

# THE EDUCATION OF AMOS

by

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## *A. Oracle Series in the Book of Amos.*

The book of Amos contains two well-known oracle chains, one at the beginning (chs. 1 and 2, roughly) and one at the end (chs. 7–9, excepting 9:11–15).

### *1. First Series.*

Though there have been suggestions about necessary excisions in the first chain—the oracles against Tyre (1:9–10), Edom (1:11–12), and Judah (2:4–5) are suspected of being secondary<sup>1</sup>—the case for excluding several passages from the second string has been more forcible. Both 7:(9)10–17 and 9:5–6 are commonly apprehended as secondary overlays that offend against the original structure of Amos' oracles.<sup>2</sup> The case against 7:10–17 is so familiar that it hardly raises a biblical scholar's eyebrow when a major commentary (W. Rudolph's *Joel—Amos—Obadja—Jona*, 1971, pp. 249–60) separates and prints the exegesis of these verses after the discussion of 8:1–3, 11 pages distant from the exegesis of 7:1–9. Explaining this major transposition Rudolph states, as a matter of fact, that this, to his mind, extraneous report is a stark disruption in the chain of visions (p. 251).

1. H. W. Wolff (1977, pp. 139–41) rehearses the arguments, primarily form-critical, against the authenticity and contextual felicity of these three oracles, all of which have been reiterated many times since the late 19th century (Wolff cites the major voices on p. 140; cf. J. Barton, 1980, pp. 22–4). The ambiguity of the evidence, however, allows an easy refutation in support of the integrity of the chain and the rhetorical brilliance of the three disputed items in their current locations. This ambiguity is clearly reflected in J. L. Mays' equivocations on the question (e.g., 1969, p. 34), which, in the same paragraph, present arguments both for and against authenticity. The casual reader is left without any sense of how the text ought to be read and understood.

2. On 9:5–6 see, for example, K. Marti (1904, p. 222, "*eine spätere Interpolation*." In support of the contextual suitability of the doxology see, for example, A. van Hoonacker (1908, p. 279); J. L. Crenshaw (1975, pp. 8–10).

At least one aspect of the rhetoric of the first series is a geographical organization.<sup>3</sup> Amos crisscrosses back and forth, from north to south and east to west, presenting oracles against Israel's various enemies to his north Israelite audience. His aim: to evoke an emotional attitude of judgment in his audience. The rhetorical ploy culminates in the oracle against Israel, his audience, which is caught in the same trap that Nathan set for David in 2 Samuel (12:7): "you are the man." Having approved the judgment on all the surrounding nations for their various crimes, the Israelite audience should be compelled—so the rhetorical plan—to assent to their own damnation for the most serious crimes of the series.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. *Second Series.*

The second oracular chain in the book of Amos extends from 7:1–9:8a.<sup>5</sup> Here again the reader finds a series of oracles of similar structure and tone. Closer examination reveals some small differences so that the oracles have been variously grouped into pairs. Most commonly readers have grouped the first four oracles into two pairs, 7:1–3 with vv. 4–6 and vv. 7–9 with 8:1–3. The last vision report, if included, constitutes a separate culmination (9:1–4).<sup>6</sup> As in the first oracle chain in the book, Amos constructs a series of linked statements with obvious internal parallels to trace a progression.

In the first oracle series Amos makes an argument to his Israelite audience, so that those who followed the logic of his rhetoric will be caught and convicted in their sin. In the chain at the end of the book, however, Amos is not addressing an audience for purposes of conviction;

3. Mays describes the geographic pattern in his commentary (1969, pp. 22–42). An alternate proposal, though not incompatible with the perception of geographical rhetoric, has been made by S. Paul (1971, pp. 397–403).

4. Mays presents a detailed rhetorical analysis (1969, pp. 22–42).

5. This demarcation of the limits of the oracular chain is unconventional, the most common delimitation being from 7:1–8:3 with the exclusion of 7:(9)10–17 (e.g., Wolff 1977, p. 294; Mays 1969, p. 123). Some commentators have, however, suggested that there is a series of five extending all the way into ch. 9: F. Hitzig (1881, p. 140); C. F. Keil (1982, pp. 304–5).

Though it is possible to incorporate the final verses (8b–15) of ch. 9 in an interpretation of the oracle chain, as Keil does, my reading subscribes to the conventional critical view that these verses constitute an ameliorating gloss on Amos' dark sayings. The rhetorical analysis of the chain supports this exegetical decision.

6. E.g., Keil (1982, pp. 304–5); Rudolph (1971, pp. 228–9). Claude Coulot (1977, pp. 184–5) has recently proposed an alternative based on careful analysis of linkages of

he is, rather, relating a series of visions and experiences that he himself had. And since visions in biblical prophetic literature are generally explanatory in orientation, it is reasonable that the chain itself should have such a function. Since the larger theme of all the visions is the approach of destruction as punishment for sin, it is likely that such is also the theme of the oracular chain's formal structure. Just as the overall structure of the first oracle chain in the book was crucial to Amos' rhetorical strategy,<sup>7</sup> so here the parallels and developments from vision to vision play an essential role in the explanation that is provided by relating this series of visions.<sup>8</sup>

The oft rejected confrontation with Amaziah in 7:10–17 is an indispensable component of the chain's explanatory power. Most readers have perceived the variations in the form of the various vision reports; with careful attention to patterns of development and the part played by Amaziah's intervention in the series, we may also appreciate why there are such transformations and what they might mean.

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content and phraseology between chs. 8 and 9. He also pairs 7:1–3 and vv. 4–6, but isolates 7:7–17 as unique and pairs 8:1–14 and 9:1–10. Coulot's scheme has much to recommend it; it may be, however, that it works in tandem with, rather than in opposition to, the conventional scheme.

S. Niditch (1980) has presented a major form critical analysis involving two members of Amos' vision series (7:7–9; 8:1–3). Needless to say, her analysis diverges markedly from that presented here, the difference between our diachronic and synchronic approaches. Niditch does, however, take care to point out at every stage of her analysis, that each instance of the genre she claims to identify has been creatively adapted to suit the developing needs of the prophetic poets who used it. Whatever the merits of Niditch's analysis—a model of form-critical sensitivity to fluidity and creativity in the employment and development of literary genres (on which see especially R. M. Fowler [1982, pp. 20–36, 170–90])—all that I seek to do here is to analyze in detail, Amos' employment of the putative genre.

