

Handout for week of 9/23/19 Luke 16: 19-31 & Amos 6: 1a, 4-7

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[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#) 9/25/16

Amos 6: 1 Amos 6: **1** Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and to them that are secure in the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come!

2 Pass ye unto Calneh, and see, and from thence go ye to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines; are they better than these kingdoms? or is their border greater than your border? *3* Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near;

4 That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; *5* That thrum on the psaltery, that devise for themselves instruments of music, like David; *6* That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the hurt of Joseph. *7* Therefore now shall they go captive at the head of them that go captive, and the revelry of them that stretched themselves shall pass away.

COMMENTARY:

Both Hosea and Amos were composed in the second half of the eighth century, in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The king of Israel from approximately 790 to 750 B.C.E. was Jeroboam II (son of Joash), who built Israel into a wealthy trading empire by controlling the trade routes to Damascus on both sides of the Jordan. In response to this, Amos focused in his prophecies on the economic disparities created by Israel's newfound wealth, criticizing the wealthy Israelites' lack of concern for the fate of the poor. He castigated those who "lie on beds of ivory, sprawled on their couches, eating the fattest of sheep and cattle from the stalls who drink from wine bowls, and anoint themselves with the choicest oils, but are not concerned about the ruin of (the House of) Joseph." (Amos 6:4-6). ("Joseph" is one term used to refer to the Northern Kingdom.)

Hosea and Amos share prophetic concern for a nation in turmoil.

By Anne-Marie Belinfante

The Political World of Hosea and Amos

The prophecies of Hosea and Amos are part of a collection of books known as the *trei asar* (The Twelve) or the Minor Prophets. Both prophets were active during the eighth century B.C.E. during the reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah. Hosea apparently continued beyond this period through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah.

Despite the essentially "religious" nature of prophecy, an understanding of the prevailing political and economic circumstances is a vital element in deciphering the prophets' message. The first half of the eighth century B.C.E. brought a period of relative stability and prosperity to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, for some segments of society at least. The relative weakness of Syria meant that Israel was no longer harried, nor subject to the payment of tribute, and Jeroboam extended the nation's borders. Likewise in Judah, Uzziah enjoyed a long reign of relative peace and prosperity.

The end of the Jehu dynasty in the North came with the assassination of Jeroboam's son Zechariah after a merely a year on the throne. Subsequently the kingdom descended into chaos. Between the death of Jeroboam and the fall of Samaria (the capital city) in 722, Israel had six kings, all but one of whom was assassinated. Beginning in 743 B.C.E., the westward sweep of the Assyrian Tiglath-Pileser III contributed significantly to this chaos. The shifting patterns of foreign alliances, revolt against vassal status and return to payment of tribute are reflected in the book of Hosea.

Amos: "Neither a Prophet nor the Son of a Prophet"

Amos is introduced as a *noked* (a shepherd or breeder of sheep) from Tekoa, a village in Judah. Elsewhere he is described as a cattleherder and a tender of sycamore trees. There has been much speculation as to the meaning of Amos' statement that he is neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. (One possibility is that he was making it clear that he was not part of the circle of "professional" prophets, many of whom were attached to the courts of kings.)



"INSTRUCT LAZARUS TO GO TO MY FIVE BROTHERS!"

Judgment for Social Injustice

The first five oracles in Amos are pronounced against neighboring peoples. All are indicted for war crimes. The sixth oracle accuses Judah of disregarding the Torah and laws of YHWH, while the seventh sets out Amos' prophetic agenda: Israel will be punished for its treatment of the poor and righteous, for offenses against the code of sexual ethics, for keeping a pledge overnight, and inappropriate behavior at a shrine. The essential qualities for Amos are mishpat (correct judgment) and tzedakah (righteousness).

It is upon those who pervert justice and throw aside righteousness that disaster will fall. Addressing the northern kingdom (referring to it as "Yosef" or Joseph), Amos describes a society in which the righteous are hated, bribes are taken and the poor are turned away. People are traded for the price of a pair of sandals while others lie on couches, eating choice meats making music and drinking wine. Feeling themselves to be secure they have no concern for the plight of Yosef, the nation as a whole. They will be the first to be taken away.

Can doom be averted? Amos calls on the people to "Seek YHWH and live" (3:5), and this is later echoed in the exhortation "Seek good and not evil that you may live" (5:14). Nevertheless, early in this section Amos describes an adversary who will surround and despoil the land leaving nothing but a small remnant. He quotes a list of chastisements--famine, drought, locusts, blight and violent death--none of which have brought Yosef back to YHWH. At the end of the section, judgment is declared on both great and small.

The Day of the Lord

As part of his social critique, Amos radically reinterprets the concepts of Israel's election and the "Day of the Lord". YHWH's special relationship with his people will bring punishment, not divine favor (3:2). The Day of the Lord, eagerly anticipated by the people as a time of rejoicing, will on the contrary be a day to be feared. It will bring darkness, not light; death not refuge. In addition, the prophet rejects the cult as practiced "I hate, I despise your feasts I will not smell the sacrifices of your solemn assemblies, but let justice rain down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream." (5:21, 24)

Chapters 7-9:6 include five visions. After each of the first two visions of destruction, God relents from his judgment following special pleading from Amos. But after the third vision there is no pardon. The confrontation with the prophet Amaziah interrupts the sequence. Amos prophesies the end of the Jehu dynasty, the destruction of the sanctuaries and the demise of Amaziah himself. The fourth vision turns on a word play: Amos sees a basket of summer (kayitz) fruit and YHWH declares the end (keitz) of His people. In the final vision, the Lord stands beside an altar and commands destruction and death.

The final section of the book has been the subject of some debate. The first oracle is again one of destruction, but beginning with verse 9:11, Amos prophesies the restoration of "the Tabernacle of David" and the return of Israel from captivity. (Some see this as a later addition to the text.)