

The Minor Prophets – volume 1
(Explanation on the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah)



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Estudo Bíblico Evangélico

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This book is dedicated to the true prophets of God.

Thanks to the Lord for His strength and fidelity to His promises, giving me perseverance, always showing me His truth and broadening my inner vision to see His greatness and sovereignty over all His Creation.

“Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth” (Hos. 6: 3).

Introduction

This book arose in the sequence of the study of the book of Isaiah as a curiosity on my part concerning the prophets of the Old Testament, with the thirst to know more deeply what they meant in each verse. I sought to know how to situate prophecy in History, what characters they were referring to, the location of the cities there, and the figures of speech used at the time to give me more insight about the writings of the prophets.

As for the spiritual interpretation for us today, as a message from God for our day to day, we know that the bible is applicable to all ages and situations of mankind and the Holy Spirit gives us personal revelation every time we read His word.

All the prophets were used by God to prophesy about the coming of Jesus, in whom the prophecies were fulfilled. In fact, the coming of Christ was a plan of God the Father that astonished mankind in what it thought about His righteousness and His ability to restore His children. Although they were used by God to reveal His designs to men, the prophets of that time had their thoughts permeated with human opinion and limited vision of something they could not understand or imagine (1 Cor. 14: 32). In other words, they could not imagine that the Father would send Jesus the way He sent, emphasizing His spiritual reign and showing mankind that it needed to be restored from something far greater than it had lost in the material sense such as houses, lands and the power to govern subjects; man needed to understand that the most precious thing he had lost was his intimacy with God and the innocence that once was present in a being similar to him in Eden. He also needed to know his true enemy.

Jesus brought a new dispensation to mankind, which was like an 'Apocalypse' to the people of that time (Isaiah is an example of this), like a new Creation. Apocalypse means 'revelation.' Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Joel, and others have undoubtedly left something about eschatological events, but it is Jesus who gives us the certainty of present and future events through His prophecy set forth in the Gospels. What happens today and will happen at His second coming is a result of what He prophesied about the end times. His prophecy is being fulfilled. Under this point of view, little of the prophets of the OT remained to be fulfilled still as an apocalyptic (eschatological) event, especially for those who already have salvation in Christ. Most prophecies have already been fulfilled. Jesus left, so to speak, what is important for us to know about His second coming; and His apostles John and Paul left their complementation on the subject, using the words of the OT prophets to corroborate their writings and the revelations given by God to them. In relation to the Jews it is another story.

In the writings of the Minor Prophets we can see practically the same message being delivered in many different ways: to seek God, to leave idolatry and to believe in His ever-present righteousness, obeying Him in all things not to provoke His wrath and His judgment, which infallibly come on those who commit perversity. We can see, above all, His mercy and patience, always giving man a chance to repent and be blessed. None of the prophets minced their words but exhorted the people as watchmen of the Lord, making them aware of their sin.

May the Holy Spirit be your guide and teacher in this reading!

Tânia Cristina

Notes:

- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995). The New International Version (NIV) will be used concurrently to make it easier for readers to understand.
- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [] or parenthesis (), in *italics*, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- In some texts we'll use 'Lexicon Strong's Concordance.' Strong's Concordance is a concordance of the King James Bible (KJV), created by the English theologian Dr. James Strong (1822-1894), along with a team of theologians, and first published in 1890. It is about a cross-reference between each word in the KJV and the original text in Hebrew or Greek. To each word in its original language is given an entry number for the biblical concordance of KJV. Lexicon means a dictionary of ancient classic languages. In order to interpret Lexicon Strong's Concordance properly it's necessary to take into account the cultural context of that time, because Strong's numbers do not consider figures of speech, metaphors, idioms, common phrases, cultural references, references to historical events, or alternate meanings used by the writers of that time period to express their thoughts in their own language (source: Wikipedia.org).

Source of research:

- J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2nd edition 1995.
- Wikipedia.org and crystalinks.com (for some images).
- Email: relacionamentosearaagape@gmail.com

Index

Hosea

Introduction	8
Chapter 1	10
Chapter 2	13
Chapter 3	19
Chapter 4	21
Chapter 5	27
Chapter 6	31
Chapter 7	35
Chapter 8	38
Chapter 9	41
Chapter 10	45
Chapter 11	48
Chapter 12	52
Chapter 13	55
Chapter 14	58
Conclusion	59

Joel

Introduction	61
Chapter 1	63
Chapter 2	66
Chapter 3	70
Conclusion	81

Amos

Introduction	82
Chapter 1	84
Chapter 2	94
Chapter 3	100
Chapter 4	103
Chapter 5	106
Chapter 6	111
Chapter 7	116
Chapter 8	122
Chapter 9	126
Conclusion	129

Obadiah

Introduction	130
Conclusion	147

Volumes 2 and 3 of this book:

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/theminorprophets2.pdf>

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/theminorprophets3.pdf>

Hosea

Hosea, prophet of Israel, the northern kingdom, exercised his prophetic ministry from 755 to 715 BC. His name Hosea (in Hebrew, Hoshea, הוֹשֵׁעַ, Strong #1954) means ‘savior, deliverer.’ The book tells Hosea’s love for Gomer, his unfaithful wife (Hos. 1: 1; Hos. 3: 5), which illustrates God’s love for us even when we are unfaithful to Him. Jeroboam II (782-753 BC) was a wicked king whose rule produced a materialistic society, immoral and unjust. The six kings that followed in the next thirty years contributed to the fall of Israel in 722 BC. Hosea announces the corruption, the pride and idolatry of Israel (Hos. 2: 8; 13; 16-17; Hos. 4: 2; 8: 14). He is also against political alliances with foreign powers that provoke dependence, economic exploitation and oppression (Hos. 7: 8-12; Hos. 8: 9-10); he denounces the coups d’état that preserve the interests of a small minority (Hos. 7: 3-7), confidence in military power and riches (Hos. 8: 14; Hos. 10: 13), all kinds of injustice and violence (Hos. 4: 1-2; Hos. 6: 7-10; Hos. 7: 1; Hos. 10: 12-13). The prophet rebukes especially the ruling classes of society: the corrupt kings and the ignorant and covetous priests who drove the people to ruin. It also criticizes religious hypocrisy: the sacrifices and external rituals (Hos. 6: 6), without devotion.



He describes the certainty of the trial (Hos. 9: 1; Hos. 10: 5), the triumph of love and mercy of God (Hos. 11: 1-11; Hos. 14: 1-9) and the infidelity and rebellion of Israel that will result in judgment and destruction (Hos. 11: 12, Hos. 13: 16). His book shows his love for the nation and humanity as well as his love for his wife Gomer, a prostitute,

daughter of Diblaim. And this family relationship reflected the ‘adulterous’ relationship that Israel had to the Lord, worshiping the false gods. His suffering became a mirror of God’s suffering, expressed in the cry: “How can I give you up, Ephraim?” (Hos. 11: 8).

Like all his brethren in the past, Hosea found peace in the Lord through his suffering, that is, in the mismatch with his wife he found God. The time of his prophetic exercise was a period of political instability (more or less, seven kings held the power), when Israel vacillated between and Egypt and Assyria, less toward God (Hos. 5: 13; Hos. 7: 11; Hos. 12: 1). But the hesitation could never save the nation, which ended with the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. Hosea made it very clear what God asked the people (Hos. 6: 6: ‘Hesedh’ or ‘Chesed’, ‘mercy’). In the past, the mercy of God had called Israel (Hos. 11: 1). At present, His mercy was the hope of Israel, which was without moral direction (Hos. 5: 4; Hos. 11: 7) and needed a sincere conversion. In the end, God’s love for His people would be more successful than that of the prophet to Gomer. Both Amos and Hosea show the exile as something that awaited Israel in the future as punishment for his sin.

His children’s names were:

1) Jezreel [Yizre’el (Hos. 1: 4) meaning, ‘God sows’, a contrast to the symbol of this name that would be the condemnation of Israel as for the royal household, for Jezreel was a city of Issachar where the army encamped before the battle of Gilboa; it was also the site of the tragedy of Naboth and his vineyard; there, Joram the king was slain by Jehu as prophesied by Elijah to exterminate the house of Ahab; therefore, Jezreel was a symbol of God’s judgment on the nation, besides being a harbinger of the Day of the Final Judgment: Hos. 1: 11]. Jezreel symbolized the fall of the royal house of Israel.

2) Not loved (Hos. 1: 6, Lo-Ruhamah = ‘Not loved’ or ‘God will not have mercy’).

3) Lo-Ammi (Hos. 1: 9, ‘not my people’), show the displeasure of God with all His people to the point of rejecting them as His people (Lo-Ammi).

Gomer was left alone by the prophet until she no longer clung to her idolatry and lust of the past. It was the same discipline that YHWH was using, abandoning those who didn’t tolerate His conditions until they awakened to the spiritual reality. The lack of knowledge that Israel had of Him had caused all forms of iniquity. Hosea bought Gomer back from her owner, as a second wife or concubine (Hos. 3: 2-3).

Chapter 1

- Hos. 1: 1-11 – Hosea’s marriage, symbol of Israel’s infidelity

• Hos. 1: 1-3: “The word of the Lord that came to Hosea son of Beeri, in the days of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel. When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, ‘Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord’ [NVI: for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD]. So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.”

Hosea exercised his prophetic ministry from 755 to 715 BC, encompassing the reigns of four kings of Judah and seven of Israel. Jeroboam II (782-753 BC) was a wicked king whose rule produced a materialistic society, immoral and unjust. In the time of Jeroboam II (2 Kin. 14: 23-29), the oppression of Syria had diminished over Israel because of the victories God had given to Jehoash, the father of Jeroboam II (2 Kin. 13: 22-25), and he resolved to extend his borders (2 Kin. 14: 25) and to develop profitable trade, which created a powerful class of merchants in Samaria. But wealth was not evenly distributed among the people. It remained in the hands of rich merchants. Oppression against the poor was common (Am. 2: 6). The rich were hardened in heart and indifferent to the afflictions of the hungry (Am. 6: 3-6). Righteousness leaned toward those who could pay higher bribes (Am. 2: 6; Am. 8: 6). In times of drought (Am. 4: 7-9) the poor could only obtain funds from the moneylenders (Am. 5: 11; Am. 8: 4-6) and were forced to mortgage their lands and their people; even their loved ones.

But as a father punishes his children when it is necessary (Deut. 8: 5; Job 5: 17; Prov. 3: 12; Heb. 12: 6-7, Rev. 3: 19), He would punish them for what they did, for their sins (2 Kin. 17: 7-23): they worshiped other gods, instead of worshiping the Lord; they walked in the statutes of the heathen nations, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had introduced (Jeroboam I – 1 Kin. 12: 25-33); they built for themselves high places; they set up for themselves pillars and sacred poles [NIV: sacred stones and Asherah poles] on every high hill and under every green tree for they to worship; they burnt incense in all the high places; they did wicked things, provoking the Lord to anger and served the idols; they made for themselves cast images of two calves; they made a sacred pole, worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. They made their sons and their daughters pass through fire; they used divination and augury. Hence, the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel; he punished them and gave them into the hands of the Assyrians, who plundered them, and He cast them out from His presence.

• v. 2b-3: “Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord [NVI: for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD]’. So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.”

The prophet’s marriage portrays Israel’s unfaithful relationship with his God (Hos. 1: 1 – Hos. 3: 5).

‘A wife of whoredom’ or ‘an adulterous wife’ (NIV) – this hints that Gomer was a prostitute when Hosea married her, or that she would become a prostitute after marrying Hosea. Her children born of her might not have been Hosea’s.

• Hos. 1: 4-5: “And the Lord said to him, ‘Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel [NIV: I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel]. On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.”

Jezreel [Yizre’e’el (Hos. 1: 4) means ‘God sows’, a contrast to the symbol of this name that would be the condemnation of Israel as for the royal household, for Jezreel was a city of Issachar where Joram the king of Israel was slain by Jehu as prophesied by Elijah to exterminate the house of Ahab; therefore, Jezreel was a symbol of God’s judgment over the nation.

‘I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel’ – In 841 BC, by order of God, Jehu destroyed the whole house of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kin. 19: 16-17; 1 Kin. 21: 1-16; 1 Kin. 21: 21-24; 2 Kin. 9: 16; 24; 27; 2 Kin. 10: 6-7; 11). Then he received a word from God: his descendants to the fourth generation would sit upon the throne of Israel (2 Kin. 10: 30; 2 Kin. 14: 8; 2 Kin. 15: 12): Jehu → Jehoahaz → Jehoash → Jeroboam II → Zechariah. Jezreel symbolized the fall of the royal house of Israel.

‘I will break the bow of Israel’ – means to destroy the military power (1 Sam. 2: 4; Ps. 46: 9; Jer. 49: 35).

• Hos. 1: 6-7: “She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the Lord said to him, ‘Name her Lo-ruhamah [NVI: Lo-Ruhamah, which means ‘not loved’], for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen.”

Lo-Ruhamah means ‘Not loved’ or ‘God will not have mercy’, for the Lord would not have mercy on Israel because of their sins. However, He said that He would have mercy on the house of Judah.

‘I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen’ – refers to the miraculous rescue of Judah during the siege of Sennacherib in 701 BC, when his army was completely wiped out by the angel of the Lord (2 Kin. 19: 32-36; 2 Chr. 32: 21-22; Isa. 37: 33-37).

• Hos. 1: 8-9: “When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said, ‘Name him Lo-ammi [NIV: Lo-Ammi, which means ‘not my people’], for you are not my people and I am not your God.”

Lo-Ammi (Hos. 1: 9) means, ‘not my people’, and shows the displeasure of God with all His people to the point of rejecting them as His people.

• Hos. 1: 10-11: “Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people’, it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God’. The people of Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head; and they shall take possession of the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.”

In spite of what the Lord was saying to Hosea, He would not reject His people forever, for He would be faithful to the promise made to Abraham (Gen. 22: 17) and Jacob (Gen. 28: 14; Gen. 32: 12). It is interesting that Rebekah’s family, as she was leaving her house, when she set off for Canaan to be Isaac’s wife, blessed her with the same blessing (Gen. 24: 60).

‘The people of Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head; and they shall take possession of the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel’ – here the bible refers to the coming of Jesus, who would be one head upon them, uniting Israel and Judah under His rule (cf. Hos. 3: 5). Jezreel means: ‘God plants’, ‘God sows’, which means that He Himself would be responsible for planting the new seed of His word in the hearts of His people (Hos. 2: 23; Hos. 3: 5), who would come to seek Him and worship Him as their King.

Chapter 2

- Hos. 2: 1: “Say to your brother, Ammi, and to your sister, Ruhamah [NIV: Say of your brothers, ‘My people’ and of your sisters, ‘My loved one’].”

God’s covenant with His people would be restored again, and His sons and daughters would have other names: ‘My people’ and ‘My loved one’, here called brothers and sisters of the prophet.