7. As Wolff has observed, the series of oracles in chs. 1–2, with its mounting emotions and escalating evocation of judgment plays much the same role as the graded numerical sequences that structure each individual oracle. "Most important, however, is the fact that the demonstrable affinity between the thought and speech modes of the graduated numerical saying . . . and our present cluster of homomorphic oracles establishes the form of the latter as a plausible rhetorical possibility" (1977, p. 148). Micro-rhetoric and macro-rhetoric work together for redoubled impact.

8. Robert Alter's concept of narrativity in biblical poetry helps to understand the overall impact of the series of visions (1985, pp. 3–61). In the vision chain, narrativity is supplied by the transition from vision to vision. And it is the seriality of the chain that explains why it is that there is a transformation in the form of the visions and why it is that Amos changes sides.

*B. The Rhetoric of the Vision Series.*

*1. First Vision.*

The series begins with 7:1–3, the vision of the locusts. The report of this vision has three basic components, as do subsequent reports:

- the vision
- the prophet's response
- the divine response to the prophet.

In 7:1–3 we find the following items within this framework:

- **Vision:** a cloud of locusts forming against the harvest.<sup>9</sup>
- **Prophetic Response:** Amos' plea, "Do forgive. Who will remain of Jacob. He is so small."
- **Divine Rejoinder:** "It shall not be."

Unlike the first series of oracles in the book this series of visions, which is described to the reader but not addressed to him, is addressed directly to Amos. "Thus my Lord showed me." The impact of the vision, its rhetorical purpose, is to show Amos something—the coming judgment—and, given the repeated displays of similar visions, it would seem also to convince him of the necessity of judgment.<sup>10</sup> When Amos reacts against the vision that he has seen, God relents but returns immediately, in the existing literary context, with another similar vision.

9. It is conceivable, given the harsh anti-covenantal sentiments that follow and which are duplicated at other points in the book, that the reference to the locusts alludes to the plague against the Egyptians (Exod 10:1–18). Though the words are different (*gōbay* 'grasshopper' in Amos and *ʿarbeh* 'locust' in Exodus; the two words are used in synonymous parallelism in Nah 3:17) the allusion operates on the basis of content alone, since the exodus story was so central to the Israelite consciousness. The point of such an allusion? To suggest that what Yhwh had once done to Egypt, the archetypal enemy, in creating his chosen people, so he was now doing to wicked Israel in turn. 'Yes I brought Israel out of Egypt, and I also brought the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir' (Amos 9:7).

On a separate issue the reference to the "king's mowings," frequently regarded as secondary, may, whatever its literary history, foreshadow the opposition between king and God, which becomes especially apparent in Amaziah's confrontation with Amos.

10. Francis Landy also observes that the vision series is aimed at convincing, though he calls it "elucidation" (p. 225).

## 2. *Second Vision.*

The second vision report follows closely the format and content of the first:

- **Vision:** Yhwh calling forth a consuming fire that consumed the great deep and the land lease.<sup>11</sup>
- **Prophetic Response:** Amos' plea, "Stop! Who will remain of Jacob. He is so small."
- **Divine Rejoinder:** "This too shall not be."

Formally, these first two visions are close. The same three major divisions are repeated in each. Both open with the same narrative statement, "Thus my Lord Yhwh showed me." In each there follows a participial phrase describing the punitive action. Both Amos' response and God's rejoinder are almost the same in each case. The divergencies are a consequence of the differing contents of each vision and of the fact that the second vision, following the first, includes the completion of the first within its purview. So, when God sets out to plague Israel with locusts, Amos appropriately calls for divine forgiveness so that the plague might be averted, just as Pharaoh had done once before, when faced by the divinely commissioned insects (Exod 10:16–17).

When the threat is one of cosmic destruction, as it is in the case of the fire that will consume the primeval deep, however, Amos shouts, "Stop!"<sup>12</sup> There is no time for any other response; the dissolution of created order must not proceed at all. Similarly in God's rejoinder, the second time he says, "this *too* shall not be," because he has already relented once. God's increased magnanimity is emphasized by the particle *gam* 'too', and by the fact that it is the more serious destruction that God forbears. Already here, then, there is development within a formal structure of sameness.

Paradoxically it is the appearance of sameness promoted by the identity of structure that operates as a guide to understanding the

11. As Keil notes (1982, p. 308), *hēleq* 'land lease' is inconsonant with the imagery of *tēhôm rabbâ* 'the great deep.' The significance of the incongruous pairing of "the deep" and the "land leases" becomes apparent when we attend to the overall chiasmic structure of the vision chain.

12. On the mythological allusion in this vision see D. R. Hillers (1964, pp. 221–5). Both Rudolph (1971, p. 233) and to a lesser extent Wolff (1977, p. 298) fail to appreciate the allusions. For an interpretation sensitive to the allusive qualities of "the great deep" here, but not mythological, see Keil (1982, pp. 307–8).

developments that have taken place. The reader is led, by the repeated structure, to expect the same items in the same order. When they do not or when there is change, the reader is brought up short. What has happened to change the pattern? Any change evokes heightened perception of the differences.

In the first two visions Amos' response is nearly identical. He responds as one who views the cataclysms from Israel's perspective. And so, he intercedes on Israel's behalf. In his view, the visions of judgment that God has shown him are too much for Israel, which could never survive them. Given that God shows the visions to Amos and that they reveal actions in process (indicated by the participial phrasing), it appears that God and Amos are of different minds on the necessity of such punishment at this point in the series. God reveals to Amos what he is doing and Amos says, 'do not do it'. God relents but only to return with second vision, more terrible than the first. The escalation in the scale of destructive punishment indicates that God affirms the necessity of punishment even through he is willing to capitulate, momentarily, to the intercessory cries of his prophet (cf. Wolff 1977, p. 298). The question from God's point of view, therefore, is how to convince Amos that the judgments he sees in the visions, or something very much like them, must come.

### 3. *Third Vision*

The third vision begins as the first two, "Thus he showed me," but differs in placing the Lord Yhwh explicitly within the vision, acting out what Amos is shown. The fact that now Yhwh personally acts out the vision may indicate a redoubled effort at convincing Amos, actions speaking louder than words. The vision, however, diverges quite radically from the first two, which were self-explanatory to Amos.<sup>13</sup> There Amos

13. Robert Gordis' suggestion that the first three visions fit into the common triadic pattern found frequently throughout the Bible and that the fourth vision is superfluous after the third (1980, pp. 250-1) is weakened by inattention to this significant divergence in the third vision. It is not so much the third in a series of three identical visions as it is the pivotal centre of five related but significantly divergent visions.

