

Amos

1

Summary: *Amos 1 opens with the superscription identifying Amos as a sheep-breeder from Tekoa who received his visions during the reigns of Uzziah (Judah) and Jeroboam II (Israel), two years before a devastating earthquake. The chapter launches immediately into the 'oracles against the nations' — a literary pattern of escalating judgment using the formula 'For three transgressions... and for four.' God's roaring judgment moves geographically from Damascus, to Gaza, to Tyre, to Edom, to Ammon — circling Israel's neighbors before the trap closes on Israel itself in chapter 2.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The graded numerical formula 'for three transgressions and for four' (al sheloshah pish'ei... ve'al arba'ah) is a wisdom-literature device (cf. Proverbs 30:15-31) repurposed for prophetic judgment. The number does not mean exactly three or four sins — it means the measure is full and overflowing. Each oracle condemns a specific atrocity: Damascus for threshing Gilead with iron sledges, Gaza for wholesale deportation, Tyre for breaking a treaty of brotherhood, Edom for relentless fraternal hatred, Ammon for ripping open pregnant women to expand territory. Amos's audience would have cheered each oracle against their enemies — unaware that the rhetorical net was closing around them.*

Translation Friction: *The verb naqam in the Edom oracle carries overtones of both 'anger' and 'vengeance' that we had to carefully distinguish. The phrase 'covenant of brotherhood' (berit achim) in the Tyre oracle may refer to the Solomon-Hiram treaty (1 Kings 5:12) or to a broader kinship pact — we preserved the ambiguity. The earthquake reference (v. 1) is confirmed archaeologically at Hazor (ca. 760 BCE), an unusually precise correlation between text and excavation.*

Connections: *The earthquake reference connects to Zechariah 14:5. The 'roaring from Zion' motif parallels Joel 3:16. The oracles against nations follow a pattern found also in Isaiah 13-23, Jeremiah 46-51, and Ezekiel 25-32. The Edom oracle anticipates the fuller treatment in Obadiah. Damascus's threshing of Gilead connects to 2 Kings 10:32-33 and 13:7.*

¹The words of Amos, who was among the sheep-breeders of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel — two years before the earthquake. ²He said: The LORD roars from Zion, and from Jerusalem he raises his voice. The pastures of the shepherds wither, and the summit of Carmel dries up. ³This is what the LORD says: For three transgressions of Damascus — and for four — I will not revoke it, because

they threshed Gilead with iron sledges. ⁴I will send fire on the house of Hazael, and it will consume the fortresses of Ben-hadad. ⁵I will break the gate-bar of Damascus and cut off the ruler from the Valley of Aven, and the one who holds the scepter from Beth-eden. The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir, says the LORD. ⁶This is what the LORD says: For three transgressions of Gaza — and for four — I will not revoke it, because they deported entire communities and handed them over to Edom. ⁷I will send fire on the wall of Gaza, and it will consume her fortresses. ⁸I will cut off the ruler from Ashdod, and the one who holds the scepter from Ashkelon. I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines will perish, says the Lord GOD. ⁹This is what the LORD says: For three transgressions of Tyre — and for four — I will not revoke it, because they handed over entire communities to Edom and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. ¹⁰I will send fire on the wall of Tyre, and it will consume her fortresses. ¹¹This is what the LORD says: For three transgressions of Edom — and for four — I will not revoke it, because he pursued his brother with the sword and destroyed all compassion. His anger tore without ceasing, and he kept his fury forever. ¹²I will send fire on Teman, and it will consume the fortresses of Bozrah. ¹³This is what the LORD says: For three transgressions of the Ammonites — and for four — I will not revoke it, because they ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to expand their territory. ¹⁴I will set fire to the wall of Rabbah, and it will consume her fortresses with war cries on the day of battle, with a storm on the day of the whirlwind. ¹⁵Their king will go into exile — he and his officials together, says the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew *noqedim* is not the common word for 'shepherd' (*ro'eh*) but a rare term indicating a breeder or owner of a particular type of sheep. The same word appears in 2 Kings 3:4 to describe Mesha king of Moab as a sheep-breeder, suggesting Amos may have been a man of some means rather than a poor laborer.
1. The verb *chazah* ('saw') rather than *shama* ('heard') frames Amos's reception as visionary experience. The earthquake (*ha-ra'ash*) is remembered as a landmark event — archaeological evidence at Hazor suggests a major earthquake around 760 BCE.
2. The verb *yish'ag* ('roar') depicts God as a lion — the same image used by Amos in 3:8. The roaring comes from Zion, asserting Jerusalem's centrality even though Amos prophesies to the northern kingdom. The verb *aval* can mean 'mourn' or 'dry up/wither' — in context the parallelism with 'dries up' (*yavesh*) favors the physical sense of withering.
2. Carmel, normally the lushest mountain in Israel due to Mediterranean rainfall, withering at God's voice dramatizes the totality of the judgment — if even Carmel dries up, nowhere is safe.
3. The formula 'for three... and for four' (*al sheloshah... ve'al arba'ah*) is a graded numerical pattern from wisdom literature (cf. Proverbs 30:15-31) meaning 'the full measure and then some.' The pronoun 'it' in 'I will not revoke it' (*lo ashvenu*) is deliberately ambiguous — it could refer to the punishment, the decree, or God's word of judgment. We preserve this ambiguity rather than supplying 'punishment' as the KJV does.
3. The threshing of Gilead with iron sledges (*charutsot ha-barzel*) refers to Hazael of Damascus's brutal campaigns against Israel's Transjordanian territory (2 Kings 10:32-33, 13:7). Whether the threshing is literal (dragging threshing sledges over captives) or figurative (devastating the land) is debated.
4. The 'fire' motif recurs in every oracle of this chapter — it is the consistent instrument of divine judgment. Hazael and Ben-hadad are Aramean dynasty names representing successive rulers of Damascus (2 Kings 8:7-15, 13:3, 24-25). The word *armenot* ('fortresses, strongholds') is sometimes rendered 'palaces' but its primary sense is military — these are fortified structures that represent the regime's power.
5. The 'gate-bar' (*beriach*) was the heavy wooden or bronze bar that secured a city's main gate — breaking it means breaching the city's defenses. 'Valley of Aven' (*Biq'at Aven*) means 'Valley of Wickedness' — likely the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon. Beth-eden ('House of Delight') is probably Bit-adini, an Aramean state on the Euphrates.
5. Kir as the destination of Aram's exile is notable — according to Amos 9:7, Kir is where the Arameans originally came from, so this exile is a reversal of their national history. The fulfillment came through the Assyrian conquest under Tiglath-pileser III (2 Kings 16:9).
6. The phrase *galut shelemah* ('complete exile/captivity') means Gaza did not merely take prisoners of war but rounded up entire populations — men, women, children — for the slave trade. The destination 'Edom' suggests a broader slave-trafficking network with the Edomites as brokers or buyers. Gaza, as the southernmost major Philistine city, sat astride the trade routes connecting Egypt, Arabia, and the Levant.
7. The judgment formula shifts from 'house of Hazael' (the dynasty) for Damascus to 'wall of Gaza' (the physical defenses) — each oracle targets the specific source of the nation's confidence.
8. The oracle began with Gaza but expands to include three other Philistine cities — Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron. Gath, the fifth city of the traditional Philistine pentapolis, is notably absent, likely because it had already been conquered by Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:6) or Hazael (2 Kings 12:17) by Amos's time.

8. The title Adonai YHWH ('Lord GOD') combines both divine names, emphasizing sovereignty and covenant identity together.
9. Tyre's crime is identical to Gaza's — wholesale deportation to Edom — but with the added aggravation that Tyre had a covenant relationship (berit achim, 'covenant of brothers') with Israel. The Solomon-Hiram alliance (1 Kings 5:12) used the language of brotherhood, making Tyre's slave-trading a betrayal of sworn kinship, not merely a war crime.
10. The judgment formula for Tyre mirrors Gaza's exactly — fire on the wall, consuming fortresses. This parallel underscores that both cities share the same crime of slave-trafficking.
11. The 'brother' language is loaded — Edom is descended from Esau, Jacob/Israel's twin brother (Genesis 25:24-26). Edom's crime is therefore not just warfare but fratricide in the broadest sense. The verb shichet ('destroyed, corrupted') applied to rachamav ('his compassion') is striking — Edom did not merely suppress compassion but destroyed it, as though compassion itself were an enemy.
11. The verbs 'tore' (yitroph) and 'kept' (shamerah) create a chilling portrait — Edom's anger is a predator that never stops tearing, and his fury is carefully preserved like something stored for future use. The word netsach ('forever, perpetually') emphasizes the unrelenting character of Edom's hatred.
12. Teman and Bozrah are major Edomite cities. Teman, in the south, was associated with wisdom traditions (cf. Eliphaz the Temanite in Job 2:11). Bozrah, in the north, was the capital or chief fortress. Together they represent Edom's full extent from south to north.
13. The atrocity described — ripping open pregnant women (biq'am harot) — is among the most horrifying acts of ancient warfare, mentioned also in 2 Kings 8:12, 15:16, and Hosea 13:16. The motive given ('to expand their territory') makes the crime doubly heinous — it was not done in the heat of battle but as calculated policy to depopulate contested territory in Gilead.
14. Rabbah (modern Amman, Jordan) was the Ammonite capital. The judgment here is more vivid than previous oracles — fire is accompanied by battle cries (teru'ah) and storm imagery (sa'ar, suphah). The storm language may be metaphorical (the Assyrian army sweeping in) or may invoke theophanic storm imagery associated with God as divine warrior.
15. The word malkam could be read as 'their king' or as 'Milcom' (the Ammonite deity, cf. 1 Kings 11:5, 33). Both readings work — either the political ruler or the national god goes into exile. Some scholars prefer 'Milcom' because gods being carried off was a standard ancient Near Eastern practice of conquest. We render 'their king' as the more straightforward reading but note the double entendre.
15. The word sarim ('officials, princes, commanders') is rendered 'officials' throughout the project to avoid the misleading English connotation of 'princes' as sons of a king.

2

Summary: Amos 2 completes the oracles against the nations and springs the rhetorical trap. Moab is condemned for desecrating an Edomite king's bones. Then the focus shifts to Judah for rejecting the LORD's instruction. Finally — the real target — Israel is indicted for a catalogue of social injustices: selling the righteous for silver, trampling the poor, sexual exploitation, and corruption of worship. The chapter closes with God recounting his saving acts (the Exodus, the wilderness, the conquest) and declaring that Israel's military might will be utterly useless on the day of judgment.

What Makes This Remarkable: The rhetorical structure is masterful. Amos's northern Israelite audience would have cheered through six oracles against foreign enemies, grudgingly accepted the Judah oracle, then been stunned when the seventh and longest oracle targeted them. The Israel oracle is three times longer than any other, signaling that this is the true burden of the prophecy. The social crimes listed — selling people for trivial debts, father and son using the same woman, taking garments in pledge, lying on confiscated cloaks beside altars — are violations of specific Torah provisions (Exodus 22:26-27, Deuteronomy 24:12-13, Leviticus 18:15, 20:12).

