the perspective of the snare, the snare doesn't snap unless it has been triggered by the bird. We should note a progression in the pairings to this point. First of all we have two people walking together, then we have the predator and the prey, then we have the hunter and their quarry.

In verse 6 we have a trumpet blown in a city, with the figures of the prey and the quarry close in the background. Who is the hunter or the predator in this instance? The city, which is not here identified, is thrown into confusion or fear by the blowing of the trumpet that announces the coming of the adversary. The preceding chapter of the prophecy had spoken about the Lord sending fire against the walls of various cities and devouring their strongholds.

Perhaps in Israel's complacency, believing that they were immune from the Lord's judgment, that because they were His special people, the descendants of Abraham, they had the impression that they would not be punished like the nations. They might think that the Lord is their great defender, but they would find that He is the hunter, the one who will snare them and judge them in their iniquities. Verse 7 sets off the questions of verse 8 from the other questions that precede it.

The word of the prophet is connected to the roar of the Lord as the lion, just as the lion's growl or snarl reveals that He has taken some prey. So the Lord's actions and intentions are revealed through the words of His prophets. His roar is heard in their prophesying.

From the words of the prophets can be inferred the actions and intentions of the Lord, much as in the pairs of effects and causes in the rhetorical questions of verses 3 to 6. The prophet, as a servant of the Lord, is a member of the divine council. In chapter 7, for instance, we'll see the Lord declaring purposes to Amos, Amos praying for mercy for the people, and then the Lord relenting and not bringing the announced judgment about. In verse 9, the Lord calls for witnesses.

He summons people from the strongholds in Ashdod and in the land of Egypt, from the Philistines and the Egyptians. They are to assemble themselves in the mountains of Samaria, around the city, as if in a great amphitheater, and these great historic enemies of the people are to witness the violence and the wickedness within this capital of Israel. The Lord would bring a great enemy upon them, who would bring down their defences and plunder their strongholds.

We can presume that this is a reference to Assyria. At various points in the text of Amos to this point, the metaphor of a lion and its prey has appeared. The book of Amos itself begins with the figure of the lion.

In Amos chapter 1, verse 2, and he said, The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem. The pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers. In verse 4, we had a lion growling in the forest, and a young lion snarling in its den.

In verse 12, we have another picture of a lion who has been successful in capturing his prey. He has snatched a sheep from the flock, and the best that the shepherd can do is recover a few pieces of the animal, as evidence that he has not stolen it for the owner. However, the sheep or the lamb has been almost completely devoured, and so the best he can do is recover two legs or a piece of an ear.

The people of Israel who lived in the capital of Samaria would face a similar fate. As the Lord, the great lion in this passage, came upon them, only the smallest tokens of their former wealth and luxury could be recovered from the wreckage. The pairing of a bed and a couch can be seen elsewhere in Amos in chapter 6, verse 4. Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches.

Although it has little impact on our understanding of the greater sense of the passage, the items that are in view here have been variously understood by the commentators. Historically, many of the commentators have read the second item as containing a reference to Damascus. However, the word here has a different spelling from other uses of the word Damascus in the book.

Others have suggested at the footboard of a bed, or have seen a reference to cushions. Carroll argues that if we keep the original text but re-point it, reordering the vowels and the division of the words without changing anything else, we get a far more reasonable interpretation, a piece of a leg. This would also connect well with the image of the limbs

of the animal taken from the mouth of the lion.

Having spoken about the judgment upon Samaria, the political capital of the nation, the Lord then goes on to declare judgment against Bethel, its cultic centre. Here the Lord's name is given as the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts. The elaborate nature of the divine name here probably serves to underline the solemnity of the statement that follows.

Bethel had first been established as a rival cultic centre to Jerusalem by Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat. He had erected a golden calf there, and a golden calf at Dan, and placed an altar before it. In 1 Kings chapter 13, judgment was proclaimed against the altar by the man of God from Judah.

That destruction would later occur through the reforms of Jeziel. Here judgment is proclaimed both against the altars of Bethel and the horns of the singular altar. Presumably the singular altar is the great sacrificial altar, and the altars plural probably include one or more altars of incense.

Bethel was, through the actions of Jeroboam I, connected with Israel's primal sin as a nation, and also recapitulated their sin with the golden calf at Sinai, along with the altar in Bethel that would be brought down. The Lord would also particularly judge the wealthy of the land. He would strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory and the great houses.

Israel had, as it were, been fattening themselves on a day of slaughter, and the wealthiest in this oppressive nation would face the most severe consequences. One can imagine that the earthquake that would follow in a couple of years would have been a first sign of this coming judgment. A question to consider.

Verse 7 declares, Amos chapter 4 continues from chapter 3. The rich men of the land had just been addressed, the Lord declaring a judgment about to come upon their winter and summer houses, and their houses of ivory. Now the Lord turned to their wives, who played a large part in inciting them to their oppression. The cows of Bashan, in verse 1, are described as well-fed, indulgent, and oppressive, crushing the poor and needy while being preoccupied only with their own pleasures.

By comparing these wealthy women to the highest quality cattle, perhaps the prophet wants his hearers to consider what such cattle are destined for. Such animals are fattened in order that they might be slaughtered and eaten. James chapter 5, verse 5 makes a similar point.

Here it is their thirst for wine, and presumably feasts, parties, and a life of excess and luxury, that draws condemnation upon them. Their husbands' crimes were far more overt, but their selfish, decadent, and entitled indifference to the poor and their need is presented as a driving force of the injustice that their class represented and

perpetuated. We find comparable condemnations of indulgent, wealthy women in passages like Isaiah chapter 3, verses 16 to 26.

In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents, the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves, the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets, the signet rings and nose rings, the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags, the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils. Instead of perfume there will be rotteness, and instead of a belt, a rope, and instead of well-set hair, baldness, and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth, and branding instead of beauty, your men shall fall by the sword, and your mighty men in battle, and her gates shall lament and mourn, empty she shall sit on the ground. As Daniel Carroll notes, there is a glaring contrast between the way that these pampered women boss everyone around, expecting to have their every whim and desire catered to by their husbands and others, utterly unmindful of anyone else and the fate that awaits them.

They will be dragged away by hooks, powerless to resist and completely humiliated. Describing their departure into captivity in such a manner underlines the poetic justice that they will be receiving. They would be taken out through the breaches in the wall of their conquered city and cast into Haman, whose exact location we don't know.

As in verse 4 of this passage, Bethel and Gilgal were also singled out as places of particular cultic sin in Hosea 4, verse 15. Bethel was the site where the Lord had appeared to Jacob, and he had seen the vision of the ladder to heaven. Later, however, Bethel was the primary cultic center established by Jeroboam the son of Nebat, as a rival location to Jerusalem.