- Hos. 2: 2-23 (The infidelity of the people and the faithfulness of God):

- Hos. 2: 2-5: “Plead with your mother, plead—for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband—that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts, or I will strip her naked and expose her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and turn her into a parched land, and kill her with thirst. Upon her children also I will have no pity, because they are children of whoredom [NIV: because they are the children of adultery]. For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully [NVI: Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace]. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers; they give me my bread [NIV: my food] and my water, my wool and my flax [NIV: my linen], my oil and my drink.’”

God tells Hosea about the land of Israel whom He calls His wife, and asks him to rebuke her for his idolatry (‘her whoring’), before He takes away His protection from her and leaves her alone and publicly ashamed (‘I will strip her naked’), without a God to protect her, and remove from her all her sustenance of water (a parched land), and kill her inhabitants (‘children’). God continues to reproach Israel, who, as an adulterous woman, followed other gods and attributed to them her bread, her water and all the blessings of the flocks and crops (‘my wool and my flax [NIV: my linen], my oil and my drink’). This reaction of the Israelite people was similar to what Gomer had done to Hosea. Therefore, their unstable marriage was still a reflection of Israel’s relations with his God.

- Hos. 2: 6-7: “Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns; and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them. Then she shall say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now.’”

From here to v. 13, the Lord gives to the land of Israel a just retribution for her betrayal.

‘Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns; and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths’ – anticipates the exile, when the Israelites would separate themselves from their idols, especially Baal.

‘She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them’ – the people will try to return to their old practices but where they go, they will not be able to find their former gods.

‘I will go and return to my first husband’ – refers to the return to the true God.

- Hos. 2: 8-9: “She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal. Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season; and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness.”

God tells the prophet that Israel needed to know who blessed them, who gave them the wheat, the wine, the oil, the silver, and the gold. Therefore, He would remove from them the blessings of nature, of the fields, and of the flocks, so that they might realize it. The nation's needs would not be met.

- Hos. 2: 10-13: "Now I will uncover her shame in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. I will put an end to all her mirth, her festivals, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her appointed festivals [NIV: I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days – all her appointed festivals]. I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, 'These are my pay, which my lovers have given me'. I will make them a forest [NIV: a thicket], and the wild animals shall devour them. I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals, when she offered incense to them and decked herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, says the Lord."

From now on God would shame His people, causing their joy to cease, as well as their feasts, for the vines and fig trees would not yield their fruit, and Israel would be punished for the countless times that they burned incense to the false gods, and they adorned themselves to celebrate their feasts and their sacrifices, forgetting the Lord. This was for them to realize that it was not their false gods who gave them prosperity in exchange for worship.

The Feast of the New Moon (Num. 28: 11; 14; 1 Sam. 20: 5; 18; 24; Isa. 66: 23; 2 Chr. 8: 13), as well as the Sabbath (Ex. 23: 12; Ex. 35: 1-3), were sacred days, when usual tasks were forbidden, because they were days of rest. The month (yarah or yare'ach = moon) began (Num. 10: 10) when the crescent of the new moon was first seen at sunset. Thus, the New Moon Feast celebrated the beginning of the months.

The word 'ring' refers to rings worn on the ears (Gen. 35: 4; Ex. 32: 2-3) or nose (Gen. 24: 47; Isa. 3: 21; Ezek. 16: 12), very common at that time among women.

- Hos. 2: 14-17: "Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. From there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor (cf. Isa. 65: 10) a door of hope. There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband', and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal' [NIV: 'my master']. For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more [NIV: no longer will their names be invoked]."

Here (v. 14-17), the Lord begins to speak about the restitution of the nation of Israel. First, He says that He will take her to the wilderness, where He will talk to her. This refers to exile or a period of great spiritual deprivation, which can be compared to the desert pilgrimage of Moses' time.

'From there I will give her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor (cf. Isa. 65: 10; Josh. 7: 24-26) a door of hope' – in a foreign land they would remember their vineyards (a symbol of prosperity, peace and divine favor; also, a symbol of the chosen people who were taken from Egypt and planted in a land promised by God) and would have their minds open to understand that away from the Lord there was only distress, but if they sought Him, even in that place of oppression, He would show them His favor, and would renew in them the hope of being able to return to their land and rebuild their lives, being restored from all that they have lost. When we remember what Jeremiah wrote about the Babylonian captivity (Jer. 29: 4-7), we can see that the Babylonians allowed the Jewish exiles to form families, to build houses, to plant gardens, and could consult their own chiefs and the elders (Ezek. 20: 1-44); so they

have learned to live in community. In addition to agriculture, some Jews devoted themselves to trade in order to survive. Therefore, many became accustomed in that land and did not want to return to Israel, even after the release of Cyrus. But when it comes to Assyria, it seems that there was no such thing, for the behavior of the Assyrians was another to the exiles. The Assyrians had very cruel methods of treating their prisoners; they used torture and mutilation and killed them for very little and without any need. They were known by decapitating the vanquished peoples, making pyramids with their skulls; they also crucified or impaled the prisoners, plucked out their eyes and skinned them alive.

Thus the term valley of Achor (cf. Isa. 65: 10; Josh. 7: 24-26) seems to have been well employed, reminding them of the sin of Achan (Josh. 7: 24-26), and of the discipline He had to exert to keep the Israelites on the right way, in order to take possession of the Promised Land. After they had taken Jericho, the Israelites, under the command of Joshua, tried to take the city of Ai, but they were defeated, wounded and persecuted by their citizens. This was because Achan had hidden a good Babylonian robe, two hundred shekels of silver (five pounds) and a wedge of gold weighting fifty shekels (1 ¼ pounds) in the ground inside his tent. Achan means ‘to trouble’ or ‘troublemaker’, and derives from Achor or Achar, in Hebrew, also derived from the verb = cākhar = to trouble, to afflict, to grieve. Therefore, Achar (‘ākhar) means man of tribulation, man of affliction. As a punishment of God, he, his family, his cattle, his tent and his belongings were burned in the valley of Achor. And all Israel stoned them and burned them. This was necessary to cleanse the nation from the stain of sin generated by the disobedience and rebellion of one man. Therefore, the valley of Achor would be known as ‘the valley of tribulation’ or ‘the valley of affliction.’



The valley of Achor in the Wadi Qelt in Israel



Details of Saint George Monastery

The valley of Achor (Josh 7: 24-26; Isa. 65: 10; Hos. 2: 25), on the border of Judah (Josh. 15: 7), is probably the Wadi Qelt, located 1.6 km south of Jericho. We can see today in this Wadi a Byzantine Christian monastery called Saint George Monastery, built in 340 CE and destroyed by the Persians in 614 CE (the Sassanian dynasty: 224–651). It was rebuilt and abandoned in the 12th century and finally rebuilt and inhabited by Greek-Orthodox monks in the 19th century. Its name in Arabic is Mar Jaras.

What God spoke to the captive Israelites in Assyria is that the valley of affliction would be transformed into a door of hope when the exiles passed by it on their return to the land of Canaan, as in the past it had been a door of hope for those who were entering in the land of God's promise.

When the bible speaks 'from there' or 'there' it may also mean 'from the moment of their repentance', that is, from the repentance of Israel. For repentant Israel, after passing through the valley of Achor (through tribulation and anguish), there will be a door of hope, which may perhaps also be interpreted as the first coming of Jesus, who brought to His hopeless people a new chance and a new hope of redemption (cf. Jer. 31: 31-34).

'There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt' – it means a regeneration of the nation in her relationship with the Lord in purity, when He took her out of the land of Egypt. To Him, she was pure at that time. Therefore, in the 'wilderness', in the exile in Assyria (or in the spiritual desert), God would purify her from her idolatry and she would hear Him and respond to Him again.

'On that day' – the day of the repentance of the nation.

"On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband', and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal' [NIV: 'my master']. For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more [NIV: no longer will their names be invoked]" – In Gen. 18: 3, we can see that Abraham used a common word in

the sense of servants and masters, which was 'adhon ('lord, master') or 'adhoni or 'adni' ('my lord'). However, there was another common word for 'lord' or 'husband', which was baal ('lord, master, owner or husband.') used by women to call their husbands: my 'baal', i.e., my lord, my husband. But the word 'lord' was also used for the false gods of Canaan, Phoenicia, Syria, Mesopotamia and all surrounding regions, especially Baal. When the Israelites entered Canaan they noticed that each part of the land had its own deity, its 'owner' or 'lord.' So, there were many 'Baals.' The Hebrew plural be'âlim appears in English as 'Baals' (1 Kin. 18: 18). The Hebrew God was the 'Lord' or 'husband' of the Israelites, and therefore they called him 'baal', and this led to a great confusion between the worship of the one true and living God and the rituals of Baal. So it became essential to call the Lord by a different name, like 'ish (יֵשׁ – Hos. 2: 16-17), which means 'husband' or 'man'. That's the reason for this guidance from the Lord in this verse. Israel would call God 'My Husband' ('ish), no longer 'my Baal', 'my master', 'my lord', as the nation got used to call this false god. The Lord would not admit to being called by the name of a pagan god.

- Hos. 2: 18: "I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety."

The Lord assures that there will be peace, and the wild animals (verse 12) will no longer devour the vines and the fig trees. There will be peace on the land when the Lord decides to act and free them from exile. Hostile armies will no longer invade Israelite territory.

'On that day' – it may be on the day of the return from exile, after the repentance of Israel, or in the days of the gospel that the Lord was already preparing for His people to know Him and to live in peace with God.

- Hos. 2: 19-20: "And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy [NIV: I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion]. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord [NIV: you will acknowledge the LORD]."

Marrying someone means to commit to that person. The union of God with His nation whom He calls wife will be a covenant of faithfulness, justice, mercy, love and compassion. And it will be an everlasting covenant. In a sincere and loving relationship, His people will know the Lord, not in an intellectual but emotional and spiritual way, in the heart, through new experiences with Him (cf. Jer. 31: 34).

- Hos. 2: 21-23: "On that day I will answer, says the Lord, I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel; and I will sow him [*Israel*] for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah, and I will say to Lo-ammi, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God' [NIV: I will plant her [*the nation of Israel*] for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved on. I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

'On that day' – the days of the gospel: grace, renewal of God's covenant with His people. He will cause the heavens to send the rain to the earth, and the earth makes the seeds of the vine, the wheat, and the olive tree sprout. More than natural and material

blessings, He will give them the blessing of having their covenant with Him renewed, and they will become His people and He will be their God and have mercy on them.

‘I will sow him [*Israel*] for myself in the land’ – God will multiply them on earth like seeds that are sown. Jezreel means ‘God sows’, so the word was used here as a symbol of that sowing, as a symbol of Israel.

Chapter 3

- Hos. 3: 1-5 – Hosea’s reconciliation with his wife

- Hos. 3: 1-2: “The Lord said to me again, ‘Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes’ [NIV: the sacred raisin cakes]. So I bought her for fifteen shekels [6 ounces or 170 grams] of silver and a homer of barley and a measure of wine” [NIV: ‘So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer [about 220 liters; American measure] and a letheke of barley’; note: letheke is probably about 10 bushels, i.e., 330 liters].”

Still in this chapter, the marriage of the prophet portrays Israel’s relationship with his God.

The Lord told Hosea to conquer Gomer again, implying His intention to redeem Israel. If he bought her, it means that she was property of another man.

‘So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver’, that is, half the price of a slave (Ex. 21: 32). The purchase of Gomer by Hosea symbolized God’s great love, which moves Him to seek reconciliation even when, for this, He has to humble Himself (Phil. 2: 8). The only difference between the price that Hosea paid for Gomer and what Jesus paid for us was the value of the purchase. The price He paid for our lives was quite high. He bought us from the hands of the devil with His own life, for to Him we are worth more than the price of a slave.

‘Raisins cakes’ or ‘the sacred raisin cakes’ were probably to be used in worshipping the fertility gods of the Canaanites.

- Hos. 3: 3-4: “And I said to her, ‘You must remain as mine for many days; you shall not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you’. For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim [NIV: without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods].”

This wait that Hosea was talking about Gomer represented the exile of Israel, when the nation wouldn’t have leader anymore, nor chance to perform the sacrifices to their gods. The sacred stones or pillars were used by the Canaanites in their worship of Baal and other gods (1 Kin. 14: 23; 2 Kin. 3: 2; 2 Kin. 10: 26-27; 2 Kin. 17:10).

The ephod was the garment worn by the high priest (Ex. 28: 4-30) and contained two stones (the Urim and Thummim) by which the Lord was consulted [Ex. 28: 30 (Aaron); 1 Sam. 23: 6; 9-14 (David and Abiathar)], but it was not mixed with pagan worship or used for ‘divination.’ In the case of Hosea it is mentioned to show the type of idolatry in the northern kingdom when this prophecy was made. In Judg. 17: 1; 4-6; 7; 9-12; Judg. 18: 14, 17, 18, 19, 20; 30, the ephod is mentioned along with a young Levite from Bethlehem in Judah and the images of Micah, an Ephraimite man who hired him to be a priest in his household. These images were ‘household idols’ or ‘household gods’ (Hebrew: Teraphim or Traphiyim – Strong’s #8655: family idol; image (of an idol); idols ; idolatry); as the idols of Gen. 31: 19, 30, 32, 35 (Laban’s idols stolen by Rachel); 2 Kin. 23: 24 (destroyed by Josiah), used in the practice of divination.

- Hos. 3: 5: “Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter

days [NIV: They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days].”

‘David their king’ – a reference to Jesus. For the Jews, the figure of the Messiah was that of the Davidic Messiah, so all prophets refer to Jesus in this way, even though they did not understand that God would bring His salvation in another way; but God knew, and that’s what matters, and He used that vision present in the midst of His people by referring to His Son.

‘In the latter days’ – in the time of the Messiah, at the time of the gospel, when those who believed would draw near to Jesus and His goodness, because they needed His blessings. ‘They shall come in awe’ or ‘they will come trembling’ expresses the reverence and fear of God in the hearts of contrite Jews.

Many prophets referred to Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of David: ‘the stump of Jesse’ or ‘the root of Jesse’ (Is 11: 1-10); ‘Righteous Branch’ (Jer. 23: 5; Jer. 33: 15). Others call the Messiah by the name of David (Jer. 30: 9; Ezek. 34: 23-24; Ezek. 37: 24-25).

The Northern Kingdom (Israel) rejected the reign of David (the Southern Kingdom – Judah) in its rebellion against Rehoboam (1 Kin. 12: 16-19). Israel’s return to God would involve the union of Israel and Judah with the recognition of the David’s dynasty established by the Lord.

Chapter 4

- Hos. 4: 1-19 – The corruption of Israel

From here, Hosea denounces the corruption, pride and idolatry of Israel (4: 1 – 7: 16; 8: 4). Then, by his evil deeds, Israel is reproved before God.

- Hos. 4: 1-2: “Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel; for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land [NIV: because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land]. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed [NIV: There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed].”

‘The Lord has an indictment’ – indictment refers to a formal complaint which accuses Israel of breaking the covenant with God.