Translation Friction: The phrase 'a man and his father go to the same young woman' (v. 7) is ambiguous — it could refer to cultic prostitution, incest, or exploitation of a servant girl. We rendered it plainly without interpretive addition. The word na'arah ('young woman') does not specify a prostitute. The military imagery in verses 14-16 required careful attention to Hebrew verb forms to distinguish types of warriors and their responses.

Connections: The Moab oracle for desecrating bones connects to ancient Near Eastern concepts of post-mortem honor. The Judah oracle anticipates Amos's distinction between ritual religion and covenant obedience. The Exodus recitation (v. 10) connects to the creedal tradition in Deuteronomy 26:5-9. The Nazirite and prophet references (v. 11-12) connect to Numbers 6 and Deuteronomy 18:15-18. The military collapse imagery (vv. 14-16)

anticipates the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE.

¹This is what the LORD says: For three transgressions of Moab — and for four — I will not revoke it, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime. ²I will send fire on Moab, and it will consume the fortresses of Kerioth. Moab will die amid uproar — with war cries and the sound of the ram's horn. ³I will cut off the ruler from her midst and kill all her officials with him, says the LORD. ⁴This is what the LORD says: For three transgressions of Judah — and for four — I will not revoke it, because they have rejected the instruction of the LORD and have not kept his statutes. Their lies led them astray — the same ones their ancestors followed. ⁵I will send fire on Judah, and it will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem. ⁶This is what the LORD says: For three transgressions of Israel — and for four — I will not revoke it, because they sell the innocent for silver and the needy for the price of a pair of sandals. ⁷They trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the ground and push the humble off the path. A man and his father go to the same young woman, profaning my holy name. ⁸They stretch out beside every altar on garments taken as pledges, and in the house of their God they drink wine taken as fines. ⁹Yet I destroyed the Amorite before them — whose height was like the height of cedars, and who was as strong as oaks. I destroyed his fruit above and his roots below. ¹⁰I brought you up from the land of Egypt and led you through the wilderness for forty years to possess the land of the Amorite. ¹¹I raised up prophets from your sons and Nazirites from your young men. Is this not so, people of Israel? declares the LORD. ¹²But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets, 'Do not prophesy!' ¹³Look — I am about to press down on you, as a cart loaded with sheaves presses down. ¹⁴Flight will fail the swift, the strong will not summon his strength, and the warrior will not save his life. ¹⁵The archer will not stand his ground, the swift of foot will not escape, and the horseman will not save his life. ¹⁶Even the bravest among the warriors will flee naked on that day, declares the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Moab's crime is unique among the oracles — it is not a crime against Israel but against Edom. This is theologically significant: God holds nations accountable for violations of basic human decency, not only for crimes against his covenant people. Burning bones to lime (la-sid) means reducing them to calcium powder, the ultimate desecration — denying the dead any hope of rest or memorial.
2. Kerioth (ha-qeriyot, 'the cities') may be a specific Moabite city or a generic reference to Moab's urban centers. The Moabite Stone (Mesha Stele) mentions Kerioth as a cult center. The shofar ('ram's horn') here signals battle rather than worship — the same instrument used for both purposes in ancient Israel.
3. The word shophet ('judge') here functions as 'ruler' — the same title used for Israel's pre-monarchic leaders in the book of Judges. Moab's political leadership will be eliminated entirely.
4. The word torah here is rendered 'instruction' rather than 'law' to capture its broader Hebrew sense of divine teaching and guidance. The 'lies' (kizvehem) likely refer to false gods or idols — calling them 'lies' strips them of dignity and exposes their unreality. The phrase 'their ancestors followed' creates a damning generational continuity of apostasy.
5. The same fire-judgment formula applied to pagan nations now falls on Judah and its capital Jerusalem. No exemption is granted for being God's covenant people — if anything, the expectations are higher.
6. The shift to present tense ('they sell') reflects the Hebrew participle-like force — these are ongoing, habitual crimes, not one-time events. The tsaddiq ('innocent, righteous one') is the person with a legitimate legal claim who loses in court because the judges take bribes. The 'pair of sandals' (na'alayim) may refer to the trivial size of the debt or bribe, or to the symbolic use of sandals in property transfers (Ruth 4:7-8). Either way, human life is valued at less than footwear.
7. The verb sha'aph can mean 'trample' or 'pant after' — both readings work: either they eagerly pursue even the dust on the heads of the poor (wanting everything they have) or they grind the poor into the dirt. The parallel with 'push off the path' (derekh anavim yattu) favors 'trample' as the physical action of oppression.
7. The phrase 'a man and his father go to the same young woman' (na'arah) is deliberately unspecific about the relationship — the Hebrew does not call her a prostitute, a slave, or a wife. The violation may be sexual exploitation of a dependent, cultic prostitution, or incestuous sharing of a concubine. What is clear is that it profanes God's holy name (shem qodshi) — God's own reputation is damaged by this behavior.
8. The Torah explicitly forbids keeping a poor person's garment as an overnight pledge — it must be returned before sunset because it is his only blanket (Exodus 22:26-27, Deuteronomy 24:12-13). Israel's wealthy are not only violating this command but using the confiscated cloaks as cushions for reclining at worship. The wine of 'fines' (anushim) — money exacted as penalties — is drunk in the temple itself, making the house of God complicit in the exploitation of the poor.

9. God shifts to first person to recount his saving acts — the theological heart of the accusation. The Amorites represent the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan (cf. Numbers 13:28-33). The tree metaphor — tall as cedars, strong as oaks, yet destroyed root and fruit — emphasizes total annihilation. God did what Israel could never have done on their own.
10. The Exodus creed is compressed into a single verse — deliverance, wilderness wandering, and conquest. This recitation of divine faithfulness becomes the measure of Israel's ingratitude. 'The land of the Amorite' is an older designation for Canaan, rooting Amos's language in the earliest traditions.
11. God's gifts to Israel include not only military deliverance but spiritual leadership — prophets to speak his word and Nazirites who embodied radical consecration to God (Numbers 6:1-21). The rhetorical question 'Is this not so?' demands acknowledgment — God dares Israel to deny his generosity. The formula *ne'um YHWH* ('declares the LORD') marks this as a prophetic declaration with divine authority.
12. Israel's response to God's gifts was sabotage — corrupting the Nazirites by pressuring them to break their vow (wine was forbidden to Nazirites, Numbers 6:3) and silencing the prophets who spoke inconvenient truths. The juxtaposition with verse 11 is devastating: God raised up; Israel tore down.
13. The Hebrew here is notoriously difficult. The verb *me'iq* can mean 'press down' (God pressing Israel) or 'groan under a load' (God groaning under Israel's sins). Most modern scholars read it as God bearing down on Israel like a heavy harvest cart crushing whatever is beneath it. The image shifts God from patient benefactor to overwhelming weight of judgment.
14. A series of three military figures — the swift runner, the strong man, the warrior (*gibbor*) — all fail when God's judgment arrives. The verb *avad* ('perish, be lost') applied to flight itself is powerful: it is not that the swift man fails to run but that the very concept of escape ceases to exist.
15. Three more military specialists are added — archer, runner, and cavalry — extending the catalogue of futility. Each branch of the army fails. The repetition of *lo yemallet* ('will not escape/save') creates a hammering rhythm of inescapable doom.
16. The climax of the military collapse: the most courageous warrior (ammits *libbo*, literally 'strong of heart') will throw off his armor and weapons — anything that slows him down — and run naked. The phrase 'on that day' (*bayyom hahu*) introduces eschatological language that will intensify throughout the book. The chapter that began with judgment on foreign nations ends with Israel's own army in panicked, naked flight.

3

Summary: *Amos 3 opens with a devastating theological inversion: Israel's election does not guarantee protection but rather guarantees accountability. 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.' A series of rhetorical questions using cause-and-effect logic (the lion roars because it has prey) establishes that Amos prophesies because God has spoken — prophecy is not a choice but a compulsion. The chapter closes with God summoning Ashdod and Egypt as witnesses against Samaria's oppression and announcing the destruction of Bethel's altars and the luxury houses of the wealthy.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The seven rhetorical questions in verses 3-8 form one of the most tightly argued passages in prophetic literature. Each question moves from observable cause-and-effect to the theological conclusion: if the LORD has spoken, can a prophet remain silent? The chiasmic structure builds from walking together (v. 3), to lion's prey (vv. 4-5), to trumpet alarm (v. 6), to the climactic statement about prophecy (vv. 7-8). Calling Ashdod (Philistia) and Egypt to witness against Israel (v. 9) is breathtakingly ironic — Israel's ancient enemies are summoned as moral witnesses because their behavior is, by implication, more comprehensible than Israel's.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 3 ('Do two walk together unless they have agreed?') has been interpreted as referring to God and Israel's broken relationship, or simply as a general observation about cause and effect. We rendered it plainly and let the ambiguity stand. The word *no'adu* ('agreed, made an appointment') is more specific than general 'agreement' — it implies a deliberate arrangement. Verse 12 contains a difficult image of a shepherd rescuing fragments of a sheep from a lion's mouth — we had to determine whether this is rescue or evidence-preservation for insurance purposes.*

Connections: *The election-accountability principle (v. 2) connects to Deuteronomy 7:6-8 and anticipates Luke 12:48 ('to whom much is given'). The lion imagery (vv. 4, 8) connects to the opening roar in 1:2. The prophetic compulsion theme connects to Jeremiah 20:9 and 1 Corinthians 9:16. The destruction of Bethel's altars anticipates the confrontation with Amaziah in chapter 7.*