There he had set up his golden calf and altar. This was often presented as the foundational sin of the northern kingdom of Israel, the sin that had set them off on the wrong path at the outset. Gilgal was a site associated with the first entry into the land, a place where Israel had dedicated themselves to the Lord, set up memorial stones, and had practiced the first Passover in the land.

Yet it too had become a place associated with unfaithful worship. Here the Lord gives the people a satirical summons to worship. However, the summons is not really to worship, but to transgress.

The people's sacrifices in these unfaithful cultic locations, however much they might multiply them, do not assuage the wrath of the Lord or gain his favor, but are transgressions that incite his anger against them. In part, the fault might be seen as the perversion of the worship of the Lord through idolatry. Yet here in this context, there might be more of an accent upon the way that such worship was persistently falsified by the behavior of the people towards their neighbors, although the statement here is not narrowly focused upon the rich of the land as the previous judgments were.

True worship must be confirmed in transformed moral practice. Where it is not, worship can be little more than the practice of whitewashing tombs, masking deeply defiling uncleanness rather than dealing with it. Such sites of worship can also be compared to dens of robbers, places that bandits and thieves would return to for safety.

Israel and Judah often seemed to approach their worship in such a manner. Jeremiah, for instance, prophesying immediately prior to the exile, condemned Judah for its presumptuous confidence in the temple, for its belief that it gave them immunity from serious judgment. Israel, here, as addressed by Amos, seems to view its worship as a sort of flattery or bribery of the Lord, presuming that the multitude of their sacrifices would close his eyes to their oppression of the poor and their wicked self-indulgence.

The Mosaic Covenant came with blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The curses of the covenant had several different degrees of severity. In practice, they would become progressively worse as the people resisted the Lord's correction and failed to respond.

In the end, they would be violently vomited out of the land and returned to Egypt. In verses 6 to 11, the Lord lists a series of warnings that he had given his people. The very purpose of these judgments was cautionary, to encourage Israel to repent and to return to the Lord their God.

As the Lord multiplied these warnings, his intent was their turning from their self-destructive path before it was too late. Just as parents can punish their children in order to save their children from experiencing the far more devastating consequences of a willful course of action, so the Lord disciplined his people in order to divert them from their own ruin. The Lord preserves his people in part through threats.

Declarations of judgment are typically designed not to give people a fatalistic sense of their own doom, but to encourage them urgently, immediately and wholeheartedly to return to the Lord in hope that he will relent. These verses describe a situation where, through inconsistent rainfall and local droughts, the Lord sought to warn the people before bringing a more general punishment upon them. As Jesus taught in the case of the Tower of Siloam and the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, such disasters can be warnings to a people more generally that, if they do not repent, they will perish in a similar manner.

Drought-struck towns were here serving as the canaries in the coal mine, graciously designed to alert Israel to disaster that awaited them all. Such local disasters were reminders and alerts to Israel that they depended entirely upon the Lord's provision for them in his land and they needed to get right with him. As they failed to respond to these initial warnings, the judgments would ramp up.

He devastated their crops. The exact form of the devastation isn't clear. It's possible that

the two diseases that afflicted the crops in verse 9 afflicted the barley and the wheat respectively.

This would be devastating, as these were the two staple crops. These were followed by locusts, which would have eaten what remained. All of these judgments should have recalled the curses of the covenant mentioned in places like Deuteronomy 28, verses 38-40.

As they failed to respond to the striking of their crops, the Lord took the lives of their animals and young men, with pestilence and the sword. So great was the death toll that the slain weren't able to be buried before the stench of their bodies became overpowering. In addition to the sickening smell, the inability to bury the bodies of the dead would have been a judgment in itself.

We might here think of the ways in which the judgments of the Egyptian plagues gradually escalated, and clearly the Lord wanted his people to make that connection, comparing the pestilence that he sent against them to the pestilence that he sent upon Egypt. A similar thing had happened to Israel, and like Pharaoh, rather than repenting, they had hardened their hearts. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain in Genesis was the great symbol of the Lord's final judgment, his cutting off of a wicked people.

At a few key moments in Israel's history, Israel had fallen to a similar state. At the end of the book of Judges, for instance, Gibeah had sinned in a similar manner to the city of Sodom, and the tribe of Benjamin had almost been completely extinguished as a result. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapter 19 was also a foil against which the blessing of Abraham and Sarah was more clearly seen.

They had just been promised a son, but Sodom and Gomorrah were utterly destroyed and rendered absolutely barren. The Lord had delivered the remaining people of Israel from this end, like a bran taken out of a fire, much as Lot had been rescued from the destruction of Sodom, albeit not on account of their being credited righteous. Once again, Israel was supposed to learn from their near ruin, to take the cautionary lesson, and to repent and turn back to the Lord.

However, as in the case of the previous warnings, they failed to repent. And by this point, Israel had no excuse. They could not complain that they were unwarned.

They had received ample warning. The Lord had given them warning after warning, without response from them. Now they would have to suffer the great reckoning for their sins, coming face to face with God himself.

The coming of the Lord's holy presence is the most devastating thing of all for a sinful people. Preparing to meet with God here requires the people to ready themselves for

confrontation with a holy God. We might think of the purification of the people prior to the Lord's arrival on Mount Sinai, in Exodus chapter 19.

However, here there is also the sense of the Lord approaching as an enemy, to bring judgment upon them. The chapter ends with a doxology, declaring the glory and the power of the Lord. However, the doxology serves to underline just how outmatched sinful Israel is.

The Lord is the creator of all, and the master of all cosmic forces. Israel has been worshipping a domesticated god of the tribe, a god who underwrites their wicked society, rather than confronting it in its iniquity. Now, however, they will come face to face with the living God, and must do business with him.

The Lord treads on the high places of the earth, including the false high places like Bethel, and now the time has come for Israel's reckoning. A question to consider, where else in scripture can we see the Lord's use of judgment as progressive levels of warning? In chapter 4, the Lord had declared disaster upon Israel. He had given warning upon warning, so Israel would repent before it was too late.

However, they had persisted in their iniquity, and so they had to face the Lord's judgment. Chapter 5 opens with a lament for the doomed people, anticipating the terrible fate about to befall them. The speaker of the lament might be Amos, but it might also be the Lord himself, it isn't entirely clear.

Likewise, we might wonder about the tone of the lament. Is it sarcastic, or is it sorrowful? Is the one voicing the lament mocking the stubborn people for the consequences of their iniquity, or is it a genuine expression of distress and mourning? It seems more likely that it is the latter. The real tragedy, of course, is that the disaster that awaits Israel was never inevitable or unavoidable.

They were given ample opportunity to arrest their course. Israel is here likened to a young woman, the epitome of life, beauty and fruitfulness, struck down and forsaken. A horrible and arresting sight.

She is abandoned and will not be raised up. Its cities send out the flower of their young men to war, and only a tenth of them returned. Like the Virgin Israel, Israel's men were cut down in the prime of their strength, leaving only a small remnant behind.