In saying that the third vision diverges from the first and second I do not mean to imply that the first two visions are normative in any historical or generic sense. Rather the divergence is in terms of reader-response: Amos' perceptions of the visions granted by Yhwh. The first two visions establish horizons of expectation, which are surmounted by the third vision. From a form-critical perspective, of course, it might be more meaningful to relate the third vision to Jer 1:11-16, which contains two visions of near formal identity to Amos 8:1-3 (cf. Niditch [1980, pp. 41-52], who does describe some significant differences

reacted without hesitation to what he saw; here, on the other hand, he sees Yhwh standing on a wall with a plumb line in his hand.<sup>14</sup> Not only is this sight not self-explanatory, but God immediately offers an explanation. Since Amos did not appreciate the divine perspective in the first two visions an explanation from God himself is now injected with a view to gaining the prophet's confidence. The change from self-evident visions in the first pair to visions accompanied by interpretations in the second can be understood as a development in God's rhetorical strategy for convincing Amos about the necessity of judgment.<sup>15</sup> The second pair of

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between Amos' and Jeremiah's visions). But my focus in this study is exclusively synchronic; the introduction of such diachronic concerns and observations here would only confound both approaches.

The parallel with the visions of Jer 1:11–16 might lead an observant reader to believe that the explicated vision is not necessarily a strategy to impress the divine perspective on the prophet. In the visions of Jeremiah, which are equally obscure, God responds to the prophet's description of what he has seen in the first vision by saying that he has "done well so to see" (*hêṭabtā lir'ôti*). This might be taken to imply that the vision is comprehensible in the case of Jeremiah and so, by analogy, also in the case of Amos. But seeing well does not imply comprehension; one can easily imagine clear perceptions of symbols without understanding their meaning. I would argue that neither the clear perception of an almond branch or a boiling pot comes close to an understanding that judgment is nigh. So much the more so for Amos' visions, in which there is not even a congratulation for clear but ignorant perception. Gitay's comments on the creative manipulation of genre in the prophets suggest that one must be more cautious in form—critical generalizations than hitherto in reading the specific rhetoric of any given oracle: "In short, the discovery of a certain formula may provide the literal meaning but not the literary function, which is a significant distinction. The application is that a linguistic study of the prophetic speech disconnected from its literary context may be misleading concerning the prophet's intention and his audience's perception" (1983, p. 211; cf. Rosalie L. Colie 1973, p. 30, "Though there are generic conventions . . . they are also metastable. They change over time, in conjunction with their context of systems. At the time of writing, an author's generic concept is in one sense historical, in that he looks back at models to imitate and to outdo. *The work he writes may alter generic possibilities . . . almost beyond recognition*" [my emphasis]).

14. Wolff's defense (1977, p. 293) of translating *ʿanāk* as "plumb line" is acceptable, especially in view of the tenuous alternatives that have been proposed. Cf. Niditch (1980, p. 22 note d).

15. Cf. Hitzig, (1881, p. 141) who notices the change in the semantics of the visions, but does not perceive the rhetorical purpose behind it. Mays also comments on the changes in the sequences of the dialogues between God and the prophet (1969, p. 124) with helpful attendance to the correspondingly different outcomes. Keil's reading is best, a good example of a reader's correct, if naive, intuitions about the "reader-response" aspects of the visionary monologue addressed by God to Amos: "The question addressed to the prophet . . . is asked for the simple purpose of following up his answer with an explanation of the symbol" (1982, p. 310); cf. Rudolph (1971, p. 236), who also perceives a new initiative to win Amos' acceptance of the need for judgment.

visions with their interpretive comments are the more developed answers to Amos' "forgive" and "cease" responses to the first two visions.

God asks Amos, "What do you see, Amos?", to which Amos, not really understanding the significance of what he sees, can only reply, "A plumb line." Having baffled the prophet, God supplies his own, authoritative explanation of the evaluative symbolism of the plumb line,<sup>16</sup> adding that he will no longer "pass by [i.e., avert divine judgment] for its [Israel's] sake" (*abôr lô*). The explanation connects to the symbolic visionary object by repeating the noun *ʔānāk* 'plumb line' again in the explanation. What the non-communicating plumb line means, says God, is that Israel is going to be evaluated and so judged; their sinfulness is assumed. God explicitly mentions the high places of Isaac,<sup>17</sup> the sanctuaries of Israel, and the house of Jeroboam as targets of his wrath.

### 3a. Amaziah's Intrusion.

It is at exactly this point that the structural parallels in the series of visions lead the reader to expect a plea from Amos.<sup>18</sup> But a remarkable turn of events defeats expectations. Just at the point where we should

16. Cf. Landy (p. 228), "thus God steals the initiative in the dialogue, effectively depriving Amos of the possibility of intercession."

17. Various explanations for the anomalous use of "Isaac" as a parallel to "Israel" have been suggested, none winning much acceptance (see Rudolph [1971, p. 237, n. 3] for a summary). The parallelism in v. 9 and again in v. 16 makes it certain that "Isaac" is being used synonymously with "Israel" in reference to the inhabitants of the northern kingdom. It is an odd usage, but the structure of the oracle may at least explain its role in the existing literary context.

18. Reader expectations of such kind are governed by what psychology of perception calls "the primacy effect." Menakhem Perry has applied the psychological theory to develop a theory of literary dynamics.

"The reader of a text does not wait until the end before beginning to understand it, before embarking upon its semantic integration. This is true even for a brief poem or a short text consisting of only a few words, as proven in psychological experiments (cf. 2.7). The reader tries to organize the so-far incomplete semantic material given him in the best possible way. He relates, links, arranges the elements in hierarchies, fills in gaps, anticipates forthcoming elements, etc. . . . When the reader expects the appearance of specific material at a given point in a text, there is, at first, a tendency to assimilate what has actually appeared to what had been expected, to make it conform as much as possible to the expectation. When this proves impossible, and the expectation is not fulfilled, there is a sharp confrontation between the expected and the actual, which may sometimes lead to reexamining the particular place in the text where this expectation arose, and correcting it in retrospect. Unfulfilled expectations are essential for the production of new information" (1979: 46, 52; cf. Sternberg 1978, index s.v. "primacy effect"; S. Fish 1980).



see Amos voicing his opposition to the divine plan, pleading for clemency, Amaziah intrudes.