¹Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, people of Israel — against the entire clan that I brought up from the land of Egypt: ²You alone have I known out of all the clans of the earth — therefore I will hold you accountable for all your iniquities. ³Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment? ⁴Does a lion roar in the forest when it has no prey? Does a young lion growl from its den unless it has caught something? ⁵Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no snare set for it? Does a trap spring up from the ground unless it has caught something? ⁶Is a ram's horn blown in a city without the people trembling? Does disaster strike a city unless the LORD has done it? ⁷Indeed, the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his purpose to his servants the prophets. ⁸A lion has roared — who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken — who can refuse to prophesy? ⁹Proclaim over the fortresses of Ashdod and over the fortresses in the land of Egypt: Gather on the mountains of Samaria and see the great turmoil within her, and the oppression in her midst. ¹⁰They do not know how to do what is right, declares the LORD — they who store up violence and plunder in their fortresses. ¹¹Therefore this is what the Lord GOD says: An enemy will surround the land! He will strip away your defenses, and your fortresses will be plundered. ¹²This is what the LORD says: Just as a shepherd rescues from the mouth of a lion two leg bones or a scrap of an ear, so will the people of Israel be rescued — those who sit in Samaria on the corner of a couch and on the edge of a bed. ¹³Hear and testify against the house of Jacob, declares the Lord GOD, the God of Hosts. ¹⁴On the day I punish Israel for their transgressions, I will bring judgment on the altars of Bethel. The horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground. ¹⁵I will strike the winter house along with the summer house. The houses of ivory will perish, and the great houses will come to an end, declares the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word mishpachah ('clan, family') rather than am ('people, nation') emphasizes kinship — God speaks to Israel as extended family, which sharpens the sting of the accusation. The preposition al ('against') is striking — this word is not for Israel but against them.
2. The verb yada ('know') in covenantal contexts means chosen, intimate relationship — the same verb used for marital intimacy (Genesis 4:1). This is not cognitive knowledge but relational election. The word avonot ('iniquities') is from the root avon, carrying the sense of twisted, bent, crooked — moral distortion. The logic inverts Israel's theology of election: being chosen does not mean protection from consequences but heightened accountability.
3. The verb no'adu means 'met by arrangement, made an appointment' — it is more specific than general 'agreement.' The question implies deliberate intention: nothing happens by accident. In context, this begins a series establishing that Amos's prophecy is not accidental — God has arranged it. Some interpreters read this as a statement about God and Israel's relationship: they once walked together by covenant arrangement, but now that arrangement is broken.
4. Two lion images in parallel: the mature lion (aryeh) roars because it has found prey; the young lion (kephir) growls from its den because it has already caught something. The implied logic: Amos roars because God has given him a message — prophetic speech, like the lion's roar, has a cause. The lion imagery connects back to 1:2 where God himself roars from Zion.
5. Two trap images reinforce the cause-and-effect logic. A bird does not fall into a trap unless a snare has been set; a trap does not spring unless it has caught prey. Applied theologically: Israel's coming disaster is not random but caused — their sin has set the trap, and God's judgment will spring it.
6. The shofar in a city signals enemy attack — of course people tremble. The second question is theologically bold: ra'ah ('disaster, evil, calamity') in a city is attributed directly to the LORD. This is not philosophical evil but historical calamity — military defeat, famine, plague. Amos asserts God's sovereignty over national disasters without softening the claim.
6. The word ra'ah here means 'disaster, calamity' rather than moral evil — though the Hebrew word covers both meanings. God causes catastrophe as judgment; he does not cause moral wickedness.
7. The word sod ('secret, counsel, purpose') refers to the divine council — the heavenly deliberation where God's plans are formed (cf. 1 Kings 22:19-22, Jeremiah 23:18). The prophets are privy to God's sod — they have been admitted to the council chamber and report what they have heard. This is Amos's claim to authority: he does not prophesy of his own will but because God has revealed his purpose.
8. The climax of the rhetorical chain. The progression from natural observation to prophetic compulsion is complete: just as a lion's roar is irresistible cause for fear, God's speech is irresistible cause for prophecy. The implied answer to both questions is 'no one.' Amos prophesies not by choice but by divine compulsion — a theme that will be stated even more forcefully in the confrontation with Amaziah (7:14-15).
9. The irony is devastating — Ashdod (Philistia) and Egypt are summoned as witnesses of Samaria's moral failure. These pagan nations, who have no covenant with God, are called to observe the social chaos in Israel and render a verdict. The implication: even nations without the Torah can recognize that what Israel is doing is wrong. Some manuscripts read 'Assyria' (Ashshur) instead of 'Ashdod' — the LXX has 'Assyria.' We follow the MT.

10. The word *nekhochah* ('what is right, uprightness, straightforwardness') is the opposite of crooked dealing. Israel has lost the very capacity for ethical behavior. The image of 'storing up' (*ha'otsrim*) violence and plunder in fortresses is mordantly vivid — their wealth is literally warehoused unjustly.
11. The Hebrew is terse — *tsar useviv ha'arets* ('an adversary and surrounding the land') — almost a military dispatch in its brevity. The fortresses that stored up violence and plunder (v. 10) will themselves be plundered — the poetic justice is precise.
12. The shepherd metaphor is grimly ironic — Amos the shepherd would know that 'rescuing' two leg bones and an ear fragment from a lion is not rescue at all but proof of loss. Under Torah law (Exodus 22:13), a shepherd who could produce remains of a predator-killed animal was exempt from restitution. This is evidence preservation, not salvation. What survives of Israel will be scraps — and those scraps are the idle rich lounging on their expensive furniture.
12. The word *demesheq* ('Damascus') here may be a textile name (damask fabric) rather than the city — 'the damask of a couch' referring to luxury upholstery. The ambiguity is appropriate either way: Israel's survivors cling to their comfort.
13. The divine title *Elohei ha-Tseva'ot* ('God of Hosts/Armies') appears here for the first time in Amos, emphasizing God's military sovereignty. The 'hosts' may refer to heavenly armies, angelic forces, or the stars — all of which are under God's command. Using 'Jacob' rather than 'Israel' reaches back to the patriarch and the covenant origins of the nation.
14. The verb *paqad* ('visit, attend to, punish') carries the sense of official inspection followed by action — God is auditing Israel's accounts. Bethel ('House of God') was the major northern sanctuary established by Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:28-33). The altar horns were the projections at the four corners where blood was applied and where fugitives could grasp for asylum (1 Kings 1:50-51). Cutting them off means eliminating both the sacrificial system and any possibility of refuge.
15. Having multiple seasonal residences was the mark of extreme wealth — winter houses in the lowlands, summer houses in the hills. The 'houses of ivory' (*battei ha-shen*) have been confirmed archaeologically: Samaria's excavated palace yielded hundreds of carved ivory fragments decorating furniture and walls (cf. 1 Kings 22:39 on Ahab's ivory house). God's judgment targets luxury as a symptom of the exploitation that funded it.

4

Summary: *Amos 4 opens with a stinging address to the wealthy women of Samaria as 'cows of Bashan' who oppress the poor and demand luxury from their husbands. The chapter then recounts a series of divine judgments — famine, drought, blight, plague, and overthrow — each concluding with the devastating refrain 'yet you did not return to me.' The chapter climaxes with one of the most ominous commands in prophetic literature: 'Prepare to meet your God, O Israel,' followed by a doxology celebrating God's cosmic power.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The fivefold refrain 'yet you did not return to me' (ve-lo shavtem adai) in verses 6, 8, 9, 10, 11 is one of the most powerful literary devices in the prophets. Each judgment escalates — from hunger, to drought, to crop disease, to Egyptian-style plague, to Sodom-like destruction — and each time Israel refuses to repent. The Hebrew word for 'return' (*shuv*) is the fundamental vocabulary of repentance in the Hebrew Bible. God is not accusing Israel of failing to perform rituals (they have plenty of those, vv. 4-5) but of failing to return relationally. The closing doxology (v. 13) may be part of a larger hymn fragment that also appears in 5:8-9 and 9:5-6.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase 'cows of Bashan' (*parot ha-Bashan*, v. 1) required sensitive handling — the metaphor is genuinely confrontational in the Hebrew but should not read as misogynistic commentary. Amos targets these women for their economic role in the oppression system, not for their gender. The series of plagues in verses 6-11 echoes but does not exactly replicate the Egyptian plagues — we noted the parallel without forcing the identification. The doxology in verse 13 has unusual vocabulary that some scholars consider a later liturgical addition, but we rendered it as part of the canonical text.*

Connections: *The 'cows of Bashan' imagery connects to Psalm 22:12 where Bashan's bulls surround the psalmist. The plague recitation parallels the Egyptian plagues tradition (Exodus 7-12) and the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28. The Sodom-Gomorrah reference (v. 11) connects to Genesis 19. The 'prepare to meet your God' formula anticipates the theophany language of Exodus 19. The doxology fragments connect to 5:8-9 and 9:5-6.*

¹Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria — you who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, 'Bring us something to drink!' ²The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness: Days are coming upon you when they will carry you away with hooks — the last of you with fishhooks. ³You will go out through breaches in the wall, each woman straight ahead, and you will be thrown out toward Harmon, declares the LORD. ⁴Come to Bethel — and rebel!

Come to Gilgal — multiply rebellion! Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. ⁵Burn a thank offering of leavened bread! Announce your freewill offerings — proclaim them! For this is what you love to do, people of Israel, declares the Lord GOD. ⁶I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your towns — yet you did not return to me, declares the LORD. ⁷I also withheld the rain from you when there were still three months until harvest. I sent rain on one city but not on another; one field received rain while the field that received no rain dried up. ⁸Two or three cities staggered to one city to find water but were not satisfied — yet you did not return to me, declares the LORD. ⁹I struck you with blight and mildew. The locust devoured your many gardens and vineyards, your fig trees and olive trees — yet you did not return to me, declares the LORD. ¹⁰I sent plague among you in the manner of Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword along with your captured horses. I made the stench of your camps rise into your nostrils — yet you did not return to me, declares the LORD. ¹¹I overthrew some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a burning stick snatched from the fire — yet you did not return to me, declares the LORD. ¹²Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel. Because I will do this to you — prepare to meet your God, O Israel! ¹³For it is he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, who reveals his thoughts to humankind, who turns the dawn to darkness and treads on the heights of the earth — the LORD, the God of Hosts, is his name.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Bashan (modern Golan Heights) was famous for its rich pastureland and well-fed cattle (Deuteronomy 32:14, Psalm 22:12). Calling the wealthy women 'cows of Bashan' evokes sleek, pampered livestock. The word *adoneihem* ('their lords/masters') here means 'their husbands' — these women drive the cycle of oppression by demanding luxury that can only be funded through exploitation of the poor. The participles (*ha-oshqot*, *ha-rotsetot*, *ha-omrot*) indicate ongoing, habitual behavior.
2. The image of being dragged away with hooks (*tsinnot*) and fishhooks (*sirot dugah*) likely refers to the Assyrian practice of leading captives with hooks through the lip or nose, depicted in Assyrian reliefs. The word *acharitken* ('the last of you' or 'your posterity') indicates total deportation — from first to last, none will escape.
2. God swearing by his holiness (*be-qodsho*) is the strongest possible oath — he stakes his own essential nature on this promise of judgment.
3. The word *ha-Harmonah* is obscure — it may be a place name (possibly Mount Hermon or a location in Armenia/Urartu), a corruption of 'Hadad-rimmon,' or related to the word for 'heap' (destruction). No scholarly consensus exists, and we transliterate rather than guess. The image is of women fleeing through gaps in a besieged city's wall, each heading straight for the nearest breach without looking for companions. The feminine verb forms continue the address to the 'cows of Bashan.'
4. Biting sarcasm — Amos mockingly invites Israel to their favorite worship sites, but instead of 'worship' the verb is *pish'u* ('rebel, transgress'). Bethel and Gilgal were major northern sanctuaries. The exaggerated frequency — sacrifices every morning, tithes every three days (not every three years as some read it) — mocks their zealous religiosity that accompanies moral bankruptcy. The irony is that more worship equals more sin when the worshippers are oppressors.
5. The sarcasm intensifies — burning leavened bread as a thank offering may violate Leviticus 2:11 (which prohibits leaven in grain offerings burned on the altar), though Leviticus 7:13 permits leavened bread alongside the thank offering. The key phrase is 'proclaim them' (*hashmi'u*) — Israel loves the public display of generosity while privately crushing the poor. The final barb 'for this is what you love' (*ki khen ahavtem*) exposes the real motivation: self-satisfaction, not devotion to God.
6. The idiom 'cleanness of teeth' (*niqyon shinnayim*) means empty mouths — teeth are clean because there is nothing to eat. This is famine. The first of five escalating judgments, each ending with the devastating refrain 'yet you did not return to me' (*ve-lo shavtem adai*). The verb *shuv* ('return') is the Hebrew Bible's fundamental word for repentance — not merely feeling sorry but turning back, redirecting one's life toward God.
7. The specificity of 'three months before harvest' pinpoints the spring rains (March-April) that are critical for the grain harvest. Without them, the crop fails. The selective rainfall — one city drenched, the neighboring city parched — depicts divine control at a precision that mocks Israel's assumption that rainfall is random or controlled by Baal (the storm god). God demonstrates that he, not Baal, controls the rain.
8. The verb *na'u* ('staggered, wandered, reeled') suggests desperate, weakened people stumbling from town to town seeking water — the same verb used for a drunkard's stagger. Even finding a city with water was insufficient — *lo yisba'u* ('they were not satisfied'). The second refrain strikes.
9. *Shiddaphon* ('blight, scorching wind') and *yeraqon* ('mildew, yellowing') are crop diseases listed in the Deuteronomic curses (Deuteronomy 28:22). The *gazam* is a type of locust (possibly the cutting locust), one of several locust terms in Hebrew reflecting Israel's detailed awareness of this devastating pest. This is the third escalation — not just drought but active destruction of crops.
10. The phrase *be-derekh Mitsrayim* ('in the manner/way of Egypt') explicitly invokes the Egyptian plagues — God is now treating Israel the way he once treated their oppressors. The escalation from crop failure to military defeat and plague is devastating. The sensory detail of the camp stench (*be'osh machanekhem*) — the smell of decaying corpses — makes the judgment viscerally real.