‘There is no... knowledge of God’ – not the intellectual knowledge but the acknowledgment of His authority as the Lord who made the covenant with Israel. More than that, the personal revelation of His character, the revealed information about His person and His intentions toward them.

Swearing (NIV: ‘cursing’) may refer to the misuse of the Lord’s name in oaths and blasphemies (Ex. 20: 7). But Hosea lists other sins that seem to be the most frequent: lying, murder, stealing and adultery [NIV: There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed].

- Hos. 4: 3-6: “Therefore the land mourns [NIV: the land dries up], and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing. Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest [NIV: But let no one bring a charge, let no one accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest]. You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night [NIV: You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you], and I will destroy your mother. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”

Because of all that, the land will be dry and barren and the animals will die of hunger, the wild animals, the birds and the fish.

Then the Lord speaks that no one questions or accuses the priests because the people are equal to them, and the one who can accuse them is He. The priests and the prophets stumble day and night because of their neglect of the law. They failed in the true teaching, and so the people did not have the knowledge of God.

‘I will destroy your mother’ – God will destroy the rebellious nation that refuses to listen to Him and rejects His commandments and His correction.

‘I also will forget your children’ – refers to the destruction of the priestly lineage.

- Hos. 4: 7-9: “The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; they changed their glory into shame. They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity. And it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways, and repay them for their deeds.”

The more numerous the priests were the more sin there would be, so the Lord would turn their honor into shame. They stimulated sin and took pleasure in it. The priesthood was a great honor, but the wicked priests of Israel stained this honor.

‘They feed on the sin of my people’ means not only the pleasure in the moral error of the Israelites, but the priests accepted the flesh of the hypocritical sacrifices of the worshipers because of their greed and covetousness (Hos. 6: 9; Hos. 8: 11-13).

The people and the priests were equal, ‘birds of the same feather.’ There was no difference between the moral level of the priests and the lay people. They would be punished, everyone. In fact, the children of Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam I had committed (1 Kin. 12: 25-33). Fearing that the people would return to worship in Jerusalem and return to Rehoboam, the king of Israel made two golden calves and told the people that these were the gods who brought them up out of the land of Egypt. He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. He also made houses on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not Levites. They burnt incense there. At his pleasure Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the Feast of Tabernacles that was celebrated in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar to the calves that he had made in Bethel and Dan. The people and kings of Israel followed his example for two centuries.

These were the idolatrous priests ministering in Israel, no longer the Levites priests instituted by God, for the bible says that they fled to Rehoboam when Jeroboam I began to make religious reforms and expelled them from Israel so that they no longer ministered to the Lord (2 Chr. 11: 13-17).

- Hos. 4: 10-11: “They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply; because they have forsaken the Lord to devote themselves to whoredom. Wine and new wine take away the understanding [NIV: They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not flourish, because they have deserted the LORD to give themselves to prostitution; old wine and new wine take away their understanding].”

There would be no blessing on them because they had forsaken the Lord. They would not be satisfied with food, and though they yielded to sensuality, they would not bring forth seed, for it was not Baal who would give them that. They had given themselves to wine, which took away the discernment of spiritual things, and consequently the people were also deprived of that understanding. In this verse, lust refers to prostitution associated with the worship of Baal, as wine was used in the worship to him.

- Hos. 4: 12-14: “My people consult a piece of wood, and their divining rod gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have played the whore, forsaking their God [NIV: My people consult a wooden idol, and a diviner’s rod speaks to them. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God]. They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and make offerings upon the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your daughters-in-law commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with whores, and sacrifice with temple prostitutes [NIV: because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes]; thus a people without understanding comes to ruin.”

Hosea speaks here of the spiritual prostitution he referred before. The Israelites consulted the idols and thought they were receiving the answers to their questions.

‘Their divining rod’ refers to the wooden idols that the people consulted. The spirit of prostitution which he spoke of was the tendency to idolatry, which led them away from God and made them sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn incense to the idols on the hills and under the oaks and terebinths. The idols consisted of stone pillars and wooden poles. Wine was used in worship of Baal, as well as divination, sacrifices, and sexual rites. There was cultic prostitution [NRSV: temple prostitutes; NIV: shrine prostitution] along with the spiritual prostitution to which the prophet refers. But God says He would not punish women because of this, since men also committed adultery with whores. The people had no understanding.



Terebinth (*Pistacia terebinthus* or *Pistacia palaestina*)



Terebinth flower (*Pistacia terebinthus* or *Pistacia palaestina*)

‘Under oak, poplar, and terebinth’ – the Hebrew words used here are: ’allown (oak; Strong #437), libneh (poplar; Strong #3839) and ’elâ (elah; Strong #424), translated in KJV as ‘elms’, or in NIV/NRSV, as ‘terebinth.’ In fact, the ‘elm’ as the translation for terebinth is wrong. The elm tree is not native to Palestine, but is more frequent in the Iberian Peninsula. In Hebrew, the word used for terebinth may be the same for ‘oak’, that is, ‘allâ, ’allôn (or ’allown) and ’elâ. It can also be translated as linden, but linden

tree does not grow in the Middle East nowadays, where the bible verses are now describing. The linden tree is native to northern Europe and Asia. However, the terebinth is present in the warm and dry hills of Palestine, but is also native to the Mediterranean region such as Morocco, Portugal and the Canary Islands; also present in Turkey and Syria. Terebinth (*Pistacia terebinthus* or *Pistacia palaestina*), as described in Isa. 6: 1-13, is a deciduous tree, small, up to six meters high, looking like a shrub, and having flowers. Its leaves are ten to twenty centimeters long, and its flowers are reddish-purple in color, blooming in the spring. Its small fruits are pulpy, of five to seven centimeters in length, and whose color varies from red to black when ripe. The resin of the plant has a strong and penetrating odor, from which turpentine is extracted, possibly the oldest source of this compound. Turpentine is a solvent widely used in mixing paints, varnishes and in liniment. The terebinth is an isolated tree, that is, it does not grow in forests. In Ancient times, idolatrous practices were common under terebinths.

Oak (cf. Isa. 3: 13; Isa. 61: 3) is a tree of the genus *Quercus*, which has twenty-four species in Palestine. The oak was the favorite tree under whose shade the Israelites sat down (1 Kin. 13: 14) or buried their dead (Gen. 35: 8; 1 Chr. 10: 12) or idols, as did Jacob, who buried the idols of his clan when he left Shechem for Bethel: Gen. 35: 2-4. Its hardwood was not employed in construction. It was used in the making of oars (Ezek. 27: 6) and carved images (Isa. 44: 14-15). Bashan was a region full of oaks (Isa. 2: 13; Ezek. 27: 6; Zech. 11: 2). Some species are perennially green, but most change leaves annually (Isa. 6: 13). It is a vigorous and hardwood tree that lives many centuries. Therefore, it symbolizes power, strength, longevity, stability and determination.



Oak (*Quercus pedunculata* B.)

As for the word poplar (KJV; NIV), the Hebrew word is *libhneh* or *libneh* (Strong #3839), which means: some kind of whitish tree, perhaps the stacte or poplar. However, it does not seem to be the case of the stacte, the tree from which the aromatic gum was extracted to make the sacred incense used in the Tabernacle, for the Hebrew word for stacte is *nātāph* (Ex 30: 34), *Styrax officinalis* (one of the hundred and thirty species of the genus *Styrax*, distributed throughout Palestine). *Populus* L. is a genus to which about 40 tree or shrub species of the family *Salicaceae* belong (to which the willow also belongs), commonly known as poplar. The poplar provides a dense shade, and when planted in the woods it might serve well to the pagan rites mentioned in Hos. 4: 13. The phrase written in Hos. 14: 5 ('he [*Israel*] shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon') is

translated into English version (RSV) as: 'he shall strike root as the poplar.' It is a characteristic tree of the northern hemisphere forests, but also present in more temperate regions, usually along rivers or in swampy areas. The leaves fall in winter and in some species they turn yellow before they fall. These trees have invasive roots, and can pierce water pipes. Roots often give rise to new trees and, for this reason, these species can survive fires.



Poplar Forest

- Hos. 4: 15-16: “Though you play the whore, O Israel, do not let Judah become guilty. Do not enter into Gilgal, or go up to Beth-aven [note NIV: Beth Aven means ‘house of wickedness’, a name for Bethel, which means ‘house of God’], and do not swear, ‘As the Lord lives’. Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn; can the Lord now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture? [NIV: How then can the LORD pasture them like lambs in a meadow?]”

Israel had become guilty, but the Lord warned Judah not to follow the example of his northern brethren, nor to come to worship in Gilgal or Bethel (here called by the pejorative name of Beth-aven, ‘house of iniquity’ or ‘house of wickedness’), for in these places were the idolatrous shrines. With the rebellion of Israel the Lord could no longer treat them like a flock of lambs in the meadow; they had become very independent to be guided by His hand.

Gilgal, which from the beginning of the Israelites’ entry into the land of Canaan was a great center for the righteous deeds of God (Josh. 4: 20, Josh. 5: 9-10, Josh. 14: 6; Judg. 2: 1; 1 Sam. 7: 16; 1 Sam. 15: 12; 22-23; 26-31; 33-35; 2 Kin. 2: 1; Mic. 6: 5) had now become an idolatrous worship center linked to Bethel by an important road (2 Kin. 2: 1-2). Not only Hosea rebuked Gilgal (Hos. 4: 15; Hos. 9: 15; Hos. 12: 11) but also Amos (Am. 4: 4. Am. 5: 5).

Gilgal and Bethel were centers of worship created by Jeroboam I (from the time of the split of the nation into two kingdoms) and followed by all the other kings of Israel. Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba became centers of corrupt worship. Bethel was in the tribe of Ephraim; Gilgal, in the territory of Western Manasseh, near the border of

Ephraim; and Beersheba, in the south, in the territory of Simeon. As for Dan, where was the other golden calf of Jeroboam I, it was to the north of Israel, in the tribe of Naphtali.

- Hos. 4: 17-19: “Ephraim is joined to idols—let him alone. When their drinking is ended, they indulge in sexual orgies; they love lewdness more than their glory [NIV: Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution; their rulers dearly love shameful ways]. A wind has wrapped them in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their altars [NIV: A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame].”

Ephraim, one of the greatest tribes of Israel, is mentioned in this verse to represent the entire Northern Kingdom.

‘Let him alone’ – an expression of frustration or resignation of those who have nothing else to do to change someone or some situation. This reflected Israel’s rebellion against God.

‘A wind has wrapped them in its wings’ or ‘A whirlwind will sweep them away’ – symbolizes the wind of divine judgment, driving them into exile and shaming them because of their idolatry.

Chapter 5

- Hos. 5: 1-14 – Rebuke against priests and princes (NIV: Judgment against Israel)

Hosea continues to denounce the corruption, pride and idolatry of Israel (4: 1 – 7: 16; 8: 4), by which Israel is reproved before God.

- Hos. 5: 1: “Hear this, O priests! Give heed, O house of Israel! Listen, O house of the king! For the judgment pertains to you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor,... [*Mount Tabor*].”

The prophet begins by summoning the people, the king’s house and the priests to listen to him, for the judgment of God is for all of them. By their idolatrous and unjust behavior, the leaders, especially the priests, imprisoned souls like hunters catching birds in their traps, for they promoted pagan worship in the high mountains of Israel.

Mount Tabor is a hill on the plain of Jezreel at 562 meters above sea level, facing the Mediterranean and southwest of the Sea of Galilee. An idolatrous sanctuary was established there in the days of Hosea (Hos. 5: 1) and therefore he says that it says that Israel was ‘net spread upon Tabor.’

Mizpah is a village in Gilead, to the east of the Jordan, and some authors think it is Ramoth-gilead, but still unproven. It is different from the city of Mizpah in Benjamin (Josh. 18:26) near Gibeon and Ramah (1 Kin. 15: 22). Benjamin was part of the kingdom of Judah, the southern kingdom.

- Hos. 5: 2: “and a pit dug deep in Shittim; but I will punish all of them [NIV: The rebels are knee-deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them].”

The rebels were probably the leaders and priests who had rebelled against God by rejecting His commandments. Slaughter may refer to their acts of violence or to the pagan sacrifices. The Lord would not let this go unpunished.

- Hos. 5: 3-4: “I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore; Israel is defiled [NIV: Israel is corrupt]. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them [NIV: in their heart], and they do not know the Lord [NIV: they do not acknowledge the LORD].”

The prophet uses again the word ‘whoredom’ to refer to the idolatrous worship of that people and their leaders, and says that God knows them deeply; He knows their nature, tending to idolatry, and therefore they are defiled. They do not know the Lord.

- Hos. 5: 5-7: “Israel’s pride testifies against him; Ephraim stumbles in his guilt; Judah also stumbles with them. With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them. They have dealt faithlessly with the Lord; for they have borne illegitimate children. Now the new moon shall devour them along with their fields [NIV: When they celebrate their New Moon feasts, he will devour their fields].”

‘They have dealt faithlessly with the Lord; for they have borne illegitimate children’ – this means treachery, fraud, offense. In an act of treason against the Lord the children of Judah worshiped strange gods and forgot Him, hence the expression ‘illegitimate children’, because God ceased to be their Father.

The Feast of the New Moon, commemorating the beginning of the months, would be for them all, now, a moment of affliction, not of rejoicing. Their fields, by God's permission, would be invaded by wild animals and foreigner armies, which would devour it (Hos. 2: 11-12; Hos. 11: 6).

At this stage of the prophecy, Hosea not only mentions the error of Israel, condemning himself, but says that Judah followed his example (2 Kin. 17: 19); so, we may think that the kings of Israel that Hosea was addressing to could be Pekah or Hoshea, contemporaries of Ahaz, when Judah absorbed the acts of idolatry of the northern kingdom and its neighbors, like Syria.

What is known from the biblical account is that in the days of Ahaz he made altars everywhere in Jerusalem and Judah (2 Chr. 28: 24-25; 2 Kin. 16: 4) and burned his own sons in sacrifice (2 Kin. 16: 3; 2 Chr. 28: 3). Uriah (2 Kin. 16: 10; 11; 15-16) was the priest who built the idolatrous altar (2 Kin. 16: 10-12) in accordance with all that King Ahaz had seen in Damascus when he went there to meet Tiglath-Pileser III, being summoned to pay him tribute. This led to the worship of Syrian deities within the temple of Jerusalem (2 Chr. 28: 23); Ahaz gathered together the utensils of the house of God, and cut them in pieces. He shut up the doors of the house of the Lord and made altars in every corner of Jerusalem (2 Chr. 28: 24). The idolatrous altar like that he saw in Damascus was set it in the house of the Lord. The bronze altar that was before the Lord he removed from the front of the house, from the place between his altar and the house of the Lord, and put it on the north side of his altar. He made sacrifices on the new altar (2 Kin. 16: 10-18). In addition, the king made altars in all places of Jerusalem and Judah (2 Chr. 28: 24-25; 2 Kin. 16: 4). So, not only Pekah and Rezin came against him. The Edomites invaded Judah and carried away captives. And the Philistines (2 Chr. 28: 18) also made raids on the cities in the south of Judah and took some villages, because the Lord humbled Ahaz, mainly because of his sins of idolatry (2 Chr. 28: 17-19).