Because the text shifts here from poetic representation of Amos' vision experiences to a narrative description of Amaziah's action—sending messages to Jeroboam and chastising Amos for prophesying at Bethel—most scholarly readers have had a strong sense of incoherency here. There is, indeed, a breach. But a break in a prophetic literary work such as the book of Amos does not automatically afford a glimpse into the book's literary history. Assertions that such a passage is secondary to this context should be called for what they are: failures to interpret the text as meaningful.<sup>19</sup> The breach opened by Amaziah's intrusion has a function that can be understood by paying careful attention to the radical change that it introduces in the regular pattern of the vision reports. Attention paid, there is both formal order and logical/causal significance in Amaziah's apparently abrupt interruption.<sup>20</sup>

Amaziah accuses Amos of two things: conspiracy against Jeroboam, and prophesying that Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will go from its land into exile (vv. 10–11). At no point in the previous context

19. Cf. C. Hardmeier (1986, pp. 93–4), "Although Amos proves itself on the basis of its literary context without any doubt to be an interpolation, it is nevertheless *controversial in research* [Hardmeier's emphasis] whether this interpolation itself has to be understood as a fragment. . . ." Though Hardmeier goes on to offer a literary-historical explanation for Amaziah's intervention, he has seen the essential point—that a text's diverse antecedents need not always be allowed to prevail over the existing, creative use that has been made of them.

20. Cf. Y. Gitay's comments on the similar problem with the prose in Amos 3:7, also intervening in a context of oracular poetry (1980, pp. 304–5), "such a structure in poetical context is usually regarded as a late insertion. However, the study of oral performance indicates that the performer occasionally switches the regular poetical form into prose; a turn which enables him to add details. "Actions . . . take on greater significance as they are more fully exploited by the use of details," (citing A. Scheub [1975, pp. 137, 152–3]). Following Gitay's argument, the prose description of Amaziah's intervention could also be understood as a detail whose disjunctive insertion draws attention to its pivotal importance in the series and in the attitude of Amos towards Israel and God (cf. Gitay, 1983, pp. 211–12).

From a diachronic perspective J. P. Hyatt (1962, p. 624) could only surmise that the confrontation with Amaziah was placed here, at the very center of the vision series, "probably because Amos at Bethel narrated his third vision." Though the principle of linking traditions by associative logic is well documented in biblical literature, to leave exegesis at such a tentative, unexamined level is useless to the reader who wants to understand what the linkage does, if anything. S. R. Driver (1915, p. 205) also saw the connection between the previous visions and the third; he calls it, "a historical episode, intimately connected with the preceding visions, and arising out of them. . . ."

of the book has Amos said what Amaziah claims here;<sup>21</sup> the nearest statement appears just before in v. 9 where Yhwh, not Amos, tells Amos and Amos only that he will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam. Most commentators have suggested that Amos must, at some time, have said what Amaziah says he did or something very much like it.<sup>22</sup> This reader response to the gap created by Amaziah's assertion is, however, only one of many possible reader responses that each reader should reject once the connections between Amaziah's statement (v. 11), Yhwh's statement (v. 9), and Amos' subsequent response (vv. 16–17) appear, that is, after one has read through to vv. 16–17.

What Amos hears in Amaziah's accusation is dramatic irony. Amaziah has unwittingly stumbled onto part of the explanation of the vision that Yhwh had just given to Amos. The reader too shares Amos' appreciation of the dramatic irony because the narrator has privileged him with a covert audition of Amos' vision and Yhwh's explanation of it. Amaziah's other attribution—that "Israel will certainly go up from its land into exile"—cannot be found anywhere in the previous context; it is complete fabrication.<sup>23</sup> Amos' response to Amaziah and the latter's near duplication of Yhwh's threat against the house of Jeroboam is uncanny and

21. Cf. Gordis (1980, p. 252), "... Amaziah denounces Amos and, in the process, exaggerates the severity of his prophecy."

22. Mays (1969, p. 135), illustrates the confusion over Yhwh's words, overhead by the reader only thanks to narratorial privilege and unproclaimed to any other in the book of Amos. "Amaziah documents his intelligence by reporting *what Amos had said* [my emphasis]. In the extant speeches of Amos there is no saying precisely equivalent to Amaziah's summary, but the priest can be credited with accurate reporting. The fall of the royal dynasty (v. 9) is enough of a threat to the royal person." Amaziah heard no such threat. Mays and others have quite properly noticed the connection between vv. 9 and 11; it is just that they have misunderstood the significance of it. Cf. Hitzig (1881, p. 142), "*Im Wesentlichen berichtet er getreu . . . und von einer Verdrehung der Aussprüche des Amos (Justi) kann nicht die Rede sein*"; Rudolph (1971, p. 253). The connection is perceived; its significance in context is not.

23. The fact that Amos does prophesy exile in 6:7 is not relevant here because that prophecy is directed at a specific group, the upper classes. The literary connection between 6:7 and 7:11 is also weak: the only link is the stem *glh* 'exile'. Within ch. 7 and even more within the same context of the third vision report, however, there are literary and phraseological interconnections between vv. 9, 11, and 16–17, the utterances, respectively, of Yhwh, Amaziah, and Amos. Glances averted to tenuously related oracles in other sections of the book only distract attention from the complex interaction of voices here in the third in the series of vision reports. The play regarding "exile" is between v. 11 *wēyisrā'el gālōh yigleh mē'al 'admātō* 'and Israel will be exiled away from its land' and v. 17 *wēyisrā'el gālōh yigleh mē'al 'admātō*, not 6:7 *lākēn 'attā yiglū bē'rō'š gōlīm* 'therefore now will they be exiled at the head of the exiles'.

marks Amos' conversion to the perspective of the divine master of that sphere: he turns Amaziah's false witness into a self-fulfilling prophecy (vv. 16–17).

Amaziah's interruption is the turning point in Amos' perception of the judgments foretold by the visions.<sup>24</sup> Whatever God's new explanatory vision might have done to convince Amos, it pales compared to Amaziah's contribution. For Amos, who according to the established pattern may have been about to intercede for Israel, Amaziah's false accusations catalyze his conversion: he crosses the floor from defence to prosecution with Yhwh. Amaziah's intrusion literally shoves aside Amos' intercession<sup>25</sup> and so cries out for fitting retribution. The insertion of this narrative segment in the midst of the poetic vision reports is a dramatic representation of this turn of events and Amos' conversion. The text's physical arrangement mirrors the structure of the events described in the text:<sup>26</sup> a jarring interruption, a displacement of the plea, and as we shall see, a total about-face in Amos' attitude to the judgments revealed in the visions.