11. The final and most extreme judgment — comparison to Sodom and Gomorrah, the paradigm of total divine destruction (Genesis 19). The phrase 'as God overthrew' (ke-mahpekhat Elohim) uses the standard formula for the Sodom tradition. The 'burning stick snatched from the fire' (ud mutsal misrephah) means Israel barely survived — a brand pulled from the flames at the last moment (cf. Zechariah 3:2). Even this near-destruction did not provoke repentance. The fifth and final refrain falls.
12. The climactic command is deliberately vague — 'this is what I will do' without specifying what. The ambiguity is terrifying: the unnamed threat is worse than any specific disaster. 'Prepare to meet your God' (hikkon liqrat Elohekha) uses language from the Sinai theophany (Exodus 19:11, 15) — but where Sinai was preparation for covenant, this is preparation for judgment. The God Israel meets will not be the comforting deity of their prosperity theology but the holy God of the covenant they have broken.
13. This is the first of three doxology fragments in Amos (see also 5:8-9 and 9:5-6). The hymn celebrates God as creator (mountains, wind), revealer (declares his thoughts), and sovereign warrior (treads the heights). The phrase mah secho ('what is his thought') is debated — it could mean God reveals his own thought to humanity or reveals a person's thought back to them. Both readings work theologically.
13. The verb dorekh ('treads') applied to the heights of the earth depicts God striding across mountain peaks like a warrior surveying conquered territory. The full divine title — YHWH Elohei Tseva'ot ('the LORD, the God of Hosts') — closes the doxology with maximum majesty.

5

Summary: Amos 5 is the theological heart of the book. It opens with a funeral dirge for Israel — 'Fallen, no more to rise, is Virgin Israel' — treating the nation as already dead. A call to 'seek the LORD and live' is followed by fierce condemnation of courtroom corruption and exploitation of the poor. The central declaration — 'Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream' (v. 24) — stands as one of the most quoted lines in all prophetic literature. The chapter closes with a shocking claim: Israel's wilderness worship was purer than their current elaborate cult, and God will send them into exile 'beyond Damascus.'

What Makes This Remarkable: Verse 24 is arguably the single most important verse in the prophetic corpus for understanding God's priorities: justice and righteousness over ritual. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted this verse in his 'I Have a Dream' speech and in his 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail,' making it one of the most culturally resonant lines in the Hebrew Bible. The funeral dirge form (qinah) in verses 1-3 uses the distinctive 3:2 falling meter that characterizes Israelite lament poetry — the rhythm itself sounds like sobbing. The chiasmic structure of the chapter places verses 14-15 ('Seek good and not evil') at the center, with worship critique on both sides.

Translation Friction: Verses 25-27 are among the most debated in Amos. The question 'Did you bring me sacrifices in the wilderness for forty years?' seems to expect the answer 'no,' challenging the entire sacrificial system's divine origin — a radical claim. Sikkuth and Kiyyun (v. 26) are astral deities whose names have been vocalized with the vowels of shiqquts ('abomination') by the Masoretes. We transliterated the names and noted the Masoretic distortion. The 'day of the LORD' reversal (vv. 18-20) is the earliest clear articulation of this theme.

Connections: The qinah meter connects to Lamentations and 2 Samuel 1:19-27 (David's lament). Verse 24 is quoted in Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches and in the broader social justice tradition. The 'day of the LORD' reversal anticipates Joel 2:1-2, Zephaniah 1:14-18, and Malachi 4:5. The wilderness question (v. 25) parallels Jeremiah 7:22. The Sikkuth/Kiyyun reference is quoted in Acts 7:42-43 (Stephen's speech).

¹Hear this word that I raise over you as a funeral dirge, house of Israel: ²Fallen, never to rise again, is Virgin Israel. She lies abandoned on her own land; there is no one to raise her up. ³For this is what the Lord GOD says: The city that marches out a thousand strong will have a hundred left, and the one that marches out a hundred strong will have ten left — for the house of Israel. ⁴For this is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: Seek me and live. ⁵But do not seek Bethel; do not go to Gilgal; do not cross over to Beer-sheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will come to nothing. ⁶Seek the LORD and live — or he will break out like fire against the house of Joseph, and it will consume with no one to quench it in Bethel. ⁷You who turn justice to wormwood and cast righteousness to the ground — ⁸He made the Pleiades and Orion; he turns deep darkness into morning and darkens day into night. He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them over the face of the earth — the LORD is his name. ⁹He brings destruction on the strong; ruin comes upon the fortified city. ¹⁰They hate the one

who reproves at the city gate, and they despise the one who speaks honestly. ¹¹Therefore, because you trample the poor and exact a grain tax from them — you have built houses of cut stone, but you will not live in them; you have planted choice vineyards, but you will not drink their wine. ¹²For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins — you who are hostile to the innocent, who take bribes, and who turn aside the needy at the city gate. ¹³Therefore the wise person keeps silent at such a time, for it is an evil time. ¹⁴Seek good and not evil, so that you may live — and the LORD, the God of Hosts, will truly be with you, as you claim he is. ¹⁵Hate evil and love good; establish justice at the city gate. Perhaps the LORD, the God of Hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. ¹⁶Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Hosts, the Lord, says: In every public square there will be wailing; in every street they will cry, 'Alas! Alas!' They will summon the farmer to mourning, and the professional mourners to lamentation. ¹⁷In all the vineyards there will be wailing, for I will pass through your midst, says the LORD. ¹⁸Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why would you want the day of the LORD? It is darkness, not light. ¹⁹As when a man flees from a lion and a bear meets him, or enters his house and leans his hand against the wall and a snake bites him. ²⁰Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light — pitch darkness with no brightness in it? ²¹I hate — I despise — your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²²Even though you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. I will not even look at the fellowship offerings of your fattened animals. ²³Take away from me the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. ²⁴But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. ²⁵Did you bring me sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, house of Israel? ²⁶You will carry Sikkuth your king and Kiyun your star-god — your images that you made for yourselves. ²⁷I will send you into exile beyond Damascus, says the LORD, whose name is the God of Hosts.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *qinah* is specifically a funeral lament — a song sung over the dead. By using this form, Amos declares Israel already dead. The verb *nosei* ('raise, lift up') is the technical term for intoning a formal lament. Amos does not threaten future death; he mourns a death that has, in God's eyes, already occurred.
2. The title *betulat Yisra'el* ('Virgin Israel') is both tender and devastating — a young woman in her prime, cut down before her time. The 3:2 *qinah* meter (three beats followed by two) creates the distinctive limping rhythm of Hebrew funeral poetry — the second half of each line drops away, as if the mourner cannot finish the thought. The phrase 'on her own land' (*al admatah*) adds the cruelty of dying at home rather than in battle abroad.
3. The military context is clear — cities sending out troops and receiving back a tenth of what they sent. A ninety percent casualty rate represents total military catastrophe. The progression from a thousand to a hundred, and a hundred to ten, makes the losses feel relentlessly personal.
4. After the funeral dirge, a sudden lifeline — two words in Hebrew: *dirshu-ni vi-chyu* ('seek me and live'). The verb *darash* ('seek') means active pursuit, investigation, inquiry — not casual interest but determined searching. The imperative is urgent: the dead nation can still live, but only by seeking the LORD himself (not his sanctuaries, as the next verse clarifies).
5. The wordplay is untranslatable: *ha-Gilgal galoh yigleh* — 'Gilgal will surely go into exile' uses alliteration between Gilgal and *galah* ('exile'). Similarly, Beth-el ('House of God') will become *le-aven* ('nothing, wickedness') — possibly a pun on Beth-aven ('House of Nothing/Wickedness'), the derogatory name for Bethel in Hosea 4:15. Beer-sheba in the far south of Judah was apparently a pilgrimage destination even for northern Israelites. Amos says: do not seek sanctuaries, seek God.
6. The call is repeated with heightened urgency. 'House of Joseph' designates the northern kingdom (Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons). The fire image from the oracles against the nations (chapters 1-2) now threatens Israel directly. The phrase 'no one to quench it' (*ein mekabbeh*) means the fire of God's judgment is humanly unstoppable.
7. Wormwood (*la'anah*) is a bitter plant (*Artemisia*) used metaphorically for bitterness, poison, and the perversion of what should be sweet. Justice — which should be life-giving — has been made toxic. The verb *hinnichu* ('set down, left, cast') applied to righteousness means they have thrown it on the ground like refuse. This verse introduces the *mishpat/tsedaqah* theme that climaxes in verse 24.
8. The second doxology fragment (cf. 4:13, 9:5-6). *Kimah* ('Pleiades') and *Kesil* ('Orion') are the only constellations named in the Hebrew Bible outside of Job 9:9 and 38:31. The word *tsalmavet* ('deep darkness, shadow of death') is a compound of *tse* ('shadow') and *mavet* ('death') — the deepest possible darkness. God's power over the constellations, the cycle of day and night, and the waters of the sea establishes his sovereignty over the same forces the Canaanite religion attributed to Baal.
9. This difficult verse likely means God causes sudden devastation to flash upon the powerful and their fortresses. The verb *mavlig* is rare and debated — possibly from *balag* ('to flash, to gleam'), suggesting sudden, unexpected destruction that flashes across the stronghold. The point is that no human strength or fortification can resist God's judgment.