- Hos. 5: 8-15 – This passage probably refers to the period of the Syro-Ephraimite war (734-732 BC – 2 Kin. 16: 5-9; Isa. 7: 1-9), when Israel fought to become independent of Syrian rule but failed.

- Hos. 5: 8-9: “Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; look behind you, Benjamin! Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment; among the tribes of Israel I declare what is sure.”

‘Sound an alarm with the trumpets’ – a trumpet blast warning of an attack and summoning the soldiers to battle (Num. 10: 9).

Gibeah was a city in Benjamin, and became famous as the birthplace of Saul (1 Sam. 10: 26), ‘Gibeah of Saul’ (1 Sam. 11: 4; Isa. 10: 29). It can be identified with the archaeological site of Tell el-Ful, which is about nine miles to the north of Jerusalem.

Ramah here is the city of the territory of Benjamin, also to the north of Jerusalem. Ramah of Benjamin was near Bethel, in the area of Gibeon (Josh. 18: 25). Ramah, mentioned here in Hos. 5: 8, is the same Ramah of Isaiah 10: 29 and Jeremiah 31: 15 (cf. Matt. 2: 18). It can be identified with Er-Ram, five miles north of Jerusalem, near Rachel's tomb (Gen. 35: 19, Jer. 31: 15 (cf. Mt 2: 18); 1 Sam. 10: 2).

Beth-aven refers to Bethel in Ephraim.

The prophet claims that he was making known to them what would happen. He warns Benjamin that Ephraim had become desolated by the enemy army, which sought to invade Judah; probably Tiglath-Pileser III, who conquered three regions of Israel between 734-732 BC: Zebulun, Naphtali, and Galilee. Damascus was captured in 732

BC and was reduced to subsidiary town within the Assyrian province of Hamath. He also reduced the kingdom of northern Israel to the hill country of Ephraim, and Samaria was its capital. Besides having killed Rezin, king of Syria, Tiglath-Pileser III confirmed the kingdom to Hoshea, who killed Pekah (2 Kin. 15: 29; 2 Kin. 17: 1), and let him rule in Samaria. The Assyrian king intended to come to Judah and then invade Jerusalem. Even though they had not entered the Holy City (Isa. 37: 6-7; 33-35), the Assyrians came and destroyed much of the land of Judah (2 Kin. 18: 13; 2 Chr. 32: 1-2; Isa. 8: 8; Isa. 36: 1-3).

The Lord stated that the announced judgment would be an irrevocable decree.

- Hos. 5: 10-11: “The princes of Judah have become like those who remove the landmark [NIV: who move boundary stones]; on them I will pour out my wrath like water [NIV: like a flood of water]. Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after vanity [NIV: Ephraim is oppressed, trampled in judgment, intent on pursuing idols].”

‘Landmarks’ were stones laid by landowners to demarcate the boundaries of their property. If a thief decided to get hold of someone’s land, it was only to change the landmarks. The law forbade this, because to invade someone’s land was a violation of rights, and would result in God’s judgment (Deut. 19: 14; Deut. 27: 17, Job 24: 2, Prov. 22: 28; Prov. 23: 10; 1 Kin. 21: 16-19).

‘The princes of Judah have become like those who remove the landmark’ – it refers especially to Ahaz and his courtiers, who overthrew every political order and religion of their ancestors to serve other gods as well, and worse, invading the temple of Lord and placing there the gods of Damascus (2 Chr. 28: 23). He gathered together the utensils of the house of God, and cut them in pieces, shutting up its doors (2 Chr. 28: 24) and making himself an idolatrous altar like that he saw in Damascus, setting it to the south of the bronze altar and sacrificing on his new altar (2 Kin. 16: 10-18). In addition, the king made altars everywhere in Jerusalem and Judah (2 Chr. 28: 24-25; 2 Kin. 16: 4) and burned his own sons in sacrifice (2 Kin. 16: 3; 2 Chr. 28: 3), according to the abominations of the heathen. So, not only Pekah and Rezin came against him. The Edomites invaded Judah and carried away captives. And the Philistines (2 Chr. 28: 18) also made raids on the cities in the south of Judah and took some villages, because the Lord humbled Ahaz, mainly because of his sins of idolatry (2 Chr. 28: 17-19).

‘Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after vanity [NIV: Ephraim is oppressed, trampled in judgment, intent on pursuing idols]’ – the northern kingdom was crushed by the Assyrians.

- Hos. 5: 12-13: “Therefore I am like maggots to Ephraim [NIV: I am like a moth to Ephraim], and like rottenness to the house of Judah. When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king [NIV: and sent to the great king for help]. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound.”

The moth destroys the clothes. In the same way the Lord would destroy Israel, the tribes of the north. From the time of Jeroboam I, He had already been doing this. And like rottenness, He would act destroying the kingdom of Judah. This means: consuming it secretly.

The two nations became corrupted, seeking political alliances to get rid of the invaders, but ended up worse than they were before.

‘Ephraim saw his sickness ... then Ephraim went to Assyria’ – At the time of Menahem he gave Pul king of Assyria (Tiglath-Pileser III) 1,000 talents of silver to help

him to consolidate his kingdom, and the enemy left the land (2 Kin. 15: 19-20). His sickness signifies a weakness, like consumption, threatening him with death.

‘And Judah his wound’ – In the time of Ahaz, to get rid of the invasion by Rezin of Syria, and Pekah of Israel, he made an alliance with Tiglath-Pileser III. So the Assyrian king marched up against Damascus, and took it, and killed Rezin. In exchange for the favors that Tiglath-Pileser had given him, Ahaz took silver and gold from the temple, the royal house, and the house of the princes, and gave them to the Assyrian king (2 Kin. 16: 7-9; 2 Chr. 28: 20-21), but later he was summoned to pay tribute to this one.

- Hos. 5: 14-15: “For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I myself will tear and go away [NVI: I will tear them to pieces and go away]; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue [NIV: I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them]. I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face. In their distress they will beg my favor [NIV: in their misery they will earnestly seek me]....”

The Lord will be like a lion that shatters both Israel and Judah because of their betrayal. Then the Lord will withdraw from them until there is repentance and they seek Him. When they are distressed, they will seek Him. This verse gives sequence to Chapter 6, whose title is ‘Israel unrepentant.’

Chapter 6

- Hos. 6: 1-11 – Israel unrepentant

- Hos. 6: 1-3: “Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up [NIV: he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds]. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him [NIV: on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence]. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth [NIV: he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.”

Here we see the people who were afflicted by the Lord exhorting one another, and acknowledging that He was the author of the wound, because of their sins. Thus, they would seek the renewal of the covenant with God. He made the wound and He will heal it.

‘After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up’ – this concerns a short period of time in which their restoration takes place, for when God sees repentance in the hearts of His children, He readily performs the healing of their souls and restores their relationship with Him (Deut. 30: 1-3).

By dying on the cross Jesus accomplished a great victory over darkness. But the victory went further, when after His death He stayed in the tomb for three days, as Jonah in the belly of the fish, and rose from that place and showed Himself alive again.

Hos. 6: 1-2 (cf. Lk. 24: 46; 1 Cor. 15: 3-4) is a reference to the cross: “Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.” The ‘yesterday’ in our lives, when we were in ‘Egypt’ (the world) and did not know Jesus, was a moment when God struck us down and torn us so that we could approach Him and be redeemed and healed. ‘After two days he will revive us’ speaks of ‘today’ (the second day) when we have Jesus and we are strengthened by His power and His grace that work in us. And ‘the third day’ refers to our future that is logically linked to our choice of today to walk with Him and serve Him, that is, to the resurrection and eternal life. Hence, it is important to live everyday our ‘today’ in His presence, because this way our past will be only a testimony of victory, healing and deliverance; now there is no condemnation on our lives. The present is our moment of victory and resurrection of the problems of ‘yesterday’, and our future will always be glorious because it was generated and shaped by our attitudes of our present time. We will live eternally with Him. According to Jewish interpretation up to the 1st century, the 1st day corresponded to the time of sin; the 2nd day, the day of God’s forgiveness, and the 3rd, the time of the redemption of God’s people.

After these verses from Hosea, the Lord tells us to continue in our knowledge of Him, for His coming is certain (‘his appearing is as sure as the dawn’). This not only refers to His first coming when He would pour the Holy Spirit on those who believed in Him (‘showers’), but to His second coming (‘the spring rains that water the earth’). It is interesting to realize that both prophets (Hosea and Joel) mention the early and later rains (NIV: autumn and spring rains).

In the bible, the terms ‘early rain’ and ‘later rain’ (‘spring rains’ written in this text) are used as a symbol of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and are related to the annual rainy season in Palestine. The early rain fell during autumn (October, early winter) in

time to sow the land, thus ensuring the harvest of winter. It was the time of planting. This rain was necessary for the seed to germinate, for the seed to sprout. The later rain fell during the first weeks of spring (April, early summer) before harvest, and it was necessary to make the plantation ripen for harvest. In other words, it was the period of ripening and the harvest of the fruit. Symbolically, the early rain means the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that happened at the beginning of the Early Church (Acts 2: 1-47). This manifestation of the Holy Spirit came to germinate the seed of the Gospel that was being sown. In other words: the early rain enabled the apostles to do God's prodigious work. The later rain represents the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to be manifested in the last days of the history of mankind and will prepare the ground for the harvest that Christ will accomplish in His 2nd coming (Hosea 6: 3; Hosea 10: 12; Joel 2: 23):

- Hos. 6: 3: "Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the **spring rains** that water the earth."

- Joel 2: 23: "O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication [NIV: the autumn rains in righteousness], he has poured down for you abundant rain, **the early and the later rain**, as before [NIV: both **autumn and spring rains**, as before]."

Therefore, we need to receive the early rain that the Holy Spirit poured and wants to continue to pour upon us so that we may receive the later rain for the Rapture, that is, a special force to preach the gospel as the last chance of repentance given the man before the Divine Judgment. It is to separate definitely those who are destined for salvation.

As a summary of all this, we can say that we should let the Holy Spirit do the work in our souls as in a land that needs to be tilled and sown in order to bear fruit, even though we seem wounded by God. He Himself will heal our wounds, because it was necessary for our growth. Secondly, we must be open to His spiritual revival, seeking the gifts of the Holy Spirit and being instruments in His hands to continue the work that was started by Jesus.



• Hos. 6: 4: “What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.”

Here the Lord again makes a new speech against this people, for it seems that their love is still small, and soon ends. He asks what He should do with them because of this instability of heart. Israel’s love could be unstable, but God’s love is unchangeable.

• Hos. 6: 5-7: “Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light [NIV: the sun]. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. But at Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me [NIV: they were unfaithful to me there].”

Then, Hosea continues denouncing the corruption, pride and idolatry of Israel (4: 1 – 7: 16; 8: 4); therefore the nation is reproved before God.

Because of this unstable love, God had rebuked them through His prophets, and His words were very hard, almost killing them. His judgment flashed and would still flash like light [NIV: sun]; would be sudden and evident. He was fed up with burnt offerings and sacrifices; what He most wanted was for them to practice mercy and had knowledge of Him. And such knowledge would only be possible after the abandonment of idolatrous practices, for this way He would turn to them with His favor and forgiveness; He would reveal Himself to them. This would imply in the acknowledgment of the Lord’s authority and therefore obedience to His commandments.

God repeats again that just as Adam did in Eden, they transgressed the covenant that He had made. They dealt faithlessly with Him, that is, they behaved treacherously toward Him; His own people betrayed Him when they decided to worship other gods.

• Hos. 6: 8-9: “Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood [NIV: stained with footprints of blood]. As robbers lie in wait for someone, so the priests are banded together; they murder on the road to Shechem, they commit a monstrous crime [NIV: As marauders lie in ambush for a victim, so do bands of priests; they murder on the road to Shechem, carrying out their wicked schemes].”

‘Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood [NIV: stained with footprints of blood]’ – this refers to the murder of Pekahiah by Pekah (2 Kin. 15: 23-25). However, Gilead also suffered at the hands of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC). He conquered three regions of Israel between 734-732 BC: Zebulun, Naphtali and Galilee (2 Kin. 15: 29: “In the days of King Pekah of Israel, King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria”). The cities of Naphtali that were conquered are Ijom (1 Kin. 15: 20; 2 Kin. 15: 29; 2 Chr. 16: 4, to north of Naphtali), Abel-Beth-Maacah (or Abel Beth Maacah, 1 Kin. 15: 20; 2 Kin. 15: 29; 2 Chr. 16: 4 – called Abel-Maim; Abel-Beth-Maacah = ‘meadow of the house of oppression’), Janoah (2 Kin. 15: 29. Janoah means ‘rest’), Kedesh (2 Kin. 15: 29) and Hazor (2 Kin. 15: 29. It means ‘village.’ It is southwest of Lake Huleh or Hula, in Galilee).

The city of the region of Gilead which the prophet refers to is probably Ramoth-Gilead, in the tribe of Gad, almost on the border with East Manasseh, in the hill country of Gilead (1 Kin. 4: 13; Gen. 31: 21- 25). Ramoth-Gilead was one of the six cities of refuge for the murderer, along with Hebron, Kedesh, Shechem, Bezer, and Golan – Num. 35: 9-15; 22-28; Deut. 4: 41-43; Deut. 19: 1-3; 4; 6; 10; Josh. 20: 7-8.

‘As robbers lie in wait for someone, so the priests are banded together; they murder on the road to Shechem, they commit a monstrous crime’ – the cities of refuge for one

accused of murder was a place where he was welcomed to be preserved from the blood avenger, a relative of the person he killed. And there he stayed till there was judgment; after being acquitted by the congregation, he remained there until the death of the high priest (Num. 35: 25; 28). Shechem was also a city of refuge and for a long time was the civil capital of Ephraim, while Shiloh was the religious capital. Shechem was the city where Jeroboam lived (1 Kin. 12: 25). What Hosea is saying here is that even in the cities of refuge the murderer had no more security, for even the priests were corrupt and committed crimes.

- Hos. 6: 10-11: “In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim’s whoredom is there, Israel is defiled. For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed. When I would restore the fortunes of my people.”

‘Whoredom’ refers to idolatry.

‘Horrible thing’ – this expression is used in the book of Jeremiah to refer to idolatry, the sins of the prophets and priests, or corruption in the midst of the court (Jer. 5: 30; Jer. 18: 13; Jer. 23: 14).