Amaziah's ripeness for judgment continues to v. 13. The temple sanctuary, in Amaziah's official eyes, is explicitly the king's and not God's:

And [as for] *bêt-ʔēl* [the house of God]:  
No longer shall you continue to prophesy,  
for it is the royal chapel, the *bêt-mamlākā* [house of the kingdom].

Needless to say, this "den of thieves" transformation is contextually grating, both for Yhwh and Amos within the text, and for the narrator and reader without. Surely judgment cannot be far from such insolence.<sup>27</sup> The final straw in place, Amos' conversion is complete. We shall hear no

24. Cf. Gordis (1980, p. 253), who speaks of "a far-reaching change in the prophet's outlook" after the confrontation with Amaziah.

25. Historical-critical readers' anxiety over the current location of vv. 10–17 supplies a good example of reader response to the pointed abruptness of the intrusion. The narrator has done a good job of making Amaziah a rude interruptor. Historical critics have not been misled by their first response to the text, only by their literary-historical theories about its meaning.

26. A good example of how structure is used in poetic oracles as a substitute for plot and flow of events in narrative. (Cf. R. Alter's remarks on "narrativity" in biblical poetry [1985, pp. 27–61].) There is some parallelism between this poetic technique and that of *mise en abyme*. See the discussion in B. Morrissette (1985), pp. 141–56.

27. Landy (p. 235) notes that Amaziah's injunction not to continue prophesying at Bethel (*ūbêt-ʔēl lōʔ-ʔōsīp ʕōd lahinnābēʔ*) is a case of dramatic irony as Amaziah begs for poetic justice in his allusive reiteration of Yahweh's just prior judgment (*lōʔ-ʔōsīp ʕōd ʕābōr lō*, v. 8).

more pleas, no more talk of Jacob's frail dimension. Henceforth judgment and damnation shall occupy the position once held by the prophetic plea.

After the "plea"—here, after Amaziah's intervention—comes the divine response: "it shall not be" (cf. vv. 3, 6). But now, just as Amaziah displaced Amos' plea, Amos steps in, shouldering Yahweh aside to offer his own version of the divine response. And just as Amaziah's interruption transformed the content of the "plea," so Amos will transform the content of the divine response. Judgment, called for by Amaziah, is the order of Amos' "divine" response.

Amos does not keep Amaziah or the reader waiting. Following a short vindication of his own part in prophecy (which has elicited an inordinate amount of historical speculation<sup>28</sup>), Amos displays for the first time in the series of visions a complete alignment with the perspective of Yhwh.<sup>29</sup> When Yhwh was last heard he proclaimed the meaning of the plumb line, mentioning three doomed things in the following order:

- A the high places of Isaac (to be desolated)
- B the sanctuaries of Israel (to be wasted)
- C the house of Jeroboam (to be put to the sword)

Amos recapitulates Yhwh's list of things needing judgment, creating a complement that begins with chiasmic parallelism (AB/B'A') and ends with simple parallelism (C/C'):

- B' do not prophesy against Israel
- A' do not speak against Isaac
- C' sons and daughters to be put to the sword

The pattern is: ABC//B'A'C'. The modification of regular chiasmic parallelism is part of Amos' rhetorical strategy.<sup>30</sup> Amos knows what Yhwh

28. See Wolff (1977, pp. 312–13) for discussion of the main issues regarding Amos' vocation. Landy's contextually moored suggestions (pp. 236–38) about the intended opposition and refutation in the title between Amos and the officious priest are more interesting and appropriate to the data supplied to us in this literary composition.

29. Against Mays (1969, p. 126), who says that even the third and fourth vision reports are designed to show that Amos did not willingly proclaim judgment against Israel.

30. The pattern is actually parallelistic,

A B : B'A'  
C : C'

said in v. 9; Amaziah does not, though he comes close to part of the truth in attributing a statement about Jeroboam's end to Amos (v. 11). So Amos, knowing full well that Amaziah falsely accused him but also touched, unwittingly, on Yhwh's vision explanation, first completes Amaziah's false accusation by completing the quote from v. 9. The false accuser is falsely accused and poetic justice satisfied as Amos consigns Amaziah to meet his fate at the hand of his own falsehood. His false accusation is completed so that it forms part of Amos' chiasmic response to Yhwh's explanation. The resultant pattern, including Amaziah's speech, is:

- A the high places of Isaac (to be desolated)
- B the sanctuaries of Israel (to be wasted)
- C the house of Jeroboam (to be put to the sword [v. 9]).
- C' Jeroboam will die by the sword
- B' Israel will go from its land into exile (v. 11).
- B' do not prophesy against Israel
- A' do not speak against Isaac (v. 16).

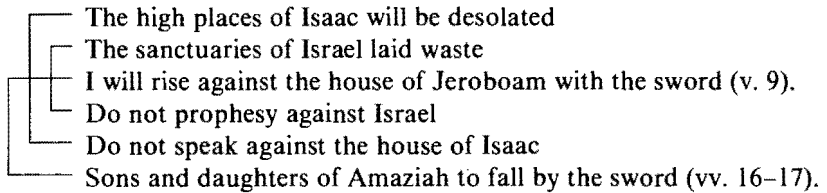
Now the pattern is that of a standard chiasmus, allowing for Amos' resumptive repetition of "Israel" in v. 16, a necessary stitch given the intervening discourse. The poetic structure also forms an integral part of Amos' own proclamation of agreement with Yhwh's perspective. Even before he signals his own acceptance of the divine perspective, Amos arranges for the false accuser to be in more perfect harmony with the damning judgment of Yhwh: poetic justice embodied in poetic structure.