Verses 4-6 have a chiasmic structure, as Daniel Carroll observes. Moving from seeking the Lord in order to live, to a reference to Bethel, a reference to Gilgal, a reference to Beersheba, and then back again through that sequence. Israel's fate was sealed, yet a small number would survive the destruction.

The places of refuge and sources of support that Israel had formerly trusted in would all come to nothing, or fail her in the hour of her need. The people of Israel might have



considered going to Bethel, to the cultic centre of the land, in the time of their calamity. But there was no aid to be found there.

They might have gone to Gilgal, another cultic centre, mentioned alongside Bethel earlier in chapter 4 verses 4 and 5. Come to Bethel and transgress, to Gilgal and multiply transgression. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings.

Publish them, for so you love to do, O people of Israel, declares the Lord God. Another possibility open to Israel was crossing over to Beersheba. Beersheba was a site in southern Judah, a prominent location in the narratives of the patriarchs.

Beersheba also was a cultic site at this time. Perhaps people in Israel thought that if they went further afield, to a cultic site in the southern sister kingdom of Judah, they might find help there. Beersheba is also mentioned in chapter 8 verse 14.

These cultic sites afford no assistance, as they are themselves doomed. Gilgal going into exile involves a clever play upon the sounds of the word Gilgal. Bethel coming to nothing associates it once again with the word Avent, meaning wickedness or vanity, as in Hosea chapter 4 verse 15, 5 verse 8 and 10 verse 5. The one possible source of help is the Lord himself.

They must turn to him as soon as they can. If they do not, he will be the one bringing about their destruction. The house of Joseph here refers to the northern kingdom, as the leading tribe of Ephraim was the primary son of Joseph.

Manasseh, his brother, was also a prominent tribe of the northern kingdom. Justice was supposed to be the defining feature of the life of the nation. The responsibility of enacting justice lay upon the entire nation, but especially upon its leaders and authorities.

However, the nation had perverted justice. That which was to give life and wholeness had been made bitter in its perversion and denial. The preceding chapter ended with a great doxology, praising the Lord as the omnipotent creator.

Chapter 4 verse 13 Here in verses 8 and 9 we have another doxology. Here he pours out the waters of the sea upon the surface of the earth and darkens the day into night. He is able to overturn the order of the cosmos as he is its creator.

Verse 9 is exceptionally difficult to translate in its current form. However, the basic point of it might be that no creature is immune to or independent of his power. Even the strong, who might fancy themselves protected in a fortress, are subject to his might and judgment.

These verses remind Israel of the one with whom they have to do. They must reckon

with the creator of the universe. The gate was the site of judgment and rule.

It was the site of the elders and of legal proceedings. Characteristic of the fool is resistance to counsel, correction and judgment. Here the few faithful leaders in Israel who are reproofing wickedness in the gate or speaking the unpleasant truth are loathed for their candor and correction.

The wealthy are economically oppressing the poor, exacting excessive rent from them to enrich themselves and live in luxury. However, they would not enjoy the use of their ill-gotten wealth. They had multiplied their forms of injustice.

They afflicted the righteous, perverted justice for bribes and denied justice to the poor and needy. Their society was corrupt through and through, founded upon oppression, lies and injustice. Verse 13 could be read in different ways.

Our interpretation will depend upon a number of considerations. For instance, how do we understand the evil time? Is this the current time or is it the time of judgment that is coming? Is the word translated as the prudent here better read as the wealthy? Is the silence the silence of the righteous when the Lord's judgment falls because they are sent to it or cannot question it? Is their silence the silence of grief or of assurance in the Lord's work? Alternatively, is their silence the silence of wise persons who know that it is not prudent for them to speak out in a society so committed to folly and wickedness? Holding their counsel, such people might survive. However, the society has silenced those whose counsel might have saved them.

They've done this because they hate reproof and the truth. Earlier in verses 4-6, the people were encouraged to seek the Lord. In verses 14 and 15, they are once again called to do this as their one hope of life.

Addressing the injustice that pervades Israel's society, beginning with a fundamental shift in their moral posture, learning to hate evil and love good, some glimmer of hope of restoration or at least preservation through judgment might remain. This hatred of evil and love of good must be manifest in the gate. Justice must be desired and pursued in their life as a society.

Verses 16 and 17 return us to the theme of lamentation with which the chapter began. Verses 1-17 of this chapter seem to follow a chiasmic or book-ended structure. Carroll, who draws the structure from others, summarises it.

Lament for Israel in verses 1-3 corresponds with lament for Israel in verses 16-17. The charge to seek the Lord and live is found in verses 4-6 and then again in verses 14 and 15. There is a warning to Israel in verse 7 and then a warning to the powerful in verses 10-13.

The power of the Lord to create in verse 8 is counterbalanced with the power of the Lord

to destroy in verse 9. And at the very heart of the chiasm is the statement, the Lord is his name. The general lamentation described occurs as the Lord passes through their midst. We should probably recall the Passover and the mourning of all Israel at the death of the firstborn.

A similar general judgment is going to strike Israel in the day of its calamity. Israel has already been compared to Egypt in the book of Amos in chapter 4 verses 9-10 for instance. I sent among you many gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees, the locusts devoured, yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord.

I sent among you a pestilence after the manna of Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword and carried away your horses, and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils, yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. Once again, as Israel had become like Egypt, it would now suffer the fate of Egypt.

The Day of the Lord is perhaps the greatest of the unifying themes of the book of the Twelve. For many, the Day of the Lord was synonymous with deliverance and salvation. The Lord would come in righteousness and deliver his people, overcoming their enemies.

However, the Prophet tells the people that they have been laboring under a terrible delusion. The Day of the Lord is a day not of light but of darkness. It is a terrible day, a day of devastation and destruction.

It is the darkness in which the Lord visits death upon the firstborn of Egypt, for instance. This day is dreadful yet inescapable. Amos gives the example of someone fleeing from a lion, thinking that he had made good his escape and then being met by a bear, or going into his house and being bitten by a venomous serpent, just when he thought he was safe.

The Day of the Lord is deadly and cannot be abated. The lights are going to be turned out over Israel and there is nothing that they can do to avoid it. One of the purposes of cultic worship was to seek the favour of the Lord.

Sacrifices would be offered, songs and psalms sung, solemn assemblies convened. Yet all of these activities were a stench in the Lord's nostrils, an abomination to him, something that he despised. While Israel might have fancied that it would escape judgement for its many sacrifices and great assemblies, these actually served to compound its iniquity.

Every time they came before the Lord in their injustice, offering to him as if that secured his favour, they were rubbing their wickedness in his face. The Lord's abhorrence of sacrifice and cultic practice divorced from righteousness is a common theme in the prophets especially. True worship must be confirmed in faithful practice and where worship is a mask for injustice, the Lord's anger is aroused.