‘A harvest is appointed’ – ‘harvest’ refers to the divine judgment, cutting off definitively the acts or wicked people (Jer. 51: 33; Jl 3: 13; Rev. 14: 15). God said that Judah would also be cut off from his land and from the merciful eyes of God. The result of this harvest (Hos. 8: 7; Hos. 10: 12; Job 4: 8; Prov. 22: 8) was derived from what that kingdom had planted, that is, the same idolatrous abominations of Israel. This happened mainly in the reign of Ahaz, a contemporary of Hosea and Pekah, kings of Israel. The first captivity for Israel was by Tiglath-Pileser III, followed by Shalmaneser and Sargon II. Then Sennacherib captured the fortified cities of Judah and besieged Jerusalem, which was delivered by the hand of God, but fell under Nebuchadnezzar.

Chapter 7

- Hos. 7: 1-16 – Iniquity of kings and princes

Hosea continues to denounce the corruption, pride and idolatry of Israel (4: 1 – 7: 16; 8: 4), which makes him reprovved before God.

- Hos. 7: 1-2: “When I would heal Israel, the corruption [NIV: sins] of Ephraim is revealed, and the wicked deeds [NIV: crimes] of Samaria; for they deal falsely, the thief breaks in, and the bandits raid outside [NIV: They practice deceit, thieves break into houses, bandits rob in the streets]. But they do not consider that I remember all their wickedness. Now their deeds surround them, they are before my face [NIV: Their sins engulf them; they are always before me].”

Hosea lists the sins of the northern kingdom: crimes, falsehood, theft and lack of shame and lack of repentance. The Lord says that they are bound in the very bonds they have created, and their sins are always before His face.

- Hos. 7: 3: “By their wickedness they make the king glad, and the officials by their treachery [NIV: They delight the king with their wickedness, the princes with their lies].”

The people delighted the king with their wickedness, and he, instead of being displeased with them, was content with all that. The princes were delighted by lies and treachery.

- Hos. 7: 4-7: “They are all adulterers; they are like a heated oven, whose baker does not need to stir the fire, from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened. On the day of our king the officials became sick with the heat of wine; he stretched out his hand with mockers [NIV: On the day of the festival of our king the princes become inflamed with wine, and he joins hands with the mockers]. For they are kindled like an oven, their heart burns within them; all night their anger smolders; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire [NIV: Their hearts are like an oven; they approach him with intrigue. Their passion smolders all night; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire]. All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen; none of them calls upon me.”

Both the king and the princes and counselors were adulterers. And what the prophet means here is that there was a lot of intrigue in the midst of the government, because the power struggle was great. There was scorn, mockery, anger and wicked plans being woven to overthrow those in the leadership. Several kings were murdered after Jeroboam II, including by his own captains or men of confidence. After Jeroboam II came: Zechariah (His son – 2 Kin. 14: 29), Shallum (conspired against Zechariah – 2 Kin. 15: 10), Menahem (conspired against Shallum – 2 Kin. 15: 14), Pekaiiah (his son – 2 Kin. 15: 22-23), Pekah (a captain, conspired against Pekaiiah – 2 Kin. 15: 25) and Hoshea (conspired against Pekah and killed him – 2 Kin. 15: 30). Thus, in a period of twenty years (752-732 BC), five kings rose to the throne through intrigues and conspiracies, each killing his predecessor. They were all like an oven, which had been heated for many hours until the dough was leavened, and in the morning it was a flaming fire. None of them called on God.

- Hos. 7: 8-9: “Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples [NIV: the nations]; Ephraim is a cake not turned [NIV: Ephraim is a flat loaf not turned over]. Foreigners devour his strength, but he does not know it; gray hairs are sprinkled upon him [NIV: His hair is sprinkled with gray], but he does not know it.”

Kings made alliances with foreign nations without consulting the Lord, and the result of this could be compared to a flat loaf not turned over, that is, it burned on one side and then roasted, no one else could eat.

‘gray hairs are sprinkled upon him’ or ‘His hair is sprinkled with gray’ – means a decline, as aging brings white hair, bit by bit, and the person barely notices it.

- Hos. 7: 10-12: “Israel’s pride testifies against him; yet they do not return to the Lord their God, or seek him, for all this. Ephraim has become like a dove, silly and without sense; they call upon Egypt, they go to Assyria [NIV: now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria]. As they go, I will cast my net over them; I will bring them down like birds of the air; I will discipline them according to the report made to their assembly [NIV: When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them].”

Israel had a very great political instability since the reign of Menahem (752-742 BC). Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul) of Assyria came against Israel during the reign of Menahem (2 Kin. 15: 19-20), and he gave the Assyrian king a thousand talents of silver, to help him consolidate his kingdom. The bible says that ‘Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy, fifty shekels of silver from each one, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land.’

In the days of Pekah (740-732 BC), king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser came and took five cities of Naphtali (Ijon, Abel-Beth-Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor), besides Gilead, Galilee and Zebulun, and took their inhabitants to Assyria (in the period of 734-732 BC – 2 Kin. 15: 29). Tiglath-Pileser also reduced the kingdom of northern Israel to the hill country of Ephraim, being Samaria its capital. In addition to having killed Rezin, king of Syria, the Assyrian king confirmed the kingdom to Hoshea, who killed Pekah (2 Kin. 15: 30; 2 Kin. 17: 1), letting him rule in Samaria (732-723 BC). Tiglath-Pileser intended to come to Judah and then invade Jerusalem. Even though they had not entered the Holy City (Isa. 37: 6-7; 33-35), the Assyrians came and destroyed much of the land of Judah (2 Kin. 18: 13; 2 Chr. 32: 1-2; Isa. 8: 8; Is 36: 1-3).

In the seventh year of Hoshea (725 BC), Shalmaneser V of Assyria came up against Israel and defeated the king because he asked for help from Pharaoh So of Egypt (2 Kin. 17: 4, probably an abbreviation of (O)so(rkon), Osorkon IV, of the 22nd dynasty, – 730-712 BC, and who reigned in Tanis and Bubastis – or Tefnakht from the 24th dynasty, who reigned at Sais, 732-725 BC). But Tefnakht (So) could not help him because he had problems in his own country, in war against Pharaohs of Cush, who disputed the throne of Egypt. Hoshea was imprisoned. Samaria was besieged for three years. In the ninth year, Israel was taken by Sargon II and exiled. In the reign of Sargon II (722-705 BC) Egypt also fell into the hands of the Assyrians (716 BC) in the year that Hezekiah came to power in Judah.

So Israel, because of his pride, as Hosea says, did not consult the Lord and preferred to remain like a dove flying to and fro, oscillating between Assyria and Egypt. He even tried to maintain his independence by throwing one power against another, but this policy was unsuccessful. The Lord would punish them for their spiritual fickleness.

- Hos. 7: 13-14: “Woe to them, for they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me! I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me

[NIV: I long to redeem them but they speak about me falsely]. They do not cry to me from the heart, but they wail upon their beds; they gash themselves for grain and wine; they rebel against me [NIV: They slash themselves, appealing to their gods for grain and new wine, but they turn away from me].”

Israel’s rebellion would have a price. The people have strayed from God. The Lord says that He had the power to redeem them, but as they lied and betrayed Him, praying to other gods to deliver them, they would have to settle the accounts with Him. The drought that the Lord sent ended with wheat and wine; yet they sought Baal, for they thought his disapproval or separation was the cause of the drought. That is why Hosea says they ‘they wailed upon their beds’ or ‘gashed themselves, appealing to their gods for grain and wine.’ Their tears were not for God.

- Hos. 7: 15-16: “It was I who trained and strengthened their arms, yet they plot evil against me. They turn to that which does not profit [NIV: They do not turn to the Most High]; they have become like a defective bow; their officials shall fall by the sword because of the rage of their tongue [NIV: Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent words]. So much for their babbling in the land of Egypt [NIV: For this they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt].”

‘It was I who trained and strengthened their arms’ – may refer to the time of Jeroboam II (782-753 BC) when God trained him for war. At that time (2 Kin. 14: 23-29), the oppression of Syria had diminished over Israel because of the victories God had given to Jehoash, the father of Jeroboam II (2 Kin. 13: 22-25), and he decided to extend his boundaries (2 Kin. 14: 25-28), therefore, conquered Hamath [NRSV: Lebo-hamath; NIV: Lebo Hamath; Lebo = from the entrance to] and Damascus. The Israelites did not seem to be grateful to God for this, and turned to other gods, so the Lord said that they plotted evil against Him.

They have become like a defective bow, that is, a damaged weapon that did not hit the target; and they were such a weapon in which God no longer trusted to carry out His plans, for they were unfaithful to Him (Ps. 78: 57).

Because of their insolence their princes died by the sword; perhaps he is speaking of this series of kings for a period of twenty years, or nobles or captains who died in these battles of invasion of their land.

‘So much for their babbling in the land of Egypt’ or ‘For this they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt’ – this means that when the Lord brought His judgment, Egypt, in whom they had sought support, would mock them.

Chapter 8

- Hos. 8: 1-14 – Punishment is near (NIV: Israel to reap the whirlwind)

From here (Hos. 8: 1 – Hos. 13: 16), Hosea ceases to denounce the sins of Israel; therefore, the reprimands of God are ended, and the prophecies of retribution for the acts of the nation begin.

- Hos. 8: 1-3: “Set the trumpet to your lips! One like a vulture is over the house of the Lord, because they have broken my covenant, and transgressed my law [NIV: An eagle is over the house of the LORD because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law]. Israel cries to me, ‘My God, we—Israel—know you!’ [NIV: ‘Our God, we acknowledge you!'] Israel has spurned the good [NIV: Israel has rejected what is good]; the enemy shall pursue him.”

The Lord tells the Israelites to put the trumpet in their mouths and give the alarm, for the punishment of God is coming and the enemy (Assyria) is coming swiftly and voraciously (‘eagle’ or ‘vulture’) against them, because they have rebelled against His law (Am. 5: 14-15; Mic. 6: 8). The house of the Lord refers to the whole land of Israel. It is no use saying that they know Him and that He is their God, when they have transgressed His commandments so much and rejected them. They did not want the covenant with Him.

- Hos. 8: 4: “They made kings, but not through me; they set up princes, but without my knowledge [NIV: They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval]. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction.”

The appointment of rulers without the guidance of the Lord began with the division of the two kingdoms, and the leadership of Jeroboam I (931-910 BC) as their first king. From then on, kings were not appointed by God as it had been with the kingdom of Judah. In the last years since the death of Jeroboam II (782-753 BC) and Zechariah’s (his son 753-752 BC), because of political instability, five kings rose to the throne in Samaria, through conspiracies and murders, logically, without divine approval. ‘Princes’ not only refers to the political area, but to the ecclesiastical leadership of the nation. Fearing that the people would return to worship in Jerusalem and return to Rehoboam, Jeroboam I (1 Kin. 12: 25-33) the king of Israel made two golden calves and told the people that these were the gods who brought them up out of the land of Egypt. He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. He also made houses on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not Levites. They burnt incense there. At his own pleasure Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the Feast of Tabernacles that was celebrated in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar to the calves that he had made in Bethel and Dan. The people and kings of Israel followed his example for two centuries.

- Hos. 8: 5-7: “Your calf is rejected, O Samaria [NIV: Samaria, throw out your calf-idol!]. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? For it is from Israel, an artisan made it; it is not God [NIV: They are from Israel! This calf—a metalworker has made it; it is not God]. The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces. For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no

heads, it shall yield no meal [NIV: The stalk has no head; it will produce no flour]; if it were to yield, foreigners would devour it.”

His idolatrous practices were not to the liking of the Lord, and therefore He would destroy his images, especially the two golden calves. What they sowed, they would reap. They sowed idolatry and moral corruption; therefore, they would reap the coming judgment. Likewise, their futile alliances with idols and foreign nations would only bring unpleasantness, trouble and devastation (‘For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind’). They could no longer eat the produce of the harvest, for the Lord would not give them the wheat; even if the wheat grew, the foreigners would eat it.

- Hos. 8: 8-10: “Israel is swallowed up; now they are among the nations as a useless vessel [NIV: now she is among the nations like something no one wants]. For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild ass wandering alone; Ephraim has bargained for lovers [NIV: For they have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has sold herself to lovers]. Though they bargain with the nations, I will now gather them up. They shall soon writhe under the burden of kings and princes [NIV: Although they have sold themselves among the nations, I will now gather them together. They will begin to waste away under the oppression of the mighty king].”

- ‘Israel is swallowed up’ – because of alliances with foreign nations, the nation was being consumed little by little, for the wicked only took advantage of them. Who ended up losing was Israel. Economically speaking, they only suffered losses.

- ‘For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild ass wandering alone’ or ‘for they have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey wandering alone’ – depending on the bible version in English (NRSV, NIV), this phrase has a different punctuation, often implying that it is about the king of Assyria, as a stubborn, treacherous, unsociable, inhuman king, who saw only what could bring advantage to him; and yet he was free, for his nation dominated over many others, even over Israel, and was not in need of any political alliance (‘to bargain lovers’ or ‘to sold oneself to lovers’) to be helped. However, Israel needed help, and so the wild donkey can be seen as the Israelite nation, which was so stupid and stubborn like a wild donkey, rejecting God’s discipline and wishing to be free, following the impetuosity of his lusts, and was alone in this endeavor.

- ‘Ephraim has bargained for lovers’ or ‘Ephraim has sold herself to lovers’ – Israel sold himself not only to his idols, but to pagan rulers, seeking political assistance, especially of Assyria.

- ‘For they have gone up to Assyria’ – it may be about Menahem (752-742 BC), who gave Pul king of Assyria (Tiglath-Pileser III – 745-727 BC) 1,000 talents of silver to help him to consolidate his kingdom, and the enemy left the land (2 Kin. 15: 19-20). The name of Menahem is read in the inscriptions in the palace of Ninrud, as a tributary of the Assyrian king in the eighth year of Menahem’s rule, that is, 744 BC.

- ‘Though they bargain with the nations, I will now gather them up. They shall soon writhe under the burden of kings and princes [NIV: Although they have sold themselves among the nations, I will now gather them together. They will begin to waste away under the oppression of the mighty king]’ – God will gather His people, not to deliver them, but for them to follow into captivity. He also says that Israel would soon ‘writhe under the burden of kings and princes’ or ‘begin to waste away under the oppression of the mighty king’, which speaks of the king of Assyria, his army commanders and his governors placed in the conquered nations to collect the tributes (cf. Isa. 10: 8).

- Hos. 8: 11-14: “When Ephraim multiplied altars to expiate sin, they became to him altars for sinning. Though I write for him the multitude of my instructions, they are regarded as a strange thing. Though they offer choice sacrifices, though they eat flesh [NIV: though they eat the meat], the Lord does not accept them. Now he will remember their iniquity, and punish their sins; they shall return to Egypt. Israel has forgotten his Maker, and built palaces; and Judah has multiplied fortified cities; but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour his strongholds.”

The prophet speaks once again of the idolatrous altars that had spread, and how much the sacrifices had already become unpleasant to God. When he says that ‘though they eat the meat’, he remembers what he had said about the priests and their abominations (Hos. 4: 8; Hos. 6: 9), for they accepted the meat of the hypocritical sacrifices of the worshipers because of their greed and covetousness (‘They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity’ – Hos. 4: 8).