10. The city gate (sha'ar) was the courthouse — where elders sat to hear cases and render verdicts. The mokiach ('one who reproves, rebukes') is the person who speaks truth in the legal proceeding. A society that hates truth-tellers in court has destroyed the foundations of justice. The word tamim ('complete, honest, whole') applied to speech means straightforward, without deception.
11. The 'futility curse' — building but not inhabiting, planting but not harvesting — comes directly from the Deuteronomic covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28:30, 38-40). Houses of cut stone (battei gazit) were expensive construction, a mark of elite wealth. The verb boshaskhem ('you trample') is rare and may be related to the Akkadian šabāšu ('to exact tribute'). The grain tax (mas'at bar) was likely an unofficial extraction from poor farmers by wealthy landowners — not a legitimate tax but legalized theft.
12. Three crimes are listed in staccato: hostility to the innocent (tsoreret tsaddiq), bribe-taking (loqchei khopher), and perverting justice for the needy at the gate (evyonim bashshar hittu). The word kopher ('bribe, ransom') is related to kippur ('atonement') — both involve a payment to cover something. Here the covering is corruption, not reconciliation.
13. A troubling verse — is Amos endorsing silence? More likely he is observing the reality: in a corrupt society, the wise person (ha-maskil) knows that speaking up in court (the gate) is futile or dangerous. This is descriptive, not prescriptive — it describes how bad things have become, not what should be done. Amos himself breaks this silence.
14. The imperative 'seek good' (dirshu tov) parallels 'seek the LORD' from verse 4 — seeking God and seeking justice are the same thing. The barb at the end is sharp: 'as you claim' (ka'asher amartem) — Israel claims God is with them (the theology of election misused as a security blanket), but his presence is conditional on their moral behavior, not their ritual performance.
15. The word 'perhaps' (ulai) is startling — even repentance does not guarantee pardon. God's grace is not a vending machine. The 'remnant of Joseph' (she'erit Yoseph) already presumes that most of the nation will be destroyed — the best hope is that a fragment survives. Establishing justice 'at the gate' (the courthouse) is the specific, concrete action Amos demands — not more sacrifices but fair courts.
16. The picture is of universal grief — public squares, streets, even the fields. The cry ho ho ('Alas! Alas!') is the raw sound of grief. Professional mourners (yod'ei nehi, 'those skilled in lamentation') were women hired to lead wailing at funerals — even farmers will be called in from the fields to join the mourning because the dead are too many for the professionals alone.
17. The verb e'evor ('I will pass through') deliberately echoes the Passover (Exodus 12:12) — God 'passed through' Egypt to bring death. Now he will 'pass through' Israel with the same devastating intent. The vineyards — places of joy, harvest, and celebration — become places of mourning.
18. This is the earliest and most revolutionary reversal of the 'day of the LORD' concept in the prophets. Israel expected the day of the LORD to be a day of divine victory over their enemies — national vindication, military triumph. Amos inverts it: the day of the LORD will be judgment against Israel. The word hoi ('woe') is a funeral exclamation, continuing the dirge motif. The darkness/light contrast was fundamental to ancient Near Eastern religion — Israel expected light (salvation, prosperity) but will receive darkness (judgment, destruction).
19. A brilliantly vivid image of inescapable judgment. Each supposed escape leads to a worse danger: flee the lion, meet the bear; reach the safety of home, get bitten by a snake hiding in the wall. There is no refuge from God's judgment — not speed, not luck, not shelter. The progression from outside danger to inside danger eliminates every possible hiding place.
20. The rhetorical question demands the answer 'yes.' The escalation from choshekh ('darkness') to aphele ('pitch darkness, gloom') intensifies the image. There is not even nogah ('brightness, gleam') — not a single ray of light. The day of the LORD is total, unrelieved darkness for those who have perverted justice and oppressed the poor.
21. Two verbs of rejection piled together: saneti ('I hate') and ma'asti ('I despise, reject'). God is not expressing mild displeasure but visceral revulsion at Israel's worship. The verb ariach ('smell') refers to the pleasing aroma of sacrifices (Genesis 8:21, Leviticus 1:9) — God refuses to even smell their offerings. We rendered this as 'take no delight' since the olfactory idiom is unfamiliar in English.
22. Three types of offerings are rejected: olat ('burnt offerings,' wholly consumed), minchot ('grain offerings'), and shelem meri'ekhem ('fellowship/peace offerings of your fattened cattle'). The fellowship offering was shared between God, the priests, and the worshippers — a communion meal. God refuses to sit at table with oppressors. The verb abbit ('look at, regard') means God will not even glance at their offerings.
23. Even worship music — normally pleasing to God (Psalms) — is called hamon ('noise, uproar, tumult') rather than song when offered by the unjust. The nevel (a stringed instrument, likely a lyre or harp) was a standard temple instrument. God's refusal to listen demolishes any notion that worship performance can substitute for justice.
24. This is the climactic verse of Amos and arguably of all prophetic literature on social justice. The verb yiggal ('roll, flow') suggests overwhelming force — justice is not a trickle but a flood. The nachal eitan ('ever-flowing stream, perennial wadi') is significant in arid Palestine where most wadis are seasonal — dry for months then flash-flooding. An eitan stream flows constantly. God demands permanent, structural justice, not seasonal bursts of charity.
24. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted this verse in his 'I Have a Dream' speech (1963) and in his 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail' (1963), making it one of the most culturally resonant lines in the Hebrew Bible.
25. The expected answer is 'no' — or at least 'not primarily.' The rhetorical question implies that the wilderness period, before the elaborate sacrificial system was fully operational, was actually a period of purer relationship between God and Israel. This radical relativization of sacrifice parallels Jeremiah 7:22 ('I did not command your ancestors about burnt offerings'). The point is not that sacrifice is inherently wrong but that it was never the foundation of the relationship — justice and obedience were.

26. Sikkuth and Kiyyun are Mesopotamian astral deities. Sikkuth (Akkadian Sakkut, identified with the planet Saturn) and Kiyyun (Akkadian Kaiwanu, also Saturn) have been vocalized by the Masoretes with the vowels of shiqquts ('abomination, detestable thing'), deliberately distorting the divine names to express contempt. The verse can be read as past ('you carried') or future ('you will carry') — if future, it means they will carry their useless idols into exile. The LXX rendering of this verse is quoted by Stephen in Acts 7:42-43.
27. The destination 'beyond Damascus' points to Assyria — the empire that would conquer the northern kingdom in 722 BCE. Damascus stands between Israel and the Assyrian heartland; going 'beyond' it means deportation deep into Mesopotamia. The full divine title closes the chapter with maximum authority: YHWH Elohei Tseva'ot — the LORD, the God of Armies.

6

Summary: Amos 6 pronounces woe on the complacent elite of both Zion and Samaria — those who live in luxury, feasting on the finest food and wine while the nation crumbles. They lounge on beds of ivory, sing idle songs, drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, 'but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.' God swears by himself: these complacent ones will be the first to go into exile. The chapter closes with images of total destruction — a house struck until it shatters, horses trying to run on rock, and the futility of Israel's pride in military conquests at Lo-debar and Karnaim.

What Makes This Remarkable: The social critique in verses 4-7 provides one of the most detailed descriptions of elite lifestyle in the Hebrew Bible and serves as archaeological confirmation of Samaria's wealth in the 8th century BCE. The ivory beds, fattened calves, improvised songs, wine by the bowl, and fine oils paint a picture of conspicuous consumption that reads like a modern critique of inequality. The wordplay in verse 13 — Israel boasts of taking Lo-debar ('nothing') and Karnaim ('horns/power') — exposes the absurdity of their military pride: they celebrate capturing a town whose name literally means 'nothing.'

Translation Friction: The phrase 'like David' (ke-David) in verse 5 in reference to musical improvisation is debated — does Amos criticize them for imitating David's musical innovation, or is this a neutral comparison? We rendered it plainly. The divine oath formula 'the LORD has sworn by himself' (v. 8) or 'by his soul' (be-nafsho) is among the strongest oath forms in the Hebrew Bible. Verse 10 describes a scene of plague so severe that bodies are burned rather than buried — an unusual practice in Israelite culture.

Connections: The woe oracle form connects to Isaiah 5:8-23 and Habakkuk 2:6-20. The ivory beds connect to the archaeological ivory finds at Samaria and to Amos 3:15. The reference to Calneh, Hamath, and Gath (v. 2) as fallen cities serves as warning examples. The Lo-debar wordplay connects to 2 Samuel 9:4 where Lo-debar is Mephibosheth's refuge. The divine oath 'by himself' parallels Genesis 22:16 and Hebrews 6:13.

1Woe to those who are complacent in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria — the notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the house of Israel comes! 2Cross over to Calneh and look; then go from there to great Hamath; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Is their territory larger than yours? 3You who push away the evil day yet bring near a reign of violence — 4They lie on beds of ivory and sprawl on their couches, eating lambs from the flock and calves from the fattening pen. 5They improvise songs to the sound of the harp, inventing musical instruments for themselves like David. 6They drink wine by the bowlful and anoint themselves with the finest oils — but they are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. 7Therefore they will now go into exile at the head of the exiles, and the revelry of those who sprawl will come to an end. 8The Lord GOD has sworn by himself — declares the LORD, the God of Hosts: I detest the pride of Jacob and I hate his fortresses. I will hand over the city and everything in it. 9If ten people are left in one house, they too will die. 10When a relative comes with the one who burns the bodies to carry the bones out of the house, and asks anyone hiding in the recesses of the house, 'Is anyone still with you?' — and the answer is 'No one' — then he will say, 'Hush! We must not mention the name of the LORD.' 11For look — the LORD gives the command, and the great house will be smashed to fragments, and the small house to splinters. 12Do horses gallop on rock? Does anyone plow the sea with oxen? Yet you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood. 13You who rejoice over Lo-debar, who say, 'Did we not take Karnaim for ourselves by our own strength?' 14For I am about to raise up a nation