What the Lord really desires from his people is justice and righteousness. Justice and righteousness are here compared to an ever-flowing stream that never ceases to irrigate and give life and fruitfulness to its land. Righteousness and justice are not a dry and dead legalism, but living and life-giving waters that make the land and its people fruitful, reliably and continually afforded to all.

Water was that which sustained the land and the people. They depended upon it for their survival. In this image of continual and bountiful irrigation, the Lord was showing his people that, if only they would pursue them, justice and righteousness would be like rains and rivers upon their parched and arid land, restoring all to life.

Verse 25 is challenging to understand. Is it suggesting that Israel didn't offer any sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness? This seems to be at odds with various passages in the Pentateuch. Perhaps the claim is a slightly narrower one.

Perhaps Israel offered sacrifices at the establishment of the priesthood, for instance, and was given instructions for sacrifice, but largely did not offer during the years of wandering, only offering when they entered the land. We might consider that the wilderness generation was not circumcised until they entered the land, which would have limited their potential for cultic practice. The 40 years, then, would be a reference to the 38 years of wandering more particularly.

At various points in the Prophets, the wilderness experience is depicted in more positive terms, Israel going out after the Lord, like a bride after her bridegroom. Is Amos' point here working with a broadly positive portrayal of the 40 years, a reading that several commentators follow? This would seem to cause some problems, as the lack of sacrifices was likely a consequence of Israel's rebellion, not a positive thing. Other commentators suggest that Israel lacked the material to perform such sacrifices.

The point for such a reading would be that even without sacrifices, Israel was able to have a relationship with the Lord. Perhaps some form of this position still makes sense. Without idealising the wilderness, the point is that during the 40 years, which was far from wholly characterised by unfaithfulness, Israel's relationship with God, whether due to their lack of materials for sacrifice or the non-practice of sacrifice in judgement upon their sin, was sustained without the performance of sacrifice.

The Israel of Amos' day, however, has a multitude of sacrifices, but does not exhibit the faithfulness and obedience that the Lord truly desires and requires, which is what the children of Israel exhibited after the 40 years of their wandering. After those 40 years, they were prepared to enter the land, but not because they had performed some great quantity of sacrifices. The consequence for Israel and its sin would be exile.

They had wedded themselves to their false gods, and their false gods would be sent into exile with them. The meaning of the words sycoth and kyun here have been discussed

quite a lot by scholars, but they most likely refer to Assyrian astral deities, as they committed themselves to these false gods, perhaps in part as an expression of their vassal status under Assyria, they would be expelled from the land and sent into exile beyond Damascus. This would all come upon Israel in 722 BC, as the northern kingdom fell to Assyria.

A question to consider, how might the scriptural vision of justice in society, described in places like verse 24 of this chapter, speak to modern debates about justice in society? Amos chapter 5 was a chapter of laments and woes, and chapter 6 also opens with a proclamation of woes. The prophetic message seeks to shock Israel out of its presumption and complacency. In the preceding chapter we saw the way that many assumed that the day of the Lord would be a positive thing for Israel, a day of vindication and deliverance.

The prophet, however, declares that it would be a day of darkness and judgment, a terrible day in which the iniquity of the people would come upon their heads. Coupled with this presumption is the complacency of the elites of Judah and Israel, who imagine that they are secure on account of their wealth and within their walled cities, not realizing that the floor is going to fall away from their walls. Their complacency is both a false sense of security, and also their lack of moral unease concerning the wickedness and the oppression that they are practicing.

Their moral insensitivity is supported by their overconfidence in the military capacity of their nations, the strength of their cities, the affordances of their wealth, and by their misplaced assurance that the Lord is on their side. They seem to regard themselves as the first of the nations, presumably on account of their covenant privilege. Not only is their nation elevated above others, but they are elevated within their nation, as its elite, with the people of the land coming to them for judgment and help.

Mount Zion and Samaria are both mentioned here, reminding us that Amos' ministry is not exclusive to Israel. He also speaks to his own nation of Judah. Kalnei, Hamath and Gath were all cities that, by this time, had been much reduced in their power and standing.

Kalnei was an old Hittite capital, while Hamath was a Syrian city-state. Daniel Carroll mentions a number of ways in which verse 2 could be understood. Some critical commentators have seen this as a later addition to the text, from a time after the destruction of those cities by Assyria.

Another suggestion is that, due to the success of Israel in expanding its borders during the reign of Jeroboam II, the elites were here boasting about their superiority to other cities in the region that had declined, and that the first half of verse 2 is their words. However, the prophet would then puncture their confidence by disputing their sense of superiority to those kingdoms, in the rhetorical questions that follow. Alternatively,

Carroll maintains that the prophet is probably the one directing the people's attention to these kingdoms.

He's challenging them that, just as the Lord had humbled those once great powers, so he could humble Israel and Judah, Israel and Judah had no grounds for their presumption. While Gath, for instance, had not yet been destroyed, we should note its absence from the oracle against the Philistines in chapter 1, where judgment was declared primarily upon Gaza, and along with it, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron. Gath, formerly a great city of the Philistines, was notable by its exclusion.

The elites of Judah and Israel had put far away the day of disaster. They had blinded themselves to the precarious nature of their situation, and the imminence of their destruction. In but a few decades, although it would survive, Judah would be brought down to its knees, and Israel would be overwhelmed by the Assyrians.

However, to those at ease in Zion and feeling secure on the mountain of Samaria, such threats could not be further from their minds. They ignored the signs of their times, paid no heed to the warning shots that the Lord had been firing across their bows, and proceeded without regard. While putting away the day of disaster from their awareness, they had been bringing near the seat of violence.

Perhaps this refers to the destruction about to come upon them. It could also refer to the injustice and oppression that they were perpetuating in their societies. Verses 4-7 depict the scene of a feast.

The decadent elite of the land are lounging on their couches, enjoying an extravagant meal of the finest food, drinking large quantities of expensive wine, anointing themselves with costly oils, and diverting themselves with idle songs and music-making. They are carefree and unmindful of the ruin of Joseph, the moral state of the nation, and the fate that is about to come upon them. They have rendered themselves insensible to the rapidly approaching disaster, a disaster which both their own actions and continuing oppression have largely precipitated.

When the disaster actually strikes, they would be the first to be struck. Their revelries would be put to an end. Verse 8 is an intense statement of the Lord's loathing of Jacob's pride, a pride that was seemingly founded in the supposed impregnability of his strongholds.

The pride, complacency and presumption all serve to accentuate the moral indifference and insensibility of Israel. The Lord feels so strongly about this that he swears by himself in making the statement, and it is presented as a declaration of the Lord, the God of hosts, the solemn oath being accompanied by a pronouncement formula. His abhorrence of their pride is yet further emphasised by the emotive language of the statement itself.

For Jacob's pride and hubris, their city, in which they had placed so much of their confidence, would be delivered up with all who were dwelling in it. From the general city, the text focuses upon a single house, just one of many such residences. All of the members of the household would die, its entire life snuffed out in the day of disaster.