But God will remember their iniquity and punish them for their sin. They shall return to be slaves of foreigners, as they were in Egypt, because they had forgotten their God. Egypt symbolized exile and slavery; and this is what they would experience in Assyria. Israel has built palaces; and Judah has multiplied fortified cities and they were proud of it. However, the Lord would have them burned. The Lord was no longer their strength (fortress).

Chapter 9

- Hos. 9: 1-17 – Punishment for Israel

Hosea continues to talk about God's retribution for the acts of the nation. She can be sure of the judgment (Hos. 9: 1 – Hos. 10: 15).

- Hos. 9: 1-2: "Do not rejoice, O Israel! Do not exult as other nations do; for you have played the whore [NIV: For you have been unfaithful to your God], departing from your God. You have loved a prostitute's pay on all threshing floors. Threshing floor and wine vat shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail them [NIV: Threshing floors and winepresses will not feed the people; the new wine will fail them]."

In addition to attribute to Baal the yield of his crops, the threshing floors of wheat where the feasts of celebration took place were the places where people offered sacrifices to this false god. Therefore, the Lord would take away the joy of the wheat harvest and the grapes harvest. The threshing floors and winepresses would be empty, for the production would be destroyed. Israel had no reason to rejoice over his immorality.

- Hos. 9: 3: "They shall not remain in the land of the Lord; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and in Assyria they shall eat unclean food."

'In the land of the Lord' – It means that the land was His, and He had given it to Israel (Lev. 25: 23).

The prophet reinforces the idea of captivity in Assyria, here symbolized by Egypt, there they will eat their unclean bread, that is, the bread of God's wrath and without His blessing (cf. Ezek. 4: 13). The 'unclean food' would be a way of saying that since they rejected God's spiritual bread (food) as well as the material bread as a sign of His blessing for their faithfulness and took pleasure in idolatry by feeding on food consecrated to idols, then they would eat the unclean, and that would be a shame to them before the nations, even because they made no distinction between the food of the Jews and the Gentiles.

- Hos. 9: 4-5: "They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to the Lord, and their sacrifices shall not please him. Such sacrifices shall be like mourners' bread; all who eat of it shall be defiled [NIV: all who eat them will be unclean]; for their bread shall be for their hunger only; it shall not come to the house of the Lord. What will you do on the day of appointed festival, and on the day of the festival of the Lord?"

The mourners, for having touched a corpse, were ceremonially unclean and defiled everything they touched (Num. 19: 14; 19; 22). Repeating a little of what was written above, they would eat the 'unclean food' or 'unclean bread', for it would be the bread of affliction eaten in captivity, like the mourners' bread for a dead man. Their contact with the wicked in a strange land made them ceremonially unclean, for those ones were like 'dead'; they had no relationship with the Living God. Being unclean, therefore, the Israelites were unable to worship the Lord with burnt offerings and other offerings. Here comes a question: what would they do on the days of the appointed festival of the Lord? They were as if excluded from them. So, one more reason to have nothing to rejoice about: the exile in a strange land and their separation from the Lord's solemnities and from the worship to Him.

The libation ['wine offerings'] was an offering of liquids (usually wine and oil), poured as a sacrifice of dedication to God; a portion of the liquid was poured **along with the grain offerings** of the 'regular offerings' presented every day (Ex. 29: 38-41; Num. 28: 1-8), or of voluntary offerings or on Sabbath Days (Num. 28: 9; 10) and at the appointed feasts (Num. 15: 3; 5; 7; 10): at New Moon feasts (Num. 28: 14), at Passover (Num. 28: 24), Pentecost or Feast of Weeks, also called the Feast of Harvest and Feast of Firstfruits (Shavuot – Num. 28: 26; 31), Rosh haShannah (the civil New Year – Num. 29: 1; 6), Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur – Num. 29: 7; 11), Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot – Num. 29: 12; 16; 19; 22; 25; 28; 31; 34; 38).

- Hos. 9: 6: "For even if they escape destruction, Egypt shall gather them, Memphis shall bury them. Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver; thorns shall be in their tents [NIV: Their treasures of silver will be taken over by briars, and thorns will overrun their tents]."

Once again, Egypt is placed here as a metaphor for Assyria. Memphis was an Egyptian city that had many cemeteries, tombs, and pyramids, and symbolized the unclean land of Israel's exile (Assyria) where they were being taken captive. They would be buried in that land.

Israel would be an abandoned land and the goods of the Israelites would be inherited by nettles (briars). Thorns would grow in their houses ('tents'). Why should Israel rejoice when he knew he would be arrested?

- Hos. 9: 7: "The days of punishment have come, the days of recompense have come; Israel cries, 'The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad!' Because of your great iniquity, your hostility is great [NIV: The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired person a maniac]."

The day of God's judgment was coming, and again the prophet was saying that the prophets of Israel (the false prophets who had prophesied prosperity to the nation) would be regarded as fools to witness the truth of God being fulfilled. 'The man of the spirit' was the one who pretended to be receiving the inspirations from God. This one would also be considered crazy, insane (Lam. 2: 14; Ezek. 13: 3; Mic. 3: 11; Zeph. 3: 4). Israel had despised the true prophets of God, considering them mad, but they were the spiritually blind because of their many sins and their hatred and violence; the hatred of Israel to the true prophets sent by God and to His law.

- Hos. 9: 8: "The prophet is a sentinel for my God over Ephraim, yet a fowler's snare is on all his ways, and hostility in the house of his God [NIV: The prophet, along with my God, is the watchman over Ephraim, yet snares await him on all his paths, and hostility in the house of his God]."

'Sentinel' or 'Watchman' – his role was to see if enemy armies were coming and warn the people, so they could prepare for battle (Ezek. 33: 6) and defend themselves. The prophets were the sentinels of God to warn the people about their behavior and, therefore, of God's judgment, causing them to repent (Ezek. 3: 17; 19; Ezek. 2: 7).

But the prophets of Israel had shown themselves against their people, for they did not behave like true watchmen; they were a fowler's snare to the nation.

- Hos. 9: 9: "They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah; he will remember their iniquity, he will punish their sins."

‘In the days of Gibeah’ – is a reference to the case of the Levite and his concubine (Judg. 19: 1-30). This incident started a civil war. Many at that time were happy for this event having been the most violent crime in all of Israel’s history. However, the sins of the generation of Hosea were equivalent with this infamous murder.

Therefore, the third reason Israel had nothing to rejoice over was the neglect of some of his inhabitants for their calling as prophets of the Lord, and participating in injustice.

- Hos. 9: 10: “Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit [NIV: the early fruit] on the fig tree, in its first season, I saw your ancestors. But they came to Baal-peor [NIV: Baal Peor], and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved [NIV: they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved].”

When God first called them, He delighted in them as one who finds grapes in a place so unlikely as the wilderness. To Him those people were like the first fruits on a new fig tree, a novelty, and as the firstfruits of a planted seed, something irresistible (first-ripe fig: Isa 28: 4, Jer. 24: 2, Mic.7: 1). However, the Lord eventually became disappointed with them when they were about to enter the Promised Land and were drawn to idolatry, yielding to the worship of Baal of Peor (Num. 25: 1-18; Deut. 4: 3; Ps. 106: 28-31 cf. Micah 6: 5). In that place, at Peor (a mountain in the north region of the Dead Sea and across from Jericho and near their encampment in Shittim in the land of Moab), the Israelites participated in rites of fertility with Moabite women, causing the judgment of God over the nation.

- Hos. 9: 11-13: “Ephraim’s glory shall fly away like a bird—no birth, no pregnancy, no conception! Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them until no one is left. Woe to them indeed when I depart from them! [NIV: Woe to them when I turn away from them!]. Once I saw Ephraim as a young palm planted in a lovely meadow, but now Ephraim must lead out his children for slaughter [NIV: I have seen Ephraim, like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place. But Ephraim will bring out their children to the slayer].”

The Lord says that because of Baal of Peor and because of what they continued to do until that moment, after many centuries walking with Him, instead of fertility, He would bring them sterility. Thus the honor of Ephraim, his glory, would flee from him like a bird, for to the Israelites, sterility was a curse. The children were their glory; and their fame as a fertile people would flee from them, for God would make them sterile. Even if they brought up children, they would be killed during the invasion. Then He utters a ‘woe’ upon them, when He withdraws completely, that is, when He leaves them to themselves and to the Assyrians. God had planned Ephraim to be like Tyre, a city erected in a very beautiful place, and ‘mother’ of many colonies beyond the Mediterranean Sea, for its prosperity, its commerce and its sailors took its fame to distant places and Tyre founded many colonies. But Israel, here called Ephraim, will bring his sons for slaughter, at the hands of the Assyrians.

- Hos. 9: 14-17: “Give them, O Lord—what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. Every evil of theirs began at Gilgal; there I came to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds [NIV: Because of their sinful deeds] I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their officials are rebels [NIV: all their leaders are rebellious]. Ephraim is stricken [NIV: Ephraim is blighted], their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I

will kill the cherished offspring of their womb [NIV: Even if they bear children, I will slay their cherished offspring]. Because they have not listened to him, my God will reject them; they shall become wanderers among the nations.”

The prophet continues to talk about the sterility of women (‘miscarrying womb and dry breasts’).

Gilgal (cf. Josh. 5: 9), which from the beginning of the Israelites’ entry into the land of Canaan was a great center for God’s righteous deeds (Josh. 4: 20; Josh. 5: 9-10; Josh. 14: 6; Judg. 2: 1; 1 Sam. 7: 16; 1 Sam. 15: 12; 22-23; 26-31; 33-35; 2 Kin. 2: 1; Mic. 6: 5) had now become a center of idolatrous worship (Hos. 12: 11; Hos. 4: 15), connected to Bethel by an important road (2 Kin. 2: 1-2). Gilgal and Bethel were centers of worship created by Jeroboam I (from the time of the split of the nation into two kingdoms) and followed by all the other kings of Israel. Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba became centers of corrupt worship. Bethel was in the tribe of Ephraim; Gilgal, in the territory of West Manasseh, near the border of Ephraim; and Beersheba, in the south, in the territory of Simeon. As for Dan, where was the other golden calf of Jeroboam I, it was to the north of Israel, in the tribe of Naphtali.

Because of its unfaithful deeds to God, Gilgal was being rejected by Him, and He would cast out its inhabitants, as an unfaithful wife is expelled from home by her betrayed husband: ‘Because of the wickedness of their deeds [NIV: Because of their sinful deeds] I will drive them out of my house.’ ‘My house’ was the land of Canaan, which He had given to the Israelites. He would cease to care for this land (‘I will love them no more’).

Their leaders were rebellious and now barren: ‘Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will kill the cherished offspring of their womb.’

Because they were rejected by God, they would be taken into exile and scattered among the nations, where they would wander, as happened with Cain, after being cursed by God for the death of Abel (Gen. 4: 11; 12; 14; 16).

Concluding this chapter, we can say that the fourth reason Israel had nothing to rejoice about was sterility and repudiation from God.

In short, God’s judgment over Israel would take away the joy from them. They would have reason not to rejoice: their immorality; the exile in a strange land and their separation from the solemnities of the Lord and the worship of Him; the neglect of their prophets toward the Lord; sterility and repudiation by God.

Chapter 10

- Hos. 10: 1-15 – Israel sowed malice and will reap destruction

Hosea continues to talk about God's retribution for the acts of the nation. The punishment of Israel is illustrated through metaphors.

- Hos. 10: 1-2: "Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars. Their heart is false [NIV: deceitful]; now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will break down their altars, and destroy their pillars [NIV: sacred stones]."

Here, Israel is compared to a luxuriant vine that bears fruit. This symbolized God's blessing upon them. But this comparison is made with the negative side, that is, for the multiplication of its idolatrous altars. The more extensive the land, the more sanctuaries were erected. The heart of its inhabitants was propitious to this, for they harbored falsehood, and God blamed them for it. Their altars and pillars [sacred stones] would be utterly shattered.

- Hos. 10: 3-6: "For now they will say: 'We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord, and a king—what could he do for us?' They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants; so litigation springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field [NIV: They make many promises, take false oaths and make agreements; therefore lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds in a plowed field]. The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-aven [NIV: Beth Aven; *reference to Bethel*]. Its people shall mourn for it, and its idolatrous priests shall wail over it, over its glory that has departed from it [NIV: because it is taken from them into exile]. The thing itself [*calf of Beth Aven*] shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king. Ephraim shall be put to shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol [NIV: Ephraim will be disgraced; Israel will be ashamed of its foreign alliances]."

They would see that they had no more king and would acknowledge that this happened because they did not fear the Lord. God's judgment would destroy the stability and political independence of Israel. But even if they had a king, the disorder of the kingdom was so great that he would have little to do for them. They only spoke vain words and swore falsely, making covenants; the people with the false gods, and the king with foreign nations. Because of this, the judgment of God will come upon them like poisonous weed in a field that has been plowed, which chokes the harvest.

'The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-aven [NIV: Beth Aven; *reference to Bethel* – 1 Kin. 12: 28-29]. Its people shall mourn for it, and its idolatrous priests shall wail over it, over its glory that has departed from it' – the calf, which was the glory of Bethel, is no more, for it was taken by the Assyrians as a gift to the king. The Assyrians had the habit of taking for themselves the idols of the peoples they defeated. Israel will be ashamed of it.

- Hos. 10: 7-10: "Samaria's king shall perish like a chip on the face of the waters [NIV: Samaria's king will be destroyed, swept away like a twig on the surface of the waters]. The high places of Aven [*referring to Beth Aven; a derogatory way of calling Bethel*], the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed [NIV: The high places of wickedness will be destroyed—it is the sin of Israel]. Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars. They shall say to the mountains, 'Cover us', and to the hills, 'Fall on us'. Since the days

of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not war overtake them in Gibeah? [NIV: Will not war again overtake the evildoers in Gibeah?]. I will come against the wayward people to punish them; and nations shall be gathered against them when they are punished for their double iniquity.”

To complete the description of this state of anarchy, the prophet says that the king will not have dominion over the situation and will be swept away by it like a twig is carried by the waters. This is what happened to Hoshea at the hands of Assyria. Tiglath-Pileser III left him in power, in the place of Pekah, whom he had killed (2 Kin. 15: 29; 2 Kin. 17: 1). Shalmaneser V rose up against Israel and defeated him because Hoshea asked for help from Pharaoh So of Egypt (2 Kin. 17: 4, probably an abbreviation of (O)so(rkon), Osorkon IV, of the 22nd dynasty – 730-712 BC, and who reigned in Tanis and Bubastis – or Tefnakht from the 24th dynasty, who reigned at Sais, 732-725 BC). But Tefnakht (So) could not help him because he had problems in his own country, in war against Pharaohs of Cush, who disputed the throne of Egypt. Hoshea was imprisoned. Samaria was besieged for three years. In the ninth year (722 BC), Israel was taken by Sargon II and exiled. In the reign of Sargon II (722-705 BC) Egypt also fell into the hands of the Assyrians (716 BC).