against you, house of Israel — declares the LORD, the God of Hosts — and they will oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of the Arabah.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The woe (hoi) targets both Zion (Jerusalem) and Samaria — neither kingdom escapes. The word sha'ananim ('complacent, at ease, carefree') describes the false security of those who believe their privilege makes them invulnerable. The phrase nequvei reshit ha-goyim ('notable ones of the foremost nation') drips with irony — they consider themselves the cream of the greatest nation on earth.
2. Three fallen or diminished cities are cited as warnings: Calneh (an Assyrian-conquered city, possibly Kullani in north Syria), Hamath (conquered by Assyria in 738 BCE), and Gath (destroyed by Hazael or Uzziah). The rhetorical questions challenge Israel's assumption of invulnerability — if these great kingdoms fell, why should Israel expect immunity? The argument is geographical: these cities were greater than Israel, yet they fell.
3. The paradox is precise: they mentally push away the day of judgment (ha-menadim le-yom ra) while their actions bring the 'seat of violence' (shevet chamas) ever closer. They refuse to think about consequences while accelerating the very behaviors that guarantee catastrophe.
4. The catalogue of luxury begins. 'Beds of ivory' (mittot shen) — confirmed by archaeological finds of carved ivory furniture inlays at Samaria. The verb seruchim ('sprawl, stretch out') suggests indolent reclining. The lambs and calves are not ordinary food but the choicest — taken from among the flock (not the old or weak) and from the marbeq ('fattening pen,' where animals are stall-fed for maximum tenderness).
5. The verb portim ('improvise, strum idly') suggests casual, self-indulgent music-making. The comparison to David (ke-David) is loaded — David invented instruments for worship (1 Chronicles 23:5, 2 Chronicles 29:26-27), but these elites invent instruments for their own entertainment. They claim David's artistic legacy while lacking his devotion.
6. The mizreqi ('bowls') are not drinking cups but temple bowls used for catching sacrificial blood (Numbers 7:13) — the elites drink wine from vessels meant for sacred use, in quantities so large that cups will not suffice. The 'finest oils' (reshit shemannim) means they use the first-pressed, purest olive oil as cosmetic rather than offering it to God. The climactic indictment: ve-lo nechlu al shever Yoseph ('but they are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph'). Amid all their luxury, they have zero concern for the disintegrating nation around them.
7. Poetic justice: they who were 'first' (reshit) among the nations and used the 'first' oils will be 'first' (be-rosh) into exile. The word mirzach ('revelry, banquet') refers to a type of feast — possibly a funerary banquet or drinking club. The word seruchim ('those who sprawl') echoes verse 4, tying the judgment back to the luxury catalogue.
8. God swears by his own nephesh ('self, soul, being') — the highest possible oath, since there is no one greater to swear by (cf. Genesis 22:16, Hebrews 6:13). The word ge'on ('pride, majesty, excellence') is deliberately ambiguous — it can mean legitimate glory or arrogant pride. Here it means the self-congratulatory pride of a nation that confuses luxury with divine favor. The phrase 'I hate his fortresses' connects the judgment to the stored-up violence of 3:10.
9. The number ten may represent a large household or the minimum for a synagogue quorum (minyan) in later tradition. The point is that even survivors will not survive — death will pursue the remnant into their homes.
10. This is one of the most chilling scenes in prophetic literature. The death toll is so catastrophic that bodies must be burned rather than buried — an extreme measure in Israelite culture, normally reserved for criminals (Joshua 7:25). The whispered command 'Hush!' (has) followed by 'we must not mention the name of the LORD' reveals pure terror — they fear that invoking God's name might draw more of his attention and more death. The dodo ('his uncle') and mesarpho ('the one who burns him') are performing grim, emergency corpse-disposal.
11. God merely commands (metsavveh) — he does not need to personally strike. His word alone shatters buildings. The parallelism between 'great house' and 'small house' means no one is exempt — the mansions of the rich and the homes of the common people alike will be destroyed. The words resisim ('fragments') and beqi'im ('cracks, splinters') convey total structural collapse.
12. Two absurd impossibilities — horses cannot run on bare rock (they would slip), and oxen cannot plow the sea (following the reading ba-baqarim yam, 'the sea with oxen,' dividing the consonants differently). What Israel has done with justice is equally absurd — turning it into rosh ('poison') and tsedaqah into la'anah ('wormwood, bitterness'). The plant metaphor echoes 5:7. Justice should bear sweet fruit; Israel has produced poison.
13. Devastating wordplay on two real place names in Transjordan. Lo-debar (2 Samuel 9:4, 17:27) literally means 'nothing' or 'no-thing' — Israel rejoices over conquering 'Nothing.' Karnaim means 'horns,' a symbol of power — Israel boasts of seizing 'Power' by their own strength. The double irony: they celebrate capturing places whose names expose the emptiness and arrogance of their military pride. Both towns were likely recaptured from Aram during Jeroboam II's territorial expansion (2 Kings 14:25).
14. The unnamed nation is Assyria. The geographical extent — from Lebo-hamath (the northern boundary of Israel's claimed territory) to the Brook of the Arabah (the Wadi Zered or the southern Dead Sea boundary) — encompasses the entirety of Israel's territory under Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). The very territory Israel boasted about conquering will be the territory under foreign oppression. The verb lachats ('oppress, press, squeeze') ironically echoes the oppression Israel has inflicted on the poor — now a foreign power will oppress them.

7

Summary: *Amos 7 presents the first three of five visions and the dramatic confrontation between Amos and Amaziah the priest of Bethel. In the first vision (locusts) and second vision (fire), Amos intercedes and God relents. In the third vision (the plumb line), God declares 'I will no longer pass by them' — intercession is no longer possible. The narrative then shifts to the confrontation at Bethel: Amaziah accuses Amos of conspiracy and orders him back to Judah. Amos responds with the famous declaration 'I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son' and delivers a devastating personal oracle against Amaziah.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The three visions follow a dramatic arc: in the first two, Amos successfully intercedes ('Lord GOD, please forgive!') and God relents. But in the third, no intercession is offered — the plumb line reveals that Israel is irredeemably out of true, and God will 'no longer pass by them.' The shift from dialogue to monologue is theologically devastating. The Amaziah confrontation (vv. 10-17) is the only narrative passage in the book and provides crucial context for Amos's prophetic authority. Amos's disclaimer — 'I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but a herdsman and a dresser of sycamores' — is not false modesty but a claim to unmediated divine calling, bypassing the prophetic guilds entirely.*

Translation Friction: *The word anakh ('plumb line') in verse 7-8 is debated. Traditional rendering is 'plumb line' but the word occurs only here and its meaning is uncertain — some scholars suggest 'tin' or 'lead' (a metal used in construction). We retained 'plumb line' as the most contextually coherent reading. Amos's statement 'I was no prophet' (lo navi anokhi) in verse 14 could be past tense ('I was not a prophet [before God called me]') or present tense ('I am not a [professional] prophet'). The Hebrew allows both; we rendered it with past tense to indicate his pre-calling status.*

Connections: *The vision sequence parallels Jeremiah's call visions (Jeremiah 1:11-14) and Zechariah's night visions (Zechariah 1-6). The plumb line connects to Isaiah 28:17 where God lays justice as a plumb line. Amaziah's charge of 'conspiracy' (qesher) uses the same word as Absalom's revolt (2 Samuel 15:12) and Jehu's coup (2 Kings 9:14). The sycamore-fig dresser detail connects to 1 Kings 10:27 and 2 Chronicles 1:15. The oracle against Amaziah's wife anticipates the sexual violence of conquest.*

¹This is what the Lord GOD showed me: He was forming a swarm of locusts at the time when the late crop was just beginning to grow — the late crop after the king's harvest. ²When the locusts had finished devouring the vegetation of the land, I said, 'Lord GOD, please forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!' ³The LORD relented concerning this. 'It will not happen,' said the LORD. ⁴This is what the Lord GOD showed me: The Lord GOD was calling for judgment by fire, and it consumed the great deep and was devouring the farmland. ⁵I said, 'Lord GOD, please stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!' ⁶The LORD relented concerning this. 'This also will not happen,' said the Lord GOD. ⁷This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸The LORD said to me, 'What do you see, Amos?' I said, 'A plumb line.' Then the Lord said, 'I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel. I will no longer pass by them. ⁹The high places of Isaac will be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel will be laid waste. I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword. ¹⁰Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent word to Jeroboam king of Israel: 'Amos has conspired against you in the very heart of the house of Israel. The land cannot endure all his words.' ¹¹For this is what Amos has said: 'Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile from its land.' ¹²Then Amaziah said to Amos, 'Seer! Leave! Flee to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and prophesy there. ¹³But never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary and a royal temple.' ¹⁴Amos answered Amaziah: 'I was no prophet, nor was I a prophet's son. I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. ¹⁵The LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel." ¹⁶Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say, "Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac." ¹⁷Therefore this is what the LORD says: Your wife will become a prostitute in the city. Your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be measured out and divided. You yourself will die on unclean soil. And Israel will surely go into exile from its land.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The vision format — 'the Lord GOD showed me' (koh hir'ani) — marks the beginning of the vision cycle that runs through chapter 9. The timing is crucial: the leqesh ('late growth, spring crop') comes after the king has already taken his portion (gizzei ha-melekh, 'the king's mowings/shearings'). The late crop was what the common people depended on — losing it to locusts meant starvation for ordinary farmers while the king's share was already safely collected.
2. Amos intercedes — the prophet who announced judgment now pleads for mercy. The verb selach ('forgive') is used exclusively of God's forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible. The argument is not Israel's innocence but their smallness (qaton) — they cannot survive what they deserve. 'How can Jacob survive?' (mi yaqum Ya'aqov) literally asks 'who will raise up Jacob?' — the answer is: only God can.
3. The verb nicham ('relented, was grieved, changed his mind') is one of the most theologically complex words in the Hebrew Bible. When applied to God, it does not imply fickleness but responsiveness — God's character does not change, but his actions respond to human intercession. The English 'repented' (KJV) misleadingly suggests God had sinned; 'relented' captures the change of intended action without implying moral failing.
4. The second vision escalates from locusts to cosmic fire. The fire devours the tehom rabbah ('great deep') — the primordial waters beneath the earth — before attacking the cheleq ('portion, allotted farmland'). Fire that consumes even the subterranean ocean is an apocalyptic image of total destruction surpassing any natural disaster. The verb qorei ('calling, summoning') depicts God issuing a judicial summons — the fire is not accidental but a legal action.
5. The second intercession changes one word: instead of selach ('forgive,' v. 2), Amos says chadal ('stop, cease'). The fire vision was so overwhelming that Amos does not even ask for forgiveness — he just begs God to stop. The rest of the plea is identical, maintaining the refrain-like structure of the vision cycle.
6. Again God relents — gam hi ('this also') notes the pattern: two visions, two intercessions, two acts of divine mercy. The audience expects the pattern to continue. It will not.
7. The third vision shifts dramatically. God is no longer sending destruction from a distance but standing (mitsav) personally beside the wall with the measuring instrument in his own hand. The word anakh occurs only in this passage and its precise meaning is debated — 'plumb line' (a weighted cord used to test whether a wall is vertical) is the traditional and contextually best rendering, though 'tin' or 'lead' (the metal weight on the cord) is linguistically possible.
8. God addresses Amos by name — the only time in the vision cycle. The question 'What do you see?' draws the prophet into participation rather than mere observation. The devastating declaration lo osif od avor lo ('I will no longer pass by them') means God will no longer overlook Israel's moral crookedness. The verb avor ('pass by') echoes the Passover tradition — God once 'passed over' Israel in mercy; now he will stop 'passing by' in judgment. No intercession is offered or invited. The pattern is broken.
9. The use of 'Isaac' (Yischaq) instead of 'Israel' or 'Jacob' is unusual — it may connect to the patriarchal tradition or may be a wordplay on the verb tsachaq ('laugh'), suggesting the 'laughter' of complacency will become desolation. The mention of 'the house of Jeroboam' names the current dynasty directly — this is the specific threat that triggers Amaziah's political response in the next verse.
10. The narrative shifts abruptly from vision to confrontation. Amaziah is the chief priest of the royal sanctuary at Bethel — a political-religious appointee, not a Levitical priest. His charge of qesher ('conspiracy') uses the same word applied to actual coups (Absalom in 2 Samuel 15:12, Jehu in 2 Kings 9:14) — he frames Amos's prophecy as treason rather than divine message. The phrase 'the land cannot endure' (lo tukhal ha-arets lehakhil) suggests Amos's words are so destabilizing that the nation itself cannot contain them.
11. Amaziah quotes Amos — but slightly distorts the message. Amos said God would rise against the 'house of Jeroboam' (the dynasty) with the sword (v. 9), not that Jeroboam himself would die by the sword. Jeroboam II actually died a natural death (2 Kings 14:29); it was his son Zechariah who was assassinated (2 Kings 15:8-10). Amaziah's paraphrase sharpens the personal threat to make it sound more treasonous.
12. Amaziah calls Amos chozeh ('seer') rather than navi ('prophet') — possibly a dismissive term for a visionary or a recognition that Amos operated outside the official prophetic guilds. The command 'flee' (berach) implies danger — Amaziah may be warning Amos that his life is at risk, or simply ordering him to run. The phrase 'eat bread there' (ekhal sham lechem) is an insult — it implies Amos prophesies for money, that prophecy is his bread-winning profession.
13. Amaziah's argument is entirely political: Bethel belongs to the king (miqdash melekh, 'king's sanctuary') and is a beit mamlakhah ('royal house, temple of the kingdom'). He defines the sanctuary by its political patron rather than its divine owner. This is precisely the conflation of religion and power that Amos attacks — Bethel is supposed to be 'House of God' but has become 'House of the King.'
14. Amos's response is the most important autobiographical statement by any prophet. Lo navi anokhi ('I was no prophet') — the Hebrew allows either past or present tense. We render past tense because Amos describes his status before God called him. He was not a member of the prophetic guilds (benei ha-nevi'im, 'sons of the prophets') who served as professional religious functionaries. He was a boqer ('herdsman, cattle-breeder') and a boles shiqmim ('dresser of sycamore figs'). The sycamore fig required manual piercing to ripen properly — a low-status agricultural task. Amos claims no institutional authority; his only credential is God's direct call.