Yerub Yerumias suggests that verse 10, an exceedingly difficult verse to translate and interpret, might look back to chapter 5, verse 3. For thus says the Lord God, The city that went out a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went out a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel. Here there are ten people in the house and just one survivor. The verse imagines a situation where, upon searching the house where the ten people, presumably dead, had lived, one survivor was surprisingly discovered.

However one questioned, it is clear that no one else survived the ruin. Perhaps the point of the exchange at the end of verse 10 is that the situation is so charged with the electricity of the judgment that has just occurred, that the lone survivor is terrified, lest the name of the Lord be invoked, and that utterance be the spark that leads to a new disaster. The Lord would bring destruction upon all, the rich elite in their great houses, and the poor in their little houses.

We might here think about the earthquake that would soon strike the land, anticipating the more comprehensive national judgment yet to arrive. In chapter 5 verse 7 we read, Verse 12 presents two pictures of unfitting or contradictory situations. Horses running on rocks would ruin their hooves.

The second rhetorical question likely refers to ploughing the sea with oxen, as two words were amalgamated in the Masoretic text. The people had poisoned the waters of justice and made righteousness bitter. Once more the arrogance of the nation is seen at the close of the chapter.

The people celebrated the nation's military successes in the Transjordan under Jeroboam II, believing that these were proof of their strength and power. Eurimius suggests that there might be an intentional play upon the meaning of the place names here. He renders the verse as follows, He says, A question to consider.

The Lord's abhorrence of his people's pride and complacent ease is a prominent and pervasive theme of this chapter. Why do you believe that the people's pride is so singled out and so detestable to the Lord? The concluding chapters of Amos contain a series of visions, beginning here in chapter 7. This chapter gives the first three of the five visions and the narrative of a confrontation that Amos had with Amaziah, a priest at Bethel. The first four visions all open with Amos' description of something that the Lord showed him.

The first two visions, in verses 1-3 and 4-6, are a pair. And the third vision can be paired with the fourth in the chapter that follows. Beyond the features that they share in common with the other visions, the first two visions both involve the Lord showing Amos

a judgment that he is about to bring upon the land.

Amos then pleads with the Lord that he relent from the judgment, both times using similar words, pleading on account of the fact that Jacob is so small, and then the Lord relenting. In Amos 3-7, we read that the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants, the prophets. We have an example of this principle in Genesis 18-19, when the Lord declares to Abraham his plan to destroy Sodom.

He then tells his children in his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him. After this, the Lord declares to Abraham his purpose concerning Sodom. Abraham then proceeds to intercede for Sodom, getting to the point where the Lord says that if there were but ten righteous in the city, he would spare the city on their account.

Here we see that the prophet is not just a messenger, but that the Lord involves the prophet in deliberations concerning what he will do to his people and others. Like Abraham in Genesis 18, Amos does not simply assent the Lord's purpose at this point. Rather, he intercedes for the nation, praying that the Lord might not actually bring his punishment upon them.

A judgment of locusts had already been mentioned in chapter 4 verse 9. Here the vision of the locust plague is one that will strike the latter growth, the crops that would be sown after the rains in March and April. This is after the king's mowings, presumably a tax that was taken from the first produce of the people's lands. As the king took some of this earlier growth, the people would especially depend upon what came next for their own survival, and with the arrival of the locusts and the dry summer months to follow, they would be unlikely to have enough to get them through the winter.

It would be a time of famine. After seeing this vision of the judgment that might come, Amos pleads for the people, and the Lord relents. Amos pleads for forgiveness, and also throws himself and the people upon the mercy of the Lord.

The people are too small, too weak to survive such a general disaster. The second vision of Amos is a fire that is sent upon the land and upon the great deep. Perhaps the great deep here are the waters beneath the earth that water the land.

This fire and its associated drought would dry up and wither the land and prevent it from being fruitful, much as the locusts, which again would be reminiscent of the eighth plague upon the Egyptians, would consume all of its fruitfulness. Once again, after Amos' appeal to the Lord for his mercy, the Lord relents. In response to the second vision, Amos does not plead for forgiveness as he does in the case of the first.

Perhaps Israel is too far gone for that. Daniel Carroll observes commonalities in the second pair of visions, in chapter 7 verses 7-9 and 8 verses 1-3. The Lord asks, Amos,



what do you see? And then the Lord plays upon words relating to what Amos sees.

The Lord explains the images that Amos sees and states, I will not pass by him again, and then declares the aftermath of the judgment that is coming upon the people. While in the first pair of visions the intercession of Amos is effectual in preventing the disaster, in the three visions that follow, the disaster cannot be averted. While Amos interceded in the first two cases, he does not in the third and fourth.

Perhaps the more focused and less comprehensively devastating character of these judgments means that he is more ready to submit to them. The third vision, although it is the most familiar of all of them, is very difficult to understand. What is commonly understood to be the plumb line, and is translated as such in most English Bibles, cannot actually be understood this way.

Benno Landsberger has made a definitive argument against it. He argues that the word must mean tin rather than lead. Of course, tin would not be suitable as a plumb line, so it must refer to something else.

Besides the fact that the word itself cannot be translated as lead or plumb line, the fact that the Lord would place a plumb line in the midst of the people seems strange. The people have already been condemned to judgment, so it seems strange that the Lord would be assessing them at this point and measuring them. Carroll suggests that the tin refers to the weakness of the walls and the fortifications of Israel.

From a distance they might look to be as strong as iron, but when you get close you see that they are made only of tin and could easily be broken through. Perhaps the Lord having tin in his hand is a sign that he has taken some from the wall to demonstrate the weakness of it. Marvin Sweeney, who also argues that it cannot mean lead, interprets it as plaster instead, not thinking that there is a convincing argument in favour of tin.

He argues that the point of the word here is not to be seen in the actual substance, whether it is plaster or tin or lead, but rather it is about the wordplay that is taking place. The word employed in the vision plays upon the word for lament, sighing or mourning. That such a wordplay is taking place is supported in part by the wordplay that is in chapter 8 verses 1 to 3. Another example of such wordplay in a similar sort of vision can be seen at the beginning of the book of Jeremiah.

Chapter 1 verses 11 and 12 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? And I said, I see an almond branch. Then the Lord said to me, You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it. If we were to focus upon the almond branch itself, trying to find significance in that, we might miss the point which is the wordplay.

The almond branch is a branch of the watcher tree, and so the Lord is watching over his

word. Here the Lord placing tin or plaster in the midst of his people is the Lord placing mourning and lament in the middle of his people. This would make sense when we read the judgement in the sentence that follows.

In the book of Jeremiah we read of several confrontations that Jeremiah had with false prophets and leaders of his time. In this chapter Amoz has such a confrontation with Amaziah, the priest of Bethel. It seems that Amoz had been delivering his message in Bethel, presumably to be heard by many people who came there to worship.