Then the prophet says that the high places of Aven [referring to Beth Aven; a derogatory way of calling Bethel], will be destroyed, and thorns and thistles will grow up on their altars. The destruction will be so great that people will want the hills to fall on them. Hosea returns to speak about the case of the Levite and his concubine (Judg. 19: 1-30) which happened in Gibeah of Benjamin (Judg. 19: 14), and the violence that was done remained in the heart of the Israelites (‘Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued’). The civil war unleashed in the nation eventually wiped out the men of Benjamin almost entirely. Likewise, the Lord would punish the people in the way He wanted. He would gather the wicked nations (heathen nations) against them when He would punish them.

‘For their double iniquity’ – it means, because of the crime in Gibeah and the collective sin of the Hosea’s generation.

- Hos. 10: 11-13: “Ephraim was a trained heifer that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck [NIV: so I will put a yoke on her fair neck]; but I will make Ephraim break the ground; Judah must plow; Jacob must harrow for himself [NIV: I will drive Ephraim, Judah must plow, and Jacob must break up the ground]. Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground [NIV: your unplowed ground]; for it is time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you [NIV: until he comes and showers his righteousness on you]. You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of lies [NIV: you have eaten the fruit of deception]. Because you have trusted in your power and in the multitude of your warriors [NIV: Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors].”

In these verses, Israel (‘Ephraim’) is compared to a trained heifer that liked to tread the wheat on a threshing floor only for it, and ate freely of the grass as it walked (Deut. 25: 4); it liked its freedom. But it was placed under the yoke of God, under His command, for it was like rebellious cattle that need to be tied to a cart and put under a yoke to work hard. According to some scholars, ‘to thresh’ in this context seems to be related to the service of Israel to the Lord, while ‘to plow’ refers to the discipline that Israel would have to develop through divine judgment and exile. The people of Judah were also included in the disciplining plans of God. Judah would have to plow the earth too, that is, to free himself equally from the rebellion and idolatry in which he had

fallen. Jacob (or Israel) would go after Judah, breaking up the ground that was left by the thresh, that is, Israel would have to undo his wrongdoing, since it was he who induced Judah to idolatry.

The prophet then leads the people to repentance, while there is still time: ‘Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground [NIV: your unplowed ground]; for it is time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.’ A time of fallow is the interruption of the cultivation of the land for one or more years to become fertile – cf. Jer. 4: 3: “For thus says the Lord to the people of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.” This meant to sow righteousness, social justice, and mercy in order to reap the fruit of loyalty, and to make furrows in the soil of their hearts, allowing the Lord to put the right seeds there and to do them justice. First the earth is plowed and planted, so that the rain may cause the seeds to grow and there be the harvest. Similarly, their repentance would bring the Lord’s rain of blessings.

However, the reality was different: they had plowed wickedness and reaped injustice. Because they trusted in their own power of war, they ended up to ate the fruit of their lies, that is, their political alliances were a snare to them, just as their fidelity to God had failed by worshiping other gods.

- Hos. 10: 14-15: “Therefore the tumult of war shall rise against your people, and all your fortresses shall be destroyed, as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel [NIV: as Shalman devastated Beth Arbel] on the day of battle when mothers were dashed in pieces with their children. Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel, because of your great wickedness. At dawn the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off. [NIV: will be completely destroyed].”

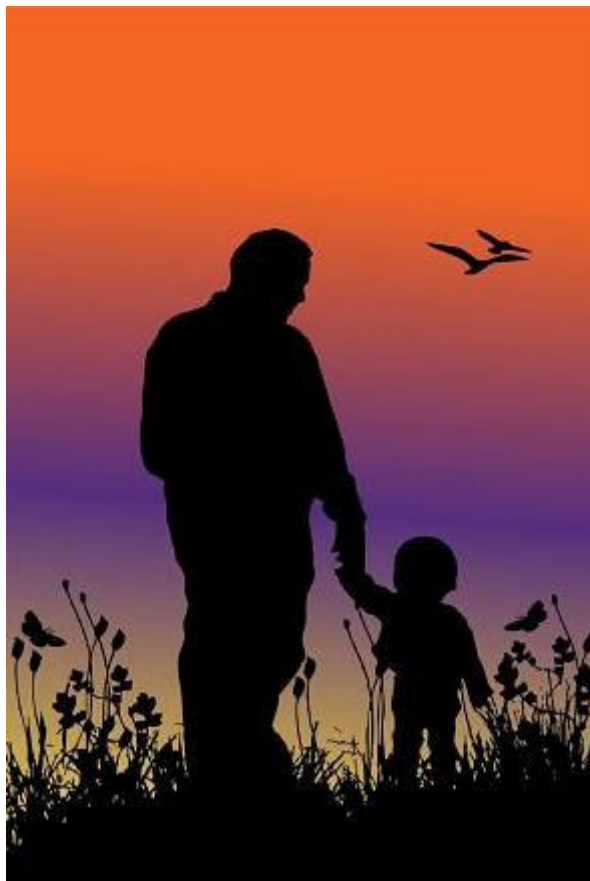
Because of lack of repentance, war will come and fortified cities will be destroyed. The identification seems uncertain, both from the name Shalman, and from the name Beth-Arbel. Some suggest Salamanu, king of Moab, mentioned in the annals of Tiglath-Pileser III; but it must have been a very violent war anyway, to the point of being mentioned by Hosea. The destruction would be so sudden that the king of the nation would be utterly destroyed before the war even began. Because of the wickedness of Bethel and its idolatry, there will be great desolation there.

Chapter 11

- Hos. 11: 1-12 – God’s love for Israel

Hosea continues to talk about God’s retribution for the acts of the nation, and makes another metaphor of Israel; now with a boy. And he shows God’s love for His people. He is the Father who teaches His children to walk and does it with all affection; He never gives up on them.

- Hos. 11: 1-4: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them [KJV: I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them].”



First God says that He called His son from Egypt. He delivered him from Egypt, a very heavy yoke, as He does with us, freeing us from the yoke of the world. This prophecy was used by Matthew in describing Jesus’ return to Galilee after staying in Egypt with Mary and Joseph to flee from Herod (cf. Matt. 2: 15).

God speaks of Israel now as a little boy whom He loved so much and called many times to be with Him. The more He called, the more Israel departed from His teachings and turned to idolatry. But the Lord says that it was He who taught this boy to walk, who held him in His arms when he was wounded, and healed him. He did everything to call them through love. Once the nation showed itself rebellious, the prophecy changes tone, passing to compare His people with animals that are used on a farm and need to be tamed with bridles and halters to be fit for work (Ps. 32: 9). He has taken the yoke away from his neck like a farmer takes away the yoke of his animals so they can rest and feed.

- Hos. 11: 5-7: “They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me [NIV: Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?; KJV: He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return]. The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes [NIV: A sword will flash in their cities; it will devour their false prophets and put an end to their plans]. My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all [NIV: Even though they call me God Most High, I will by no means exalt them; KJV: And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him].”

As God Himself had promised to Moses (Deut. 17: 16), the people would never return to Egypt. But now, the Assyrian would be their ruler because they didn't convert, they didn't want to turn to Him. The war ('the sword') will come upon the cities of Israel and will break their defenses because of their plans contrary to the Lord's. He knows that they are bent on turning away from Him, and if they are called to seek Him and revere Him, none of them give Him praise and glory [KJV: 'none at all would exalt him'].

- Hos. 11: 8-9: “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim [NIV: Zeboyim]? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender [NIV: My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused]. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath [NIV: For I am God, and not a man—the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities].”

God mourns for not wanting to leave them in the hands of the enemy; He is like a father facing a difficult choice: to use authority and steadiness to discipline a child, or to be more meek and indulgent, maintaining his love and sweetness, giving the child time for himself to realize his mistake ('My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender' or 'My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused'). Thus, His compassion for them is manifested, and He withdraws His wrath, for He is God and not man, the Holy One among them. Perhaps this happened at the time of Menahem, who, by offering 1,000 talents of silver to Tiglath-Pileser III, made the enemy leave the land (2 Kin. 15: 19-20). Or perhaps the measure of Ephraim's wickedness was not yet full enough for the Lord to come in with destruction. We can imagine that God was still thinking of preserving them from a more severe judgment. God's patience is great and He is always looking for ways to bring His children back to His ways ("For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished" – Mal. 3: 6).

Admah and Zeboiim [NIV: Zeboyim] (Gen. 14: 8) were cities on the plain along the Lower Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea Plain, along with Zoar, where Lot chose to dwell (Gen. 13: 10-12; Gen. 19: 30), more specifically in a cave near Zoar, formerly called Bela (Gen. 14: 8; Gen. 19: 20; 22). Here were the other cities described in Gen. 14: 8, which God destroyed: Sodom and Gomorrah. Bela (Zoar) was spared from destruction (Gen. 19: 23-25; 29; 30; Deut. 29: 23). However, God destroyed Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim.



- Hos. 11: 10-12: “They shall go after the Lord, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria [NIV: like sparrows, from Assyria]; and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord. Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah still walks with God, and is faithful to the Holy One [NIV: And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One; KJV: Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints].”

Despite His desire to spare them, He knew He would have to make His judgment for them to learn what it is to live without Him. He would let them go to exile, as He would soon do with Judah; in the future, He would call them with a loud voice, like the roaring of a lion, which dominates over all the beasts of the forest. He would call His

people back from the exile in Assyria, and those who took refuge in Egypt to escape the captivity. They will come swiftly, flying like birds and doves to dwell in their own land. ‘They shall come trembling’ – it means with awe and reverence to Him, because now they knew His strength and recognized His lordship. Discipline was achieved.

In verse 12 He says: “Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah still walks with God, and is faithful to the Holy One [NIV: And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One; KJV: Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints].” Although Judah had committed sins of idolatry since the time of Solomon, he actually began to walk in the sins of Israel in the reign of Ahaz (732-716 BC), in the last days of the northern kingdom in the reign of Pekah and Hoshea. When God says ‘Ephraim has surrounded me’ it could mean that Ephraim had ‘surrounded’ Him with lies as if He were a besieged city, not letting Him see a drop of truth in them so He could spare them from destruction.

‘Judah still walks with God’ or ‘Judah yet ruleth with God’ – it means to reign with God, serving Him and maintaining worship to Him. Ephraim desired to rule without God; he did not even let Him choose his kings. In Judah the succession of kings and priests was legitimate.

‘And is faithful to the Holy One’ – in Isaiah we often see the expression ‘The Holy One of Israel’ when referring to God. Jeremiah also uses the same expression: Isa. 1: 4; Isa. 5: 19; Isa. 5: 24; Isa. 10: 20; Isa. 12: 6; Isa. 17: 7; Isa. 29: 19; Isa. 30: 11; 12; 15; Isa. 31: 1; Isa. 37: 23; Isa. 41: 14; 16; 20; Isa. 43: 3; 14; Isa. 45: 11; Isa. 47: 4; Isa. 48: 17; Isa. 54: 5; Isa. 55: 5; Isa. 60: 9; 14; Jer. 50: 29; Jer. 51: 5. This confirms us that it was the Lord (‘The Holy One of Israel’) that the prophet Hosea was speaking of.

Chapter 12

- Hos. 12: 1-14 – Israel's sin / Jacob, an example for the people of Israel

Hosea continues to talk about God's retribution for the acts of the nation. The punishment of Israel is illustrated through metaphors, and here, Israel is like one that herds the wind (Hos. 12: 1-14).

- Hos. 12: 1: "Ephraim herds the wind [NIV: feeds on the wind], and pursues the east wind all day long; they multiply falsehood and violence; they make a treaty with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt."

When the prophet says that Ephraim herds the wind it means that the nation wants to control what has no control, nor depends on its will; or, then, something futile, without fruit or compensation. He makes a comparison between the eastern wind (east wind) and Assyria, with whom they were attempting a political alliance. This would only multiply falsehood and violence, and when he mentions 'falsehood', most probably he refers not only to the political deceits that might occur in this exchange, but to idolatry, for Assyria, especially Nineveh, also influenced many nations with their false gods. The east wind coming from the desert (Job 1: 19; Job 15: 2) is very dry and causes herbs wrinkle and wither. Often, it blows violently, which is a great metaphor for Assyria. It was by the east wind sent by God that the waters of the Red Sea were divided, allowing the crossing of the Israelites (Ex. 14: 21). Some Jewish scholars explain that this east wind refers to the Simoon. Simoon (in Arabic, 'to poison' or 'poisonous wind') is a strong, dry, dust-laden wind that moves in a circular shape like a cyclone, which produces a stifling effect on humans and animals. Its high temperature brings a lot of heat to living beings, more than they can eliminate it from the body through perspiration. It burns the skin, in the same way as it burns plants, so it is harmful, very harmful indeed. Its temperature can exceed 54° C (129° F) and the humidity may drop below 10%. It is a local wind blowing in the Sahara desert and in the east of Palestine, in Jordan, Syria and the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula. It's also called Samoon, Samun, Simoun, Samūm (Arabic), Samiel (Persian); or in Turkish, Samyeli, from Arabic root sāmm, meaning 'to poison' and Turkish 'yel' meaning 'wind.' It is of short duration (twenty minutes, more or less), but it lasts enough to destroy.

'Oil is carried to Egypt' – probably, the oil as a gift from Israel to win friendship and assure the alliance with Egypt (Isa. 30: 6). Palestine was famous for its oil, and traded it with other nations (Ezek. 27: 17); here in this text, most probably, it was not about the ordinary oil for commerce, but rich and precious oils. In Genesis there is a reference to this type of product, which was brought to Egypt: Gen. 37: 25; Gen. 43: 11.

The truth is that Israel was wavering between Egypt and Assyria as a valuable ally.

- Hos. 12: 2-4: "The Lord has an indictment against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways, and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he tried to supplant his brother, and in his manhood he strove with God [NIV: In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God]. He strove with the angel and prevailed, he wept and sought his favor; he met him at Bethel, and there he spoke with him [KJV: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us]."

The Lord has an indictment not only against Israel, but also against Judah, most likely because of his idolatry as well, or because of his reprehensible acts in relation to the government and the social area.

‘Has an indictment’ – indictment refers to a formal complaint that accuses His people of breaking the covenant with God.

‘Repay him according to his deeds’ – according to our deeds, we are rewarded or judged.

‘Jacob’, in this first sentence (verse 2), is used for the nation of Israel. Now, Hosea goes on to speak of the patriarch Jacob as an example of the Israelite people. From his mother’s womb he was already struggling with his brother, Esau (Gen. 25: 22). He was born holding the brother’s heel (Gen. 25: 26). His competitive and deceitful character, greedy for blessings, was transformed into his walk with God until he recognized his need for Him. Now an adult, before meeting Esau, he fought with a man all night long, and who was actually God Himself, and got the blessing he desired (Gen. 32: 24-30). He named the place Peniel (Gen. 32: 30). There, Jacob surrendered to the will of the Lord.