Amos is not satisfied simply to bring Amaziah into ironic accord with Yhwh. His chiasmically structured reply to Amaziah also ties himself and his own point of view back to that of Yhwh in the vision explanation. His full conversion to Yhwh's point of view is precipitated by Amaziah's intervention. So now he voices his agreement with Yhwh by focusing Yhwh's pronouncement of v. 9 squarely on Amaziah, priestly representative of the king and opposition to Yhwh's prophet. Now Amaziah is the target for the aforestated judgment against the house of Jeroboam. The

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with a chiasmic inversion within the first set of paralleled lines. The prophetic poet uses this combination of simple parallelism and chiasmus to tie together the structural allusion back to Yhwh's utterance—the AB . . . BA pattern—and forward to the remaining speeches of the altercation between Amos and Amaziah—the AB:BA, C:C pattern. Wilfred Watson has called a similar modification of chiasmic parallelism "skewed chiasmus" (1981:132; cf. W. L. Holladay 1966:432-3).

pattern of connection between Amos' statement in vv. 16–17 and Yhwh's in v. 9 is thus:



Amos focuses Yhwh's pronouncement against the regime of Jeroboam because Amaziah has convinced him of the necessity of the judgment and proven himself and the regime he represents worthy of receiving the judgment that Amos now offers.

But Amos does not respond solely with agreement to the sentiments of v. 9. Rather, in v. 17 he also includes a detailed response to Amaziah's castigation. The detailed response to Amaziah's words is exactly what we would expect given that it is Amaziah's speech that transforms Amos from intercessor to joint accuser with Yhwh. Amaziah misquoted Amos saying, "Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go up from its land into exile" (v. 11). Amos responds to Amaziah's false witness with a retaliatory misquotation, turning Amaziah's own words against him. It is Amaziah's, not Jeroboam's own sons and daughters that will die by the sword (v. 17). Israel will "indeed go into exile away from his land" (verbatim quotation) and moreover the priest and his wife will themselves suffer desecration, she as a prostitute, he by death in an unclean land. This latter punishment comes, it would seem, as a fitting turnabout of Amaziah's attack on Amos' sacred office.

The third vision, with its incorporation of the Amos-Amaziah dialogue, is the turning point in the series of visions. The first two visions prepare for it by establishing a set pattern that conditions the reader to expect subsequent visions to follow the same pattern. The third report begins to deviate from the pattern established by the first two visions with Yhwh's new tactic for winning Amos over, the vision that requires a divine commentary. But that deviation is small compared to the radical change in the orderly sequence that is brought about by Amaziah's interruption. Amaziah's intrusion marks a turning point in the series of visions; in the last two visions of the series, the consequences of this turning point are worked out in detail. In comparison with the first two vision reports, which have established the normative pattern for reader expectations, the reader sees Amos' transformation: the intercessor (the

first and second visions) becomes a judge (the third and fourth visions) and finally a celebrant of judgment (the fifth vision).<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. Fourth Vision

Like the third, the fourth vision is explicated. The vision takes the form of a symbolic vision of fruit, the meaning of which is clarified by the word play between the words, *qāyīš* 'fruit' and *qēš* 'end': the vision of *qāyīš* 'fruit' indicates that the *qēš* 'end' is at hand. The time is ripe.

Explaining this new finality within the symbolism of the vision, Yhwh says that he will no longer pass by, alluding to the first two visions in which he did so at Amos' behest. Yhwh picks up his diatribe against the monarchy and all that it represents where he left off in v. 9, just before Amaziah's interruption. Once again, there is an inverted parallelism between a statement made before the interruption and one made by the same character after it:

- General destruction, all-encompassing locales (vv. 8–9a).
- Specific destruction of the monarchy of Jeroboam (v. 9b).
- Devastation of the monarchic palace (8:3).
- Widespread devastation, corpses everywhere (8:3).

Here Yhwh reiterates, in inverse order, what he told Amos about the third vision.<sup>32</sup> Like the third, the punishment foretold is by direct divine intervention: it comes from Yhwh himself, who no longer passes by. The escalation in the visions—from natural disaster (7:1–2) to natural disaster with overtones of mythological chaos (7:4) to divine intervention for evaluative purposes—rises still further here with the intimation that God himself will take destructive action.<sup>33</sup> But there is still one step further to go before that trajectory reaches its apex.

The similarity of this fourth vision with the third, in terms of the divine attitude is marked by the repeated phrase, "I will no longer pass by for him" (cf. 7:8). In both cases the phrase aims to forestall any plea

31. Against Wolff (1977, p. 319, "we must assume that it was this vision which first impressed upon Amos that basic conviction which evoked his proclamation of Israel's death"), it is not this vision that first explicates Amos' transformation. Ch. 8 functions, rather, to confirm his conversion to the side of necessary judgment. Cf. Perry (1979).

32. The inversion argues against Gordis's attempt (1980, p. 252) to sever the fourth from the first, second, and third visions.

33. "Am 8:1, 2, and 3 interrelate such that the theme of harvest = the end of Israel crescendoes in the final imagery of mourning and death" (Niditch, 1980, p. 39).

from Amos. The punishment is inevitable. Yhwh simply states his intention. Like the third vision, however, the fourth is also explicated to compel Amos' understanding and assent, just in case the combined force of the third explicated vision and Amaziah's timely intervention were not enough. Yhwh's rhetoric in the third and fourth visions is essentially the same.<sup>34</sup>

God need not have worried. Where Amos pleaded with God in the first two visions, he now issues a lengthy indictment. There is also a shift in the accusation. Whereas Yhwh has targeted the monarchy (7:9; 8:3) and the cult (7:9) for destruction in this series, Amos widens the mark to include all the unjust of Israel (8:4–6). All Israel, Amos says, is in need of punishment. There is no more talk of the pitiable, diminutive Jacob (*ya<sup>c</sup>āqōb kī qāṭōn hū<sup>?</sup>*, 7:2, 5). Rather, Amos addresses that same Jacob to declare that God has sworn “by the arrogance of Jacob” (*big<sup>?</sup>ōn ya<sup>c</sup>āqōb*, 8:7) never to forget any of their deeds. Plea, addressed to God on behalf of “wee Jacob,” has become condemnation on behalf of God addressed to Jacob. ‘Sure as their pride, God will never forget their sinfulness’. Amos concludes his condemnation with a description of the cosmic consequences of Israel's sinful actions. The cosmological tone of this description of disaster probably alludes specifically to an earthquake; the incongruous comparison of the land with the river of Egypt may also allude to those more famous Egyptian waters that first rose up (Exod 15:8) and then subsided (Exod 15:10) to destroy that most sinful and rebellious of God's enemies.<sup>35</sup>

34. Cf. S. Niditch (1980, p. 37), “The pattern of elements in this vision is identical to that of Am 7:7–9.” Niditch's comments are made from a form-critical perspective and reflect the fact that these two are *explicated* visions as opposed to, for example, the two visions in 7:1–6.