Perhaps Amaziah saw Amoz's message receiving traction among the people. Amoz was a man who was gaining standing, people were paying attention to him, and his message was starting to cause waves. And so he sent the king, Jeroboam II, telling him that Amoz was conspiring against him, causing trouble in the midst of the people, and that the land could not long sustain his troublemaking.

He misreports Amoz's message, saying that Amoz said that Jeroboam should die by the sword. Amoz had not said that, he had said that the Lord would rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword. That does not mean that Jeroboam himself would die.

But Jeroboam's house would be violently cut off in his son Zechariah. Amaziah commands Amoz to return to Judah at once, to his land of Tekoa, and not to come back. He is not welcome at Bethel anymore.

Speaking of Bethel as the king's sanctuary, and the temple of the kingdom, it is notable that he makes no reference to the Lord. It is as if the sanctuary at Bethel exists primarily to prop up and support the nation, rather than to serve as a site of faithful worship of the Lord. We might think back here to an earlier confrontation between a man of God and the king himself at this site of Bethel.

In 1 Kings chapter 13, where another man of God from Judah had confronted Jeroboam's predecessor and namesake, Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat. In responding to Amaziah, Amoz stresses that he was no prophet. He did not come from a prophetic school.

Being a prophet was not his primary vocation. He was a herdsman, an addresser of sycamore figs, perhaps primarily as fodder for animals. The Lord called him from his primary vocation, and presumably he is going to return to that when the mission is over.

As Amoz's mission is dated relative to a single year, being a couple of years before the year of the earthquake, it is quite possible that all of these visions and prophecies occurred within a very short span of time. When this whirlwind of prophecies is over, Amoz expects to return to regular civilian life. Amoz then declares a great judgement upon Amaziah by the word of the Lord.

Amaziah had tried to expel Amoz and with him the word of the Lord from the place of Bethel. He had forbidden him to prophesy on Israel. As he has tried to expel the word of

the Lord from the land, he is going to be expelled from the land by that word.

His wife will be a prostitute in the city. Whether this woman of high standing is going to be raped by an invading army, or whether she is going to have to sell her body to survive, is not entirely clear. Either way, it's a terrible fate.

His sons and daughters are going to die by the sword, and his whole household is going to be cut off and humiliated. His land is also going to be divided up with a measuring line. We might see in Amaziah a picture of what's going to happen to the entire nation.

A question to consider, why do you think that the Lord declares judgements to Amoz that he is going to relent from performing? The visions of Amoz continue in chapter 8 with the fourth vision in verses 1 to 3. This should be paired with the third vision in chapter 7 verses 7 to 9, the vision of the tin or the plaster, much as the first and the second visions were paired. There are immediate similarities to be observed between the third and the fourth visions. In both cases, the Lord shows Amoz images and asks Amoz what he sees.

After Amoz responds, identifying the object, the Lord proceeds to explain its significance. In both of the visions, the Lord declares that he will never again pass by them. The third vision, of the tin or the plaster, likely involved the play upon words.

Marvin Sweeney suggested that the word panned upon the word for sighing, mourning or lament. The possibility that such a pun or wordplay is being employed is strengthened by the confusing character of the image taken by itself. Many bible translations understand the image as that of lead or a plumb line, but Benno Landsberger and others have argued forcefully against this.

While convincing suggestions for the meaning of the image of tin or plaster are hard to come by, and commentators sometimes just throw up their hands, if the image were primarily about a wordplay, the object in the image wouldn't necessarily need to make sense apart from that. Here we might helpfully recall Jeremiah's vision of the almond branch in Jeremiah chapter 1 verses 11 to 12. The significance of the almond branch is found in the fact that the word for almond sounds like the word for watching, as is apparent from the explanation in verse 12.

Understandably, many readers of English translations of this passage, without explanatory notes in their margins, will be confused by the meaning of the vision. Readers of Amos' third sign can have a similar experience. The wordplay in the fourth sign is somewhat more obvious than the original language, and is even carried over into some English translations.

For instance, the New Living translation. He asked. I replied, A basket full of ripe fruit.

Then the Lord said, Like this fruit, Israel is ripe for punishment. I will not delay their punishment again. In Robert Alter's translation of the Hebrew Bible, he renders the verse

as follows.

And he said to me, What do you see, Amos? And I said, A basket of summer's end fruit. And the Lord said to me, The end has come upon my people Israel. I will no longer forgive them.

The fruits in the basket would likely include things like figs, pomegranates and grapes, fruit harvest around the time of the Feast of Tabernacles at the beginning of the rainy season. Presumably, this was in the same year as the first vision of the locusts, which was set around March or April. Here the word for summer fruit is punned with the word for end, which, although coming from a different root, sounds similar.

In the case of the summer fruit, we might perhaps see some further connections. On the surface, the summer fruit might be an image of life and bounty, but it might also be an image of Israel's ripeness for judgment, or of the final harvest that is about to come upon it. The Lord's announcement of the end in connection with the fruit of the end of the summer might then be significant.

While Amos had interceded for the nation in response to the first two visions, after the third and fourth, he does not. The Lord's statement of the end does not seem to invite or perhaps even allow for the appeal of the prophet. The vision is a declaration of the finality of the judgment about to fall upon the nation.

There will be no return from it. The vision is followed by a description of the aftermath of the judgment, presenting us with a scene that might be set in the temple or sanctuary, presumably in Bethel, or the palace in Samaria, where the songs would be turned into wailing. The place would be littered with rotting corpses, and anyone there would be commanded to keep silent, perhaps lest any voice might reawaken the horrors that had occurred there.

We might recall the similar statement in chapter 6, verse 10. The third vision, in chapter 7, verses 7-9, was followed by a narrative section, building upon the vision in various ways, in the statement of the judgment coming upon the sanctuaries and high places of Israel, and upon the house of Jeroboam. The rest of chapter 8 does a similar thing, with the fourth vision being a word of judgment attached to it.

The Lord condemns the economic oppression within the land, addressing those who are mistreating the poor. In places such as Deuteronomy chapter 15, the Lord had instructed his people about how they should treat the poor in their midst. The fourth commandment, also concerning the Sabbath, placed limits upon commerce and the toil of workers.

Here, however, the oppressive rich are pictured as chafing at the burden of having to rest from their buying and selling on the Sabbath, eager to get back to dishonest trading,

trading carried out with weights and measures with which they were tampering, and involving the selling of substandard produce. The poor, who might have thought that they were buying pure grain, would have found a lot of worthless chaff hidden beneath it. As grain was a staple food of the poor, this was particularly wicked.

In chapter 2, verses 6-8, the oracle concerning Israel declared, Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Israel and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted. A man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned. They lay themselves down beside every altar, on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined.