15. The verb *yiqqacheni* ('took me') implies divine seizure — God did not invite Amos but commandeered him. The phrase *me-acharei ha-tson* ('from behind the flock') locates the call in the middle of ordinary work — there was no temple vision, no prophetic school, no gradual training. The designation *ammi Yisra'el* ('my people Israel') is God's own claim — Israel belongs to God, not to Jeroboam, and God sends prophets to his own people regardless of Amaziah's territorial claims.
16. Amos turns Amaziah's own words back on him. The verb *tattif* ('preach, drip, drop') literally means 'to drip' — prophecy drips from the prophet like water or rain. It can be used contemptuously (Micah 2:6, 11) to mean 'stop your dripping/drivel.' Amos quotes Amaziah's prohibition as the setup for the devastating oracle that follows.
17. The oracle against Amaziah is systematically devastating — it strikes every dimension of his life: his wife (sexual humiliation during conquest), his children (killed), his land (confiscated), his person (dying in exile on 'unclean' gentile soil — the worst fate for a priest whose identity depends on ritual purity), and his nation (exiled). The verb *tizneh* ('will become a prostitute') likely refers to the sexual violence that accompanied ancient conquest rather than voluntary prostitution — Amaziah's wife will be sexually violated by invading soldiers.
17. The final statement — 'Israel will surely go into exile from its land' — repeats exactly what Amaziah accused Amos of saying (v. 11), confirming it as God's own word.

8

Summary: *Amos 8 presents the fourth vision — a basket of summer fruit (qayits) whose name puns on 'end' (qets) — and declares that the end has come for Israel. The chapter then returns to the social justice theme with a scathing depiction of merchants who cheat the poor: they cannot wait for the Sabbath to end so they can resume dishonest trade, making the ephah small and the shekel heavy. God swears he will never forget these deeds. The chapter climaxes with a prophecy of cosmic darkness and a famine — not of bread or water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The qayits/qets wordplay in verses 1-2 is the most famous pun in the prophetic literature. A basket of summer fruit (qayits, the last harvest of the season) sounds like 'the end' (qets). The vision communicates through sound as much as sight — Hebrew listeners would hear the doom in the word itself. The merchants' monologue in verses 5-6 is one of the rare places where the prophets give voice to the oppressors, letting them condemn themselves from their own mouths. The 'famine of the word' prophecy (vv. 11-12) is theologically devastating — the worst judgment is not physical suffering but God's silence.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase 'to buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals' (v. 6) echoes 2:6 almost verbatim, creating an inclusio across the book. The astronomical imagery in verse 9 ('I will make the sun go down at noon') could be literal (an eclipse — there was a solar eclipse visible from Israel on June 15, 763 BCE) or metaphorical (premature catastrophe). We preserved the ambiguity. The description of mourning rites in verse 10 — sackcloth, shaved heads — connects to broader ancient Near Eastern funeral practices.*

Connections: *The qayits/qets wordplay has parallels in Jeremiah 1:11-12 (shaqed/shoqed) and Ezekiel 7:2-6 (qets). The merchants' speech echoes Hosea 12:7-8 and Micah 6:10-11. The cosmic darkness connects to Exodus 10:22 (the plague of darkness) and Joel 2:31. The 'famine of the word' anticipates the silence of God in the intertestamental period. The basket of summer fruit connects to Jeremiah 24 (the two baskets of figs).*

1This is what the Lord GOD showed me: a basket of summer fruit. 2He said, 'What do you see, Amos?' I said, 'A basket of summer fruit.' Then the LORD said to me, 'The end has come for my people Israel. I will no longer pass by them. 3The songs of the temple will become wailing on that day, declares the Lord GOD. The corpses will be many — in every place they will be thrown out. Silence!' 4Hear this, you who trample the needy and bring ruin to the poor of the land — 5You say, 'When will the new moon be over so we can sell grain? When will the Sabbath end so we can open our wheat for sale? — making the measure small and the price large and cheating with dishonest scales.' 6buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling even the sweepings with the wheat.' 7The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: I will never forget any of their deeds. 8Will the land not tremble because of this, and every one of its inhabitants mourn? All of it will rise like the Nile — surging and sinking like the River of Egypt. 9On that day, declares the Lord GOD, I will make the sun go down at

noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. ¹⁰I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your songs into dirges. I will put sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head. I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and its end will be like a bitter day. ¹¹Days are coming, declares the Lord GOD, when I will send a famine on the land — not a famine of bread, and not a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. ¹²They will stagger from sea to sea, and from north to east they will wander, searching for the word of the LORD — but they will not find it. ¹³On that day the beautiful young women and the young men will faint from thirst. ¹⁴Those who swear by the guilt of Samaria, who say, 'As your god lives, O Dan!' and 'As the way of Beer-sheba lives!' — they will fall and never rise again.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The vision is simple — just a basket of qayits ('summer fruit,' the late figs harvested in July-August). The simplicity is deceptive; the theological weight is carried entirely by the wordplay that follows in verse 2. The word keluv ('basket') is a rare term, possibly a woven cage-like container used for fruit collection.
2. The wordplay is the crux: qayits ('summer fruit') sounds like qets ('end'). The basket of final-harvest fruit becomes a symbol of Israel's final season — the harvest is over, the end has arrived. The declaration lo osif od avor lo ('I will no longer pass by them') repeats 7:8 exactly, confirming the irreversibility of judgment. As in 7:8, God calls Israel 'my people' (ammi) — the intimacy of the covenant makes the judgment more painful, not less.
3. Temple songs (shiroi heikhal) that were meant for praise become howls of grief. The word peger ('corpse, dead body') is used for bodies without dignity — discarded remains rather than honored dead. The final word has ('Silence! Hush!') may be a command to stop the wailing, an expression of stunned horror, or a liturgical signal. Its abruptness is chilling — the verse simply stops with a shushing sound.
4. The verb sho'afim ('trample, swallow up, pant after') is the same word used in 2:7 — creating a literary connection between the opening indictment and this near-closing accusation. The verb lashbit ('to put an end to, to bring to ruin') applied to the aniyei erets ('poor of the land') means the wealthy are systematically eliminating the poor as a class — not just exploiting them but destroying them.
5. The merchants' own words condemn them. They observe the holy days (new moon, Sabbath) only as annoyances that interrupt commerce. Three forms of commercial fraud are listed: making the ephah small (reducing the measure of grain the buyer receives), making the shekel large (inflating the price by using heavier-than-standard weights), and falsifying the scales (mo'aznei mirmah, 'scales of deceit'). Each violates explicit Torah commands (Leviticus 19:35-36, Deuteronomy 25:13-16).
6. This verse echoes 2:6 almost word for word — 'buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals' — creating a structural bracket around the entire book. The debt-slavery system reduces human beings to commodities valued at the price of footwear. The final detail — selling mappal bar ('sweepings of grain,' the chaff and debris swept from the threshing floor mixed into the good wheat) — is petty fraud added to systemic injustice.
7. God swears by 'the pride of Jacob' (ge'on Ya'aqov) — this may be ironic (swearing by their arrogance, which God detests per 6:8), or it may refer to God himself as Israel's true pride/glory. The oath 'I will never forget' (im eshkach la-netsach) inverts the usual hope that God would 'forget' (i.e., forgive) sins. These deeds are permanently recorded.
8. The earthquake imagery connects back to the superscription (1:1) and its reference to the earthquake. The comparison to the Nile's flooding (ka-'or, 'like the Nile') is geologically apt — the land will heave up and down like the annual Nile flood, unstable and overwhelming. The verbs nigreshah ('surge, be driven') and nishqe'ah ('sink, settle') describe the oscillation of flood waters and, by extension, the convulsions of the earth.
9. The sun setting at noon — when it should be at its zenith — reverses the natural order. This may refer to the solar eclipse of June 15, 763 BCE, visible from Israel and recorded in Assyrian annals, which would have occurred close to Amos's prophetic career. Whether literal eclipse or metaphorical catastrophe, the image of premature darkness in the middle of the day captures the sudden, total reversal of Israel's fortunes. The phrase be-yom or ('in a day of light') intensifies the contrast — darkness when light is expected.
10. Every celebration becomes its opposite: festivals become mourning, songs become dirges (qinah). Sackcloth and head-shaving were standard mourning practices (Isaiah 15:2-3, Jeremiah 48:37). The climactic comparison — 'like mourning for an only son' (ke-evel yachid) — describes the most inconsolable grief imaginable: losing an only child, the one who carries the family name and future. This grief has no remedy and no successor to provide comfort.
11. This is one of the most theologically profound verses in the prophetic corpus. The worst famine is not physical but spiritual — the absence of God's word. Israel silenced the prophets (2:12) and told Amos to stop prophesying (7:13); now God will give them exactly what they asked for: silence. The irony is complete — they wanted the prophets to stop speaking, and God will grant their wish as the ultimate punishment. A nation without divine communication is a nation without guidance, hope, or future.
12. The verb na'u ('stagger, wander') is the same verb used in 4:8 for drought refugees staggering between cities looking for water. Now they stagger across the compass searching for a prophetic word. 'From sea to sea' (from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea) and 'from north to east' covers three of four directions — the south (Judah) is notably absent, perhaps because the word of the LORD will persist there. The phrase ve-lo yimtsa'u ('but they will not find it') is the final, devastating conclusion.