35. References to the *y<sup>?</sup>r* (‘river’) of Egypt in the prophets span a spectrum of allusion from the physical body of water (e.g., Isa 19:7–8; 23:3, 10) to a synecdochic metaphor for the forces of chaos so frequently associated with Egypt (e.g., Jer 46:7–8; Ezek 29:3–12; cf. Ezek 32; Job 40:25f.; H. Eising 1986). The allusions here in Amos 8:8 (cf. 9:5–6) seem to fall somewhere in the middle. In all cases, the *y<sup>?</sup>r* is associated with death and destruction to be wreaked upon Israel, the same role that the sea itself played in the destruction of Egypt. The symbol of chaos—the river claimed by that proud dragon of Egypt (Ezek 29:3)—is now employed as a mythic image of the destruction that God is about to let loose on Israel. Any doubts about the possibility of an Israelite prophet making such a scandalous, anti-covenantal allusion are laid to rest by the close association of this same imagery in 9:5–6 with 9:7, which denies the significance of the exodus event, and thus belittles Israel's covenant, by putting that sacred event into the context of several identical, mundane events.



The combined allusion to a watery chaos and the destruction of Egypt's might in the same vision seems to intimate that Israel has become as Egypt and will be treated as though the covenant did not exist. This theme continues in the third section of this vision report, the divine response to the prophet's intercession/indictment. There are two divine responses here: vv. 9–10 and vv. 11–14, each marked off by the formula, "saying of Yhwh." In Exod 10:21–23 God punishes the rebellious Egyptians with darkness for three days, whereas during the same period the Israelites have light. Now, says Yhwh, the Israelites are to be subject to a dark punishment like that he inflicted on the Egyptians (v. 9). The covenantal implication is obvious: Israel's special status—the peculiar people (Exod 19:5; Deut 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4)—is forfeited: they are no more special than the Ethiopians (9:7). Like the Pharaoh, who was finally punished by the death of his only son (Exod 11:4–6; 12:29–30) whereupon a great mourning cry resulted, so Israel is to suffer and mourn instead of celebrating its covenant festivals (vv. 9–10). There will be no more word of Yhwh for Israel (vv. 11–13) because they are no longer fit recipients.<sup>36</sup> Yhwh concludes his response by picking up Amos' words of v. 7:

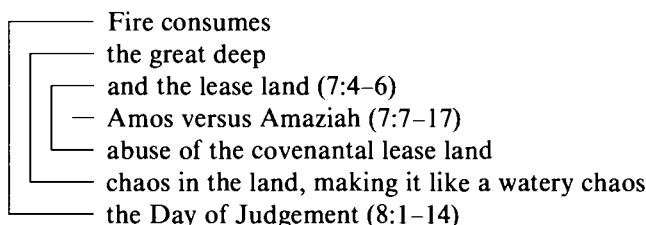
Yhwh swears by the arrogance of Jacob,  
I will not ever forget their doings (v. 7).

Those swearing by the guilt of Samaria  
and say, "As your god lives, O Dan,"  
and "As the way to Beersheba lives,"  
They shall fall and rise no more.

Here Yhwh changes places with Amos to record his new consensus with his prophet. Granted Yhwh promises specific action where Amos can only threaten—this is in accord with their differing potentialities. But the remarkable turn of events is not weakened. Finally Amos agrees with and supports Yhwh's call for judgment (v. 7) to which Yhwh responds with a resounding "Yes!" This response, in which God now agrees with the human prophet, is almost as remarkable in the context of the vision series as the still-standing sun is in Josh 10:12–14: it records a complete agreement of perspective between God and the erstwhile intercessor.

36. The same consequence appears in 1 Sam 3:1, where divine communicates to Israel are cut off as a result of the priestly Elides' sin (L. Eslinger, 1985, p. 146).

Having passed the pivotal third vision, in which the whole direction of the series changed from appeasement to doom, the reader hears an echo, in the fourth vision, of the second vision. In 7:4 the incongruous pairing of the 'great deep' (*tēhôm*) and the 'leased land' (*hahēleq*), Israel's covenantal inheritance,<sup>37</sup> teases the reader's curiosity. Why has the prophet forced this dissonant wedding of incompatible imagery? When this parallelism is compared with 8:4–10, however, the incongruity resolves itself as a poetic foregrounding of the relationship between the second and fourth vision reports. As such, its sharp, contrastive sidelighting illuminates the contours of Amos' conversion to God's point of view.<sup>38</sup> The reader does not understand the incongruous parallelism while reading the second vision report. But the point becomes clear when he comes to the fourth vision and hears Amos first indicting Israel for unjust agricultural marketing (8:5–6) and then hears Yhwh respond to that indictment with threats of cosmic destruction, in which the allusion to the river of Egypt reawakens an awareness of the symbolism of those chaotic waters.<sup>39</sup> The relationship between the second and fourth vision reports may be outlined as follows:



This link between the second and fourth visions serves the singular purpose of the series: to show how Amos begins as an intercessor and becomes a prosecutor—the education of Amos—and to show how crucial Amaziah's role is in that process.

##### 5. *Fifth Vision.*

The fifth and concluding vision opens a new chapter in the fullest sense. The report begins in a manner not seen in the preceding four, which all start with the phrase, “thus Lord Yhwh showed me,” or a close

37. Cf. Josh 19:9; 2 Kgs 9:10, 36–7; Hos 5:7; Mic 2:4.

38. Here my reading diverges from Landy's (p. 238) in seeing the parallels between the second and fourth visions as mechanisms for highlighting difference and change rather than identity.

39. For a similar combination of the imagery of chaos with a specific reference to the Nile see, e.g., Ezek 29:3 (cf. W. Eichrodt 1970:403).

variant. 9:1, on the other hand, begins, not with Yhwh showing Amos something, but with Amos seeing Yhwh himself in the vision: "I saw my Lord standing by the altar." Visions whose enactment can be forestalled by intercession are long past. Visions that symbolize impending destruction are also gone. Now it is time for action.<sup>40</sup> Not only is Yhwh now in the vision, but he breaches the figural bounds between vision and reality to issue an order to Amos, who stands outside the vision, in the real world. Instead of any explanation of the symbolism of Yhwh standing by the altar, Yhwh commands his like-minded prophet to initiate the destruction (v. 1), and follows up with a detailed description of how he will pursue any survivors to the ends of the universe for judgment (vv. 2–4). It is Amos who ironically, in view of his beginning as intercessor, has become the primary destroyer, the one who instigates destruction with a Samsonian demolition of the Temple roof on the unfaithful worshippers. Here is the culmination of the entire series. Judgment is no longer nigh; it is now.

