

## **Amos and Hosea**

### Class 2 — Study Guide

#### *1. Historical Setting*

The northern State of Israel and the southern State of Judah were surrounded by a number of small countries — Damascus, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab. At times these countries might cooperate with one another to face an outside threat, but more often they were in conflict with one another, and the prophets often directed their oracles of judgment against these neighboring countries.

We have already seen that the cultic center of the northern State of Israel was Bethel. The capital of the northern kingdom was Samaria. We know that Amos prophesied in Bethel from the story of Amos and Amaziah that we considered in the last class. We do not know whether he prophesied in the capital, but he refers to the capital in his oracles.

#### *2. The Texts*

In this second class we will focus on a sample of Amos' oracles to show something of the range of his prophetic message. The sample, though, just represents a selection of the impressive proclamations of this prophet. Each student will undoubtedly find other passages that speak powerfully to us as we struggle to understand God's will for us in the world.

#### *3. The first text — Judgment on Israel*

Most of Amos' oracles are brief poetic utterances. We also, though, find some longer passages. The opening two chapters contain a long series of oracles directed at the nations surrounding Israel. The nations are all condemned for war crimes or crimes against humanity. The crimes, like all war crimes, are horrendous. For example, Ammon is accused of ripping open Gilead's pregnant women to enlarge its border. We can only imagine Amos' hearers applauding as one after another their hostile neighbors are condemned. At the end of the long series, though, Amos turns to attack Israel, in some sense turning the tables on his hearers. From our first class you should recognize the main evils that Amos attacks and the main lines of God's response.

#### *4. The second text — The Chosen Family*

Among many other goals, the prophets aim to attack faulty thinking and distortions of the truth. This text can serve as a textbook example of the prophets' relentless attempts to correct faulty thinking. What core idea of Israelite thought does this text address? What is the people's understanding of the idea? What understanding does Amos oppose to the people's understanding? If we stay with the prophets, they will change or modify many of our ideas and lead us to clearer thinking.

### 5. *The third text — The Women of Samaria*

The prophets spare no one. Here we find Amos attacking the women of the capital, Samaria. What does he charge them with? Does the charge ring true? Might Amos have a word for us in the twenty-first century? Amos refers to God's holiness. What is your understanding of God's holiness? What does holiness mean in this context?

### 6. *The fourth text — The Remnant*

If a nation were defeated, it was possible that some survivors might remain after the military defeat and the subsequent executions. The prophets, beginning with this text in Amos, frequently comment on the possibility of a remnant that might survive the disaster and continue the life of the people although in greatly reduced circumstances. This passage is one of the few passages in Amos that offer a glimmer of hope. What will have to happen for the hope to become a reality?

### 7. *The fifth text — The Day of Yahweh*

Israel understood that there are two spheres where God acts — the cosmos and history. As creator God formed the universe, and God continues to sustain the cosmos and all of its processes by sending the rain and promoting the life of humans and animals and all creatures. God also acts in history. Examples abound. God called Abraham from his former life into God's future by sending him from his home to the land God would show him. God intervened at the Red Sea to save Israel from the Egyptian army. God sealed a covenant with the people under Moses. God raised up David to save the people from the Philistines. The faith grew that God would protect Israel on the "day of Yahweh" — a decisive intervention in history. What does Amos think of this concept?

### 8. *The sixth text — Famine for Hearing the Word of God*

This sixth text returns us to our on-going efforts to comprehend the prophetic word. What new understanding of the prophetic word is embedded in this text? How does Amos connect the image of a famine with the prophetic word? Summarize what you have learned about the prophetic word from reading Amos.

### 9. *Further work*

You might want to read further in the Book of Amos. If you have questions, feel free to contact me at any time by phone. If I am not at home, leave a message with your phone number; and I will return your call.

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