13. The strongest and most vibrant members of society — young women in their beauty and young men in their vigor — will collapse. If the young cannot endure, no one can. The 'thirst' (tsama) here is both physical and spiritual — the famine of the word affects even those who should be most resilient.
14. The 'guilt of Samaria' (ashmat Shomeron) likely refers to the golden calf at the Samaria/Bethel sanctuary. Dan and Beer-sheba represent the northernmost and southernmost cult sites — 'from Dan to Beer-sheba' was the traditional description of Israel's full extent (Judges 20:1). The oath formulas ('as your god lives,' 'as the way of Beer-sheba lives') invoke false deities or corrupt cult practices. The word derekh ('way') may refer to the pilgrimage route itself or to the deity worshipped there. The chapter ends with a fall from which there is no recovery: ve-lo yaqumu od ('they will never rise again').

9

Summary: Amos 9 contains the fifth and final vision — God standing beside the altar commanding its destruction — followed by a hymn of inescapable divine power, a theological qualification distinguishing between the 'sinful kingdom' and the covenant promises, and the book's stunning reversal: the restoration of the 'booth of David' and an age of superabundant agricultural blessing. The chapter moves from the most severe judgment in the book to its most hopeful promise, ending with God's pledge that Israel will be planted in their land 'never again to be uprooted.'

What Makes This Remarkable: The fifth vision is the most terrifying — God himself stands at the altar (not beside a wall or above a basket, but at the central place of worship) and commands destruction from the top of the pillars down. There is no intercession, no dialogue, no wordplay — only judgment. Yet the chapter's ending (vv. 11-15) is the most hopeful passage in Amos. The 'booth of David' (sukkath David, v. 11) — not the palace or temple but the humble sukkah — suggests a restoration that begins from humility rather than imperial power. This passage is quoted by James at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:16-17) as the scriptural basis for including Gentiles in the people of God.

Translation Friction: The relationship between the judgment section (vv. 1-10) and the restoration section (vv. 11-15) is debated — some scholars consider the hopeful ending a later addition, but we render the canonical text as it stands. The phrase 'sinful kingdom' (ha-mamlakhah ha-chatta'ah, v. 8) is carefully qualified: God will destroy the sinful kingdom but 'will not completely destroy the house of Jacob.' This distinction between the political entity and the covenant people is theologically crucial. The LXX version of verse 12 ('so that the rest of humanity may seek the LORD') differs significantly from the MT ('so that they may possess the remnant of Edom') — we follow the MT.

Connections: The altar vision connects to the destruction of Bethel's altars (3:14). The 'nowhere to hide' passage (vv. 2-4) parallels Psalm 139:7-12 in structure but inverts its theology — what is comfort in the psalm becomes terror in Amos. The booth of David connects to Isaiah 16:5 and 2 Samuel 7 (the Davidic covenant). Acts 15:16-17 quotes verse 12 from the LXX. The agricultural abundance in verses 13-15 reverses the futility curses of 5:11. The final planting promise ('never again to be uprooted') echoes Jeremiah 24:6, 31:28, and 42:10.

1 I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said: 'Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake! Shatter them on the heads of all the people. Those who remain I will kill with the sword. Not one of them will flee successfully; not one of them will escape. 2 If they dig down to Sheol, my hand will take them from there. If they climb up to the heavens, I will bring them down from there. 3 If they hide on the summit of Carmel, I will search them out and take them from there. If they conceal themselves from my sight at the bottom of the sea, I will command the serpent there, and it will bite them. 4 Even if they go into captivity before their enemies, I will command the sword there, and it will kill them. I will fix my eyes on them for harm, not for good. 5 The Lord GOD of Hosts — he touches the earth and it melts, and all who live in it mourn. All of it rises like the Nile and sinks like the River of Egypt. 6 He builds his upper chambers in the heavens and sets his vault over the earth. He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the earth — the LORD is his name. 7 Are you not like the Cushites to me, people of Israel? declares the LORD. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Arameans from Kir? 8 Look — the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth. Yet I will not completely destroy the house of Jacob, declares the LORD. 9 For I am giving the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes a sieve — but not a pebble will

fall to the ground. ¹⁰All the sinners among my people will die by the sword — those who say, 'Disaster will never reach us or come near us.' ¹¹On that day I will raise up the booth of David that has fallen. I will repair its breaches, raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old, ¹²so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations over whom my name is called, declares the LORD who does this. ¹³Days are coming, declares the LORD, when the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes will overtake the sower. The mountains will drip with sweet wine, and all the hills will flow with it. ¹⁴I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel. They will rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will cultivate gardens and eat their fruit. ¹⁵I will plant them on their land, and they will never again be uprooted from the land that I have given them, says the LORD your God.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The final vision is the most direct — no symbolic object, no question, just God standing at the altar of judgment. The kaptor ('capital, top of the pillar') of the sanctuary is struck so that the sippim ('thresholds, foundations') shake — the building collapses from top to bottom on the worshippers' heads. This may be the Bethel sanctuary or a symbolic representation of all Israel's worship sites. The language 'not one will flee... not one will escape' (lo yanus lahem nas ve-lo yimmalet lahem palit) eliminates all possibility of survival.
2. The cosmic 'nowhere to hide' passage begins. Sheol (the underworld, the realm of the dead) is the lowest point; the heavens are the highest. The Hebrew uses extremes — vertical axis from deepest to highest — to establish that no spatial dimension can provide escape. Compare Psalm 139:8, which uses the same vertical axis to express the comfort of God's omnipresence; Amos inverts it into terror.
3. The horizontal axis now: Carmel, with its dense forests and countless caves, represents the best hiding place on land. The bottom of the sea represents the most inaccessible place on earth. Even there, God commands the nachash ('serpent, sea monster') — the primordial chaos creature of the deep — to attack. The serpent echoes the snake-in-the-wall image from 5:19, creating another structural connection across the book.
4. The final impossibility: even exile itself — normally the ultimate punishment — will not satisfy justice. God's eyes (a phrase usually associated with divine watchfulness and protection, as in Deuteronomy 11:12) will be fixed on them le-ra'ah ve-lo le-tovah ('for harm and not for good'). The inversion of the protective divine gaze into a hostile stare is the most psychologically terrifying image in the passage.
5. The third and final doxology fragment (cf. 4:13, 5:8-9). God merely touches (ha-nogei'a) the earth and it melts (tamog) — total dissolution from the lightest contact. The Nile imagery reprises 8:8. These doxology fragments, scattered across the book, function as hymnic refrains celebrating the power of the God who judges.
6. The word ma'alotav ('his upper chambers, his stairway') refers to God's heavenly dwelling built above the firmament. The word aguddato ('his vault, his band') likely refers to the dome of the sky — the firmament that arches over the earth. God's architectural mastery encompasses the entire cosmos. The sea-water verse echoes 5:8 exactly, creating continuity across the doxology fragments.
7. This is one of the most theologically radical verses in the Hebrew Bible. God compares Israel to the Cushites (Ethiopians/Nubians) — a distant people with no covenant — and claims to have directed the migrations of the Philistines (from Caphtor, likely Crete) and the Arameans (from Kir, cf. 1:5) just as he directed Israel's Exodus. Israel's election is not denied but radically relativized — God is sovereign over all nations' histories, not just Israel's. This demolishes the nationalistic theology that assumed God cared only about Israel.
8. The crucial theological distinction: the 'sinful kingdom' (ha-mamlakhah ha-chatta'ah) — the corrupt political entity — will be destroyed, but the 'house of Jacob' — the covenant people as a whole — will not be completely annihilated. The word ephes ('except, however') marks the transition from total judgment to qualified mercy. The double negative lo hashmeid ashmid ('I will not utterly destroy') is emphatic — complete annihilation is explicitly ruled out, preserving a remnant for the restoration that follows.
9. The sieve image is precise: the kevarah ('sieve') is shaken to separate grain from debris. When grain is sieved, small pebbles (tserorot) either pass through or are caught and discarded. The meaning depends on whether the tsror ('pebble') represents the righteous (who will not be lost) or the wicked (who will not escape judgment). The latter reading fits better: no guilty person will slip through God's sifting process. The exile is not random scattering but purposeful sifting.
10. The judgment is specific — not all of 'my people' but 'all the sinners among my people' (kol chatta'ei ammi). The qualifier is important: it distinguishes between the sinful individuals and the covenant community as a whole. Their fatal delusion is articulated: they believe disaster 'will not reach us or come near us' (lo taggish ve-taqdim ba'adenu). This is the complacency of 6:1-3 expressed as theology — they have turned divine election into a guarantee of safety.
11. The sukkah David ('booth of David') is the theological pivot of the entire book. The word sukkah is used for the temporary shelters of the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:42) — a flimsy structure of branches, not a permanent building. Applied to David's dynasty, it means the once-great kingdom has been reduced to a ramshackle hut. Yet God will rebuild even this. The verbs are architectural: gadarti ('repair the breaches'), aqim ('raise up'), and banitiah ('rebuild'). The phrase ki-mei olam ('as in the days of old/forever') points back to the united monarchy under David and Solomon.

11. This verse is quoted by James at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:16-17) from the LXX, which reads 'so that the rest of humanity may seek the LORD' — a reading that supported the inclusion of Gentiles.
12. The MT reads 'possess the remnant of Edom' (yireshu et she'erit Edom), while the LXX reads 'so that the rest of humanity may seek [the Lord]' (ekzetesosi hoi kataloipoi ton anthropon) — a significantly different reading that James quotes in Acts 15:17. The LXX reading may reflect a different Hebrew text or a theological interpretation. We follow the MT. The phrase 'over whom my name is called' (asher niqra shemi alehem) indicates God's ownership — the nations claimed by God's name belong to him.
13. The agricultural reversal of the futility curses. The harvest will be so abundant that reaping is still ongoing when plowing begins for the next season, and the grape harvest overlaps with the next sowing — a vision of agricultural superabundance where the land produces faster than it can be harvested. The mountains 'dripping with sweet wine' (hittifu he-harim asis) and hills 'flowing' (titmogagnah, literally 'melting') paint a picture of a land so fertile it dissolves into abundance. This reverses the drought, blight, and famine of 4:6-9.
14. The phrase shavti et shevut ('I will restore the fortunes') is the standard Hebrew expression for reversal of national disaster — it may include but is not limited to return from exile. The specific reversals — building and inhabiting cities, planting vineyards and drinking wine, cultivating gardens and eating fruit — directly reverse the futility curses of 5:11 ('you have built houses of cut stone but will not live in them; you have planted choice vineyards but will not drink their wine'). What was threatened is now promised.
15. The final verse of Amos is a permanent promise. The verb nata'tim ('I will plant them') treats Israel as God's own planting — a vine or tree set in soil by divine hands. The phrase lo yinateshu od ('they will never again be uprooted') uses the strongest possible negation — this planting is permanent. The book that began with devastation (1:2 — the pastures wither, Carmel dries up) ends with permanent agricultural rootedness. God speaks as 'the LORD your God' (YHWH Elohekha) — the covenant formula is restored. The last word belongs to hope.