There they were selling the poor into debt slavery, and here the oppressors are purchasing those who have been sold into debt slavery, the other side of the transaction. The echoing of the language of chapter 2 seems clear, though. To exacerbate their sin, they seem to be driven in their dishonest dealing by their intention of using their gains to purchase the poor.

Their economics is fundamentally predatory, profiting by impoverishing and enslaving others. The oath that the Lord gives in response is challenging to understand. The pride of Jacob has previously been mentioned in chapter 6, verse 8. The Lord God has sworn by himself, declares the Lord, the God of hosts, I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.

It seems strange that the Lord would swear by something that he has said, that he abhorred, just a couple of chapters earlier. Should we understand this as a sarcastic statement, trying to read the expression in keeping with its earlier use in the book? Alternatively, we could take the pride of Jacob as properly referring to the Lord himself. The Lord elsewhere swears by himself.

Perhaps this is a roundabout way of speaking about that. Yet another possibility is that the pride of Jacob is a reference to the land, as we see the expression the pride of Jacob used with that sense in Psalm 47, verse 4, and Nahum chapter 2, verse 2. The Lord would judge them for their wickedness, causing the entire land to mourn. The reference to the Nile is challenging to understand.

This is likely a reference to the earthquake that would come upon the nation in probably only a couple of years' time, an initial vindication of the message of Amos. However, while the trembling of the land and the being tossed about are natural images for an earthquake, Daniel Carroll notes the strangeness of the image of the Nile rising and falling. As he observes, the Nile rises and falls, not suddenly, but over a period of months.

Carroll suggests that the imagery should be understood as illustrating not the destabilizing and moving up and down of the earth in a sudden movement, but the more general effects of the earthquake upon the land. Another possibility is that the reference to the Nile is drawing our minds back to the story of the Exodus, a story that was precipitated by the oppression of the poor slaves. As the rich of the land have reduced their brothers and sisters to servitude, the land itself starts to behave like Egypt and to suffer similar judgments.

The remaining verses of the chapter contain a series of three oracles, all connected with some days that are coming. The first refers to making the sun go down at noon and darkening the earth in broad daylight. Some have seen this as a reference to the partial eclipse that would have occurred on June 16th, 763 BC.

Both the earthquake and the darkening of the sun refer to concrete physical disasters or phenomena within the land, but also gesture beyond those more concrete reference to the Lord's greater shaking of the earth and darkening of the heavens. We might think of the imagery associated with the opening of the sixth seal in Revelation 6, verse 12. When he opened the sixth seal, I looked and behold there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood.

The darkening of the heavens connects with the theme of mourning in the verse that follows. Much as in the vision of Revelation, the sun itself becomes like sackcloth. It takes on the shrouded appearance of the mourner.

The mourning is especially bitter. It's described as like the mourning for an only son. A similar description of terrible mourning is found in Zechariah chapter 12, verse 10.

The prophetic word of the Lord irrigates the land and sustains its people. Man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The word of the prophets was the means by which the Lord primarily guided his people.

In the prophetic word, the Lord addressed his people as the one who was their God. He directed them towards life, and when those words were followed, he gave them health and prosperity in the land. Now, however, those words are going to be cut off.

The Lord is going to be silent towards them. They're thrown back completely upon their own councils, councils that had led them to this point of destruction. In vain they will look in every corner of the land to find that word of guidance, to find that word of the Lord's presence and favor towards them.

But there will be nothing there. They'll just experience his judgment and a shrouded heavens from which their prayers will receive no answer. The third oracle in the sequence seems to be connected also with the second.

It continues the theme of thirst. Here it is the young people of the land, the lovely virgins

and the young men, who are fainting from thirst. Perhaps we should see here the way that the word of the Lord is particularly that which opens up and promises a future to the people.

And when that word is cut off, that future is cut off. The removal of a future from the people is something that will particularly hurt the youth of the land. It is difficult to survive for long without hope.

The final verse refers to the guilt of Samaria. The guilt of Samaria may be the calf of Samaria. That is the way the calf of Bethel is described in Hosea 8, verses 5-6.

Samaria was the capital of the nation, and the nation's cultic center and the golden calf that was built for it was at Bethel. Swearing by the guilt of Samaria might be a way of speaking about those who swear by the name of the Lord, connecting him with the calf of Bethel. Along with Bethel, Dan was the site of the other golden calf that was set up by Jeroboam I. Again here we have an identification of the Lord in association with idolatrous practice.

The true word of the Lord has been cut off, and now people can only seek him in the mute idols that they have given themselves to. The final reference was to Beersheba, which was also mentioned in chapter 5, verse 5, as a place of cultic worship for people in the north. While people in the north went to Beersheba, Beersheba was in the south.

Beersheba was the other extent of the land. In several places in scripture, from Dan to Beersheba is a way of speaking about the whole length of the land, from the very north to the very south. In the preceding oracle it spoke of them wandering from sea to sea, from north to east, and running to and fro to seek the word of the Lord.

Now it speaks about them swearing by the guilt of Samaria, by Dan, and by Beersheba. It's another way of saying a similar thing. They are caught in a futile, idolatrous quest, and their fate is to fall and never rise again.

A question to consider. In verses 5 to 6, the people expressed their desire that the Sabbath and the new moon would be over, so that they would be able to get back to practicing their economic oppression. How did the principle of the Sabbath, which was at the very heart of the Mosaic covenant, the great sign of the covenant itself, serve to resist the practice of economic oppression within the land? Amos chapter 9 is the final chapter of the prophecy, and the final of the five visions with which the book concludes.

As Daniel Carroll notes, it's quite different from the others, in containing no reference to an exchange between the prophet and the Lord. Rather, the prophet Amos sees the Lord in a vision, and hears the Lord's word concerning his people. The Lord is standing beside the altar, at the heart of the people's worship.

Presumably, this is the altar at Bethel. The altar at Bethel, we must remember, was

condemned to destruction in chapter 3, verses 13 to 14. The Lord here commands the capitals, the top of the great pillars of the temple, to be struck, until the thresholds at the bottom shake.

The temple is being unsettled from its top to its bottom. The temple, we must consider, was a microcosm of the entire world order, and of the people, but also a macrocosm of the human being. By shaking the temple, the Lord is throwing the whole symbolic order into instability.

The hearer might naturally think of the earthquake that was about to come upon the nation in a couple of years' time. However, the earthquake is a concrete symbol of a greater judgement that is about to arrive. By focusing upon the trembling temple, the vision helps us to connect these two levels, the immediate and more literal referent of the physical disaster in two years' time, and the greater disaster that it symbolises.

Carroll argues that the phrase translated, should rather be rendered, referring not to the capitals of the temple, but to the people. He argues that those at the temple would lose their lives as the disaster struck the building, perhaps even during a festal celebration. It's also possible that the heads of all of the people particularly refers to their civil, religious, and political authorities who would be present at the temple, leaving the people without many of their leaders.