Yhwh picks up the leitmotif of the sword, which has been picked up several times since he mentioned it in 7:9. In contrast to the announced judgment of 7:9, which was directed against the house of Jeroboam, Yhwh now proclaims total annihilation; there shall be no escape.<sup>41</sup> Those

40. Cf. Hitzig (1881:147), "*Jahve zeigt ihm nicht mehr ein Symbol des kommenden Unterganges, sondern erscheint, um diesen in's Werk zu setzen.*" Rudolph's suggestion (1971, p. 230) that Amos already sees Yahweh at work in the first vision is a good example of a reader's response to a gap in the text, here the unidentified subject of the participle in 7:1 *yôšer* 'forming'. But he confuses the overall structure of the vision series, in which it is important for Yahweh to act explicitly in the visions only in the last instance. (Yhwh does appear in the visionary world already in the third instance (7:7–8) but does not act at that point; cf. Rudolph "*die dritte ist zunächst statisch*" [1971, p. 235].) Mays (1969, p. 152) errs when he jumps to literary-historical conclusions on the basis of this report's different opening formula ("... the vision was not received nor the report formulated in direct connection with them [the series]") because his suggestion assumes that the change is without meaning or contextual significance, as do the majority of such literary-historical interpretations of biblical literature. If significance can be demonstrated such explanations collapse.

41. In Yhwh's portrait of destruction there is, as Alter has pointed out (1985, pp. 74–75) a process of constricting focus in the structure of the poetry that also has a semantic effect. "... the poem proceeds to a series of concrete pictures of the desperate fugitives' futile efforts to escape, almost as though they were trying vainly to run away from the inexorable focus of the very poetic structure in which they are caught." Thus Yhwh commands Amos to begin the attack on the human/religious plane (v. 1a) and proclaims that he will follow up by hunting down the fugitives from the widest reaches of the cosmos (v. 2), to the narrowing, but still vast bounds of the earth (v. 3), to the narrowest corners of human history itself (v. 4). See, also, Rudolph's perceptive comments on the rhetoric of these verses (1971, pp. 245–46).

who survive Amos' assault on the temple at Bethel, the destruction of the cultic mechanism that is the heart of Israel's theological-political system,<sup>42</sup> are relentlessly pursued and cut down by Yhwh himself. Together at last, prophet and god work in unison to destroy Israel. From this duo, there is no escape.

Where once Amos pleaded for mercy (7:2, 5) he now celebrates Yhwh's awesome powers of destruction. The intercessor has become the gleeful celebrant who responds to the litany of annihilation with a doxology that glorifies the Destroyer. Amos repeats, almost verbatim, what he has already said in response to the preceding vision (cf. 8:8) and the repetition emphasizes his commitment to the need for a destructive punishment. Here, however, there is a singular focus on the omnipotence of God. The allusions to the exodus, with its destruction of the Egyptian enemy (v. 5) and the Flood (v. 6), in which all of wicked humanity was destroyed, no longer proclaim imminent doom. Instead, Amos draws on them for the imagery they provide to celebrate the terrible vision that Yhwh reveals.<sup>43</sup> The implication of these allusions at this point is that Amos expects and lauds an end for Israel that is very much like that accorded to the anathematic Egyptians or the wicked predeluvians. In other words, the special Israelite covenant is more than over.

That such is the implication of Amos' exultation is, at least, Yhwh's interpretation. His rejoinder indicates that he agrees with Amos' assessment of the covenantal implications of the vision. The exodus event, the mythic foundation of all Israelite theology, is belittled, an insignificant event with many parallels among other nations (v. 7). Recalling Amos' allusion to the Flood, poured out "on the face of the earth" (v. 6), Yhwh

42. It is rather strange that the identity of the person to whom Yhwh makes the command in 9:1 has been disputed (Rudolph [1971, p. 241] discusses various proposals). Yhwh has addressed Amos and Amos only in the four previous vision reports. And there is nothing in the text that leads the reader to expect or find any alteration in the last report. Rudolph asks, "*warum würde die Mittelperson verschwiegen? und warum täte diese dann doch nicht die ganze Arbeit?*" (1971, p. 241). Apparently he cannot conceive that Amos might be called upon to strike the Temple (whether as a symbolic gesture or as an actual, divinely empowered blow is moot and irrelevant). Why not? It may be that Yhwh gives Amos the honour of the first blow against the Temple of honor of his conversion to the divine point of view, which was precipitated by Amaziah, the priest, who commanded Amos to leave the royal chapel, as he called it. Amos gets the first swing as a reward. In any case, the identification of Amos as the person called to strike the Temple fits the context eminently; other proposals do not.

43. Form-critical discussion of the "doxologies" in Amos is available in Crenshaw (1975).

says that his eye is on the sinful kingdom to destroy it “from the face of the earth” (v. 8a). In both cases, the allusion to the great Flood is clear: it too was intended to wipe the sinful mass from the face of the earth (Gen 6:7; 7:23).

Like the fourth vision report, the fifth also links back in chiasmic fashion, in this case to the first vision which alludes to the exodus plague of the locusts (Exod 10:4–15).<sup>44</sup> In the first vision report, with its promise of an exodus type plague against God’s own people, Yhwh relented at Amos’ request. In contrast, the final vision report in the series concludes with an allusion to the exodus myth and one of its many plagues that suggests that Israel has now taken its place among the nations; its privileged status has been nullified. And the nullification comes from no less than Yhwh himself.

Proceeding through this balanced intricacy of interwoven visions that revolve around the pivotal intervention of Amaziah, the reader, like Amos himself, gains an education through the vehicle of this literary creation on the necessity of judgment. But only when Amaziah’s intervention is left to stand where the author of the book put it is the reader able to see the education of Amos. There is, to be sure, an education to be had in the study and reading of historical-critical redactions of the book of Amos, such as Rudolph’s. The modern reader must simply decide by whom it is that he or she wishes to be educated.

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44. In both Exod 10:12 (*wəyōʿkal ʿet-kol-ʿēšeb ha-ʿāreš*) and Amos 7:2 (*leʿēkōl ʿet-ʿēšeb hāʿāreš*) the locusts “eat all the greenery of the land.”

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