We could, however, also read this in a more symbolic way. The heads of all of the people are akin to the capitals of the temple, the top of the great supporting pillars of the body politic. They are going to be radically shaken.

We might think here, for instance, of the striking of the house of Jeroboam and the weakening of the monarchy after the assassination of Zechariah, Jeroboam's son. All but one of the six kings in the three decades after the death of Jeroboam II to the extinction of the Northern Kingdom were assassinated by rivals or removed by foreign powers, and the nation was also at war for a lot of time during this period. With the striking of the capitals of its pillars, the whole nation would be shaken, and destruction would come for them all.

Vertical extremities symbolically related to the tops and bottoms of the pillars of the temple also appear in the two verses that follow, the depths of Sheol, the realm of the dead, and the heights of heaven, the dwelling place of God and the divine council, and the top of Mount Carmel and the depths of the sea. There was nowhere to escape from the Lord's judgment. He was going to bring down the house of Israel from its rafters to its roots, and no part of the nation would escape the general catastrophe.

The Lord would seek them out and destroy them with the symbolic serpent and the literal sword. His purpose is set upon their ill, no longer their good. The literal earthquake would be the sign of the cosmic earthquake that was going to destroy the whole house



of Israel.

The literal earthquake was a great enough disaster in itself, it would be remembered 200 years later, being referenced in Zechariah 14, verse 5. In verses 5-6 of this chapter, we encounter the third of the doxologies of the book associated with the statements of judgment. The others are found in chapter 4, verse 13, And then in chapter 5, verse 8-9. He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name, who makes destruction flash forth against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress.

The doxology in verses 5-6 picks up on elements of the statement concerning the extent of the Lord's judgment in verses 1-4. It also reminds us of chapter 8, verse 8. As in the preceding doxology, there is a reference to the waters of the sea being poured out on the surface of the earth. This is an image, among other things, of a foreign nation invading the land and overwhelming it.

The doxology, which particularly relates to the coming literal earthquake, also expands to refer symbolically to the greater shaking of the land. It implies a connection between the land and Egypt, whose character the land has taken on. The creation themes of these verses, Who builds his upper chambers in the heavens, and founds his vault upon the earth, stand alongside themes of de-creation.

The Lord, as it were, is going to reverse day 3 of creation, the raising of the land out of the waters. The waters of the sea will once again cover the surface of the earth, sinking it into the great deep. Of course, symbolically speaking, the dry land was Israel, which was brought up out of the sea in the Red Sea crossing and the deliverance from Egypt, drawn up and out of the waters of the nation.

Now those waters are going to engulf it once more. It's being de-created and returned to the domain of the Nile and the dominion of the deep. Israel was in constant danger of presumption.

They prided themselves in their privileged covenant status and did not sufficiently consider the consequences of their unfaithfulness. The Lord here punctures their complacency and their false sense of a unique immunity to catastrophic judgment on account of their elect status. Verse 7 is a remarkable verse.

It flies directly in the face of cherished and virtually unchallenged beliefs concerning Israel's privilege as the elect people. Everyone would have instinctively answered no to its questions, but they imply affirmative answers. Israel is indeed like the Kushites, the Philistines and the Syrians.

Kush is in the region of modern Sudan and would have been one of the extremities of the

known world for the Israelites of that day. The book began with oracles addressed to the various nations and here the Lord suggests that he had been graciously involved in the histories of other nations beyond Israel. Israel might be the Lord's firstborn, but that does not mean that he is the Lord's only son.

Rather, the firstborn is to mediate between the father and the other sons and the father is actively concerned for them too. He had brought them up out of their former lands much as he had brought Israel out of Egypt. We might have hints of a similar analogy between Israel's experience and that of other nations in Deuteronomy chapter 2. In verses 5, 9 and 19 of that chapter, the Lord declares that Israel is not to harass or contend with Edom, Moab or Ammon as the Lord had given them their respective lands in a manner that suggests a similarity between their reception of their lands and Israel's reception of the gift of the land of Canaan.

While Israel does have a special relationship with the Lord as his firstborn son, the relationship is not as popularly imagined. It does not offer grounds for presumption. Indeed, the kingdom of Israel would be destroyed.

The Lord would shake them among all of the nations, another judgment that the earthquake would literally anticipate. However, there would be mercy in the judgment, although there are different ways to take the image of the sieve and the identity of the pebbles left in it, it seems clear that it is an image of judgment that would involve some sort of separation and different degrees or modes of judgment for different elements of the population. Carroll suggests that we should think of the pebbles as the comfortable and self-confident perpetrators of injustice who would experience targeted judgment in the land while the rest of the nation would be scattered through the sieve among all the other nations.

The chapter and the book concludes with two connected prophetic statements of hope and reversal. That of verse 11 and 12 begins with In that day, and that of verse 13 to 15 with Behold the days are coming. The judgment will come upon Israel and the people, but it will not be the final word.

There is hope of restoration and new life on the other side. The Lord declares that he will raise up the booth of David that has fallen. There are numerous opinions among commentators about what this might refer to.

Many see it as a reference to the Davidic dynasty more generally. The booth of David could be a reference to the kingdom of David which was torn apart after the death of Solomon. As Jerusalem is referred to as a booth in a vineyard in Isaiah chapter 1 verse 8, some have seen this as a reference to Zion, others as a reference to the temple.

Peter Lighthouse has made the argument that this is a reference to the shrine for the ark in Jerusalem that David set up. After the battle of Apeac at the beginning of 1 Samuel, the

worship of Israel was torn in two. There was the site of the tabernacle and then there was the site of the ark.

In 2 Samuel, David brought the ark into Jerusalem and set up a shrine for it. David's booth, or his shrine for the ark, was a place of prayer and song. The ark shrine was also more open to the Gentiles.

We might think of the fact that the ark was in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite prior to its being brought into Jerusalem. Peter Lighthouse has argued that the vision here refers to the restoration of that ark shrine, a place more of song than of sacrifice, and which included Gentiles among its worshippers. In verse 12, remnants of other nations are brought into the enjoyment of these blessings.

The use of the word possess might initially connote for us a sense of violent or coercive conquest, but that is challenged both by the context, where in verse 7 the Lord declares his interest in these other nations, and also by the description of the nations as those who are called by the Lord's name. Israel is not the only nation that is called by the Lord's name. The remnants of other nations will be called by his name also, and they will be joined into a common possession of the blessing of the Lord's presence in their midst.

Along with this vision of the raising up of the people again, and the bringing in of other nations, in verses 13-15 there is a vision of the restoration of the land and its fruitfulness. Verse 13 recalls Joel chapter 3 verse 18, which is earlier in the book of the Twelve, but later historically as a text. A question to consider.

In Acts chapter 15, James in summing up the decision of the Council of Jerusalem, refers to Amos chapter 9 verses 11-12, presenting those words as being fulfilled in the work of Christ and his church. Reading these two passages alongside each other, how can each one shed light upon the other?