‘In his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed’ – the Angel of the Lord, often in the OT is used as a manifestation of Jesus before His human incarnation: Gen. 16: 9-13; Judg. 6: 11-24; Judg. 13: 3; 9; 13; 15; 17-22.

‘He met him at Bethel, and there he spoke with him [KJV: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us]’ – at Bethel (formerly called Luz) it where Jacob met the Lord for the first time when he fled from Esau (Gen. 28: 17; 19; 22). And it was there that the Lord gave him the promise for his descendants (Gen. 28: 13: “And the Lord stood beside him and said, ‘I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring’”).

Hosea uses Jacob as an example of faithfulness and perseverance, at the same time of surrender to the will of God.

- Hos. 12: 5-6: “The Lord the God of hosts, the Lord is his name! But as for you, return to your God, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.”

He reaffirms that the Lord is God. He is the Lord of Hosts, the God who fights for His people and defends Him. He also completes the phrase stating the name of the Lord, YHWH, the name given to Moses at Sinai, the name that the Israelites knew well and that was the proper name of God, by which He would be called only by those who had a true covenant of faithfulness to Him.

It was in Him that they should always wait, that is, believe and trust, practicing justice and love. Just as Jacob believed in God and acknowledged his dependence on Him, the nation should also stand firm in the righteousness and love of the true God, and trust in Him.

- Hos. 12: 7-8: “A trader, in whose hands are false balances, he [*Ephraim*] loves to oppress. Ephraim has said, ‘Ah, I am rich, I have gained wealth for myself; in all of my gain no offense has been found in me that would be sin’ [NIV: Ephraim boasts, ‘I am very rich; I have become wealthy. With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin’].”

The prophet speaks again of the robberies, greed and extortion that were practiced in Israel, and his merchants were proud of what they possessed, though dishonestly; they altered their scales so that their customers could lose their money when they bought something, weighting the product. And they feigned innocence, denied their sin, and boasted themselves in their own strength. His arrogant self-sufficiency today

resembled Jacob's, before turning to the Lord and asking for mercy. By placing himself in dependence on God, Jacob was truly blessed.

- Hos. 12: 9-11: "I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of the appointed festival. I spoke to the prophets; it was I who multiplied visions, and through the prophets I will bring destruction [NIV: I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them]. In Gilead there is iniquity, they shall surely come to nothing. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls, so their altars shall be like stone heaps on the furrows of the field."

The Lord was the same that brought them out of the land of Egypt; He had known them ever since. Through the prophets, Israel received the guidance of God; unfortunately, rejected the message.

'I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of the appointed festival' – He referred to the Feast of Tabernacles, which celebrated the pilgrimage in the wilderness (Lev. 23: 33-43). The people would be exiled and live in tents, as it was in the beginning, to teach them to depend on God.

Gilead (Ramoth Gilead), quoted in Hos. 6: 8, and Gilgal, quoted in Hos. 4: 15; Hos. 9: 15, were cities where idolatry was practiced; they would become ruins. Their altars would become stone heaps.

- Hos. 12: 12-14: "Jacob fled to the land of Aram, there Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he guarded sheep. By a prophet the Lord brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded. Ephraim has given bitter offense, so his Lord will bring his crimes down on him and pay him back for his insults [NIV: But Ephraim has aroused his bitter anger; his Lord will leave on him the guilt of his bloodshed and will repay him for his contempt]."

God has always guarded His people from the time of the patriarchs when Jacob fled to Haran or Aram (later, Syria), and there worked as a shepherd for Rachel's sake. The Lord also used Moses to deliver His people from Egypt and to bring them into the Promised Land. But they were ungrateful and provoked Him to anger with idolatry and other sins, including shedding innocent blood. Because of this, the Lord will judge them and despise them.

Chapter 13

- Hos. 13: 1-16 – The Lord’s anger against Israel

Hosea continues to talk about God’s retribution for the acts of the nation. The punishment of Israel continues to be illustrated through metaphors. In these verses, Israel (‘Ephraim’) is compared to someone who is spiritually dead.

- Hos. 13: 1: “When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling; he was exalted in Israel; but he incurred guilt through Baal and died [NIV: But he became guilty of Baal worship and died].”

When Ephraim served God, the tribe spoke and there was trembling in the heart of all Israel, for it had a position of prominence among the other tribes; and it had life and honor. But after serving Baal it became guilty before God, and died spiritually.

- Hos. 13: 2: “And now they keep on sinning and make a cast image for themselves, idols of silver made according to their understanding, all of them the work of artisans. ‘Sacrifice to these’, they say. People are kissing calves! [NIV: Now they sin more and more; they make idols for themselves from their silver, cleverly fashioned images, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of these people, ‘They offer human sacrifices! They kiss calf-idols!’].”

Now what one could see in Ephraim were idols made of silver, to which the Israelites offered sacrifices. The golden calves of Jeroboam I were still revered, and even men kissed it to show their honor (1 Kin. 19: 18).

- Hos. 13: 3: “Therefore they shall be like the morning mist or like the dew that goes away early, like chaff that swirls from the threshing floor or like smoke from a window.”

The judgment of God would destroy Ephraim suddenly, just as the sun dissolves the mist and dries the dew of the dawn, or as the wind dissipates the smoke and carries the straw.

- Hos. 13: 4-5: “Yet I have been the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior. It was I who fed you in the wilderness, in the land of drought [NIV: I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of burning heat].”

God repeats to Israel that He is their God from the moment they left Egypt. He no longer admits that they come to worship another god, for He is the only one who can save them. It was in a very dry and lifeless land that He knew these people, took care of them, gave them water and hope, and a land to live. For all He had done for them, He expected exclusive loyalty.

- Hos. 13: 6-9: “When I fed them, they were satisfied; they were satisfied, and their heart was proud; therefore they forgot me. So I will become like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way [NIV: I will lurk by the path]. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, and will tear open the covering of their heart; there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would mangle them [NIV: Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open; like a lion I will devour them—a wild animal will tear them apart]. I will destroy you, O Israel; who can help you? [NIV: You

are destroyed, Israel, because you are against me, against your helper; KJV: O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help].”

After the Lord had given them food and everything they needed, like as a good shepherd who takes care of his flock, they were exalted, they got proud and forgot Him. As they turned away from their God, their relationship with Him worsened and He came to be seen as an enemy, a wild animal that shatters the sheep. Because of their revolt and rebellion against their true shepherd, from now on He will really be a predator; like an angry bear He will destroy them. The ruin of Israel came from them alone because of what they did, but salvation could only come from the Lord.

- Hos. 13: 10-11: “Where now is your king, that he may save you? Where in all your cities are your rulers, of whom you said, ‘Give me a king and rulers?’ [NIV: ‘Give me a king and princes?'] I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath.”

When the nation was being ruled by judges and prophets, it asked for a king, and the prophet Samuel brought the affair to God, who gave them Saul. He did not like the choice of His children, but gave them the king they asked (1 Sam. 8: 1-22). Some years later, Saul died because he displeased God deeply (1 Sam. 15: 28; 1 Sam. 16: 1; 1 Sam. 28: 18-19; 1 Sam. 31: 6).

Now, not even the king could protect the nation, nor its officials and commanders. None of them could protect the people from the judgment of God. Even they would be destroyed.

- Hos. 13: 12-14: “Ephraim’s iniquity is bound up; his sin is kept in store [NIV: The guilt of Ephraim is stored up, his sins are kept on record]. The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son; for at the proper time he does not present himself at the mouth of the womb. Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol [NIV: the grave]? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your destruction? Compassion is hidden from my eyes [NIV: I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? “I will have no compassion].”

Ephraim’s guilt was stored up by God, and his sins were recorded minutely, as a judge gathers the evidence to judge a case.

‘He is an unwise son; for at the proper time he does not present himself at the mouth of the womb’ or ‘but he is a child without wisdom; when the time arrives, he doesn’t have the sense to come out of the womb’ – this shows their spiritual indifference. When God called them to a new life and a new relationship with Him, they chose to reject the invitation and remain dead in their offenses. They did not repent; on the contrary, they refused to be born.

‘Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol [NIV: the grave]? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your destruction?’ – Even so, God proclaims salvation to Ephraim, for He alone has power to deliver from death and hell (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 55).

‘Compassion is hidden from my eyes’ – the NIV translates as: ‘I will have no compassion’ – this is quite different from the words spoken in chapter 11 (Hos. 11: 8) when the Lord mentions compassion for them and the reluctance of leaving them in the hands of the enemy. Now, after all the chances were given, He would act otherwise; He would not spare them from the destruction any more.

- Hos. 13: 15-16: “Although he may flourish among rushes [NIV: even though he thrives among his brothers], the east wind shall come, a blast from the Lord, rising from the wilderness; and his fountain shall dry up, his spring shall be parched. It shall strip his treasury of every precious thing [NIV: His storehouse will be plundered of all its treasures]. Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword, their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.”

Ephraim, the name used to describe Israel, was like a fruitful and well-watered plant, but the judgment of God would come. Ephraim means ‘fruitful.’ Then, God begins to speak clearly of the destruction of this people, mentioning the east wind, the destroying wind that symbolizes the Assyrian army. No one will be spared by it, not even the innocents.

Chapter 14

- Hos. 14: 1-9 – Repentance to bring blessing

From here (Hos. 14: 1-8), the prophecies of restoration of the nation begin for a repentant people.

- Hos. 14: 1-3: “Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the Lord; say to him, ‘Take away all guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips. Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; we will say no more, ‘Our God’, to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy [NIV: Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips. Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount warhorses. We will never again say ‘Our gods’ to what our own hands have made, for in you the fatherless find compassion].”

Hosea for the last time exhorts them to repentance, and says that they are fallen because of their own sins. He calls them to conversion to the Lord, and even teaches what they should say: ask forgiveness for their wickedness and that God may accept the praise of their lips. They should say that they recognize His power to save them, instead of Assyria, and they must renounce false gods. They will no longer seek war (‘we will not ride upon horses’ or ‘we will not mount warhorses’), and will cry out for the mercy of God over the orphan. In fact, all Israel is an orphan who needs a Father.

- Hos. 14: 4-8: “I will heal their disloyalty [NIV: I will heal their waywardness]; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily, he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon [NIV: Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots; His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like that of Lebanon. They shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon. O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; your faithfulness comes from me [NIV: Your fruitfulness comes from me]”.

The Lord hears the prayer and responds that He will remove His wrath and will love them. He will bring them prosperity and pour blessings upon them, as the dew falls from the sky. They will bloom like the lily and will settle in their land like a cedar of Lebanon sends down its roots. They will spread and multiply like branches of trees and will be as beautiful as an olive tree. Their fragrance will be like that of the cedars and forests of Lebanon. Their children will return to their land and be revived like the wheat or barley that grows in their fields, and they will blossom like the vine. Their fame will grow throughout the land, as the wine of Lebanon is known for its bouquet and its special flavor. Ephraim will have no more commitment to idolatry. When they pray, God will hear them and take care of them. God compares Himself to an evergreen cypress, and provides shade and shelter. The fecundity, the fertility and productivity of the nation come from the Lord.

This is the divine promise made to the repentant Israel who received the Messiah as his Lord at His first coming and, as a Church, spread her branches among the nations, always having a God and Father to protect her in her mission and in the difficult moments. This promise will only be fully fulfilled at His second coming until the rebellious Israel repents and returns to Him who called him.



- Hos. 14: 9: “Those who are wise understand these things; those who are discerning know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them [NIV: the rebellious stumble in them].”

Hosea ends his book by telling the readers to be wise and prudent, for only then will they understand what God said there. The ways of God are always right; in His mouth there is no crooked, perverse, or lying word (Prov. 8: 8). All His promises will be fulfilled. The righteous will always walk on a path illuminated by these words, but those who rebel against God’s law will find in them a stumbling block for their lives.

Conclusion:

Observing the prophetic profile of Hosea, we can draw the conclusion that he proclaimed the wickedness of his people and once again urged them to the covenant and commitment to the Lord, reinforcing in them the idea of the inevitable divine judgment over all kind of sin. Even having lived long after other brethren who brought the same message of YHWH to Israel, and which was rejected and disobeyed, this prophet obeyed the voice of the Most High to exhort His people again; he didn’t give up to cry out, he continued to prophesy the word of justice, judgment, mercy and restoration, as a way of saying that the Creator always gives us a new chance to reassess our lives, to

rethink about our attitudes and to exercise our free will, choosing between salvation and punishment. Hence, the prophet of God should not give up of exhorting, despite having proclaimed the same message previously, until He carries out what He promised. He should also call his brethren to the covenant and communion with their Creator, assuming the perfect commitment to be His instrument on earth. It is often the life example of the Prophet the best way to witness that what he preaches is true and thus be able to reveal his God to the world.

Joel

The book of Joel was written at a time unknown. The period of his ministry is also questioned. It may have been when king Joash (835-796 BC) was still a child [which may coincide with the period of Elisha's ministry (848-797 BC)]. Joel means 'YHWH is God.' He prophesies the descent of the Holy Spirit, and connects the work of God in the Old Testament to the birth of the Church in the NT. The book shows the intense desire that God has to maintain intimacy with all His people. Joel urged them to turn to Him. He describes a plague of locusts (Jl. 1: 1-20) that attacked successively in groups of astounding dimensions, which devoured the bark of fig trees, wheat fields, vineyards and orchards, extinguishing the materials for the sacrifices of the priests. In Joel 1: 9; 13, the prophet says that the sacrifices were cut off from the House of the Lord, more specifically the grain offerings and the drink offerings of wine. The grain offerings were made with the fine flour, that is, the flour of the best quality and with olive oil. With a period of drought and famine, with bad harvests and the plague of locusts devouring fig trees, wheat fields, vineyards and orchards (apple trees, palm trees and pomegranates), it is understood why grain offerings were cut off from the temple. In Joel 1: 18; 20, the bible says that the animals were also suffering because they had no pasture and because of the fire that took place during the drought (Jl. 1: 19). The plague is a symbol of divine wrath and His punishment against sin. The natural disasters mentioned in the first chapter are a figurative language in relation to the foreign enemies who would destroy Judah (Jl 2: 1-11). The invasion of the locusts turned the land into desolation.



The Jews should mourn in the day of God's wrath, that is, on the day of His judgment (Jl 1: 13-16). The prophet mentions 'The Day of the Lord' many times: Jl 1: 15; Jl 2: 1; Jl 2: 11; Jl 2: 31; Jl 3: 14, that is, the day on which He rises to execute His judgment. However, it is never too late for repentance, and a new call for the special worship in the temple is given, both for the priests and for the people (Jl 1: 13-16 cf. Jl 2: 12-17). God wants a sincere conversion to start to act. The devastation of the locusts will then be replaced by the abundance that the Lord will provide (Jl. 2: 18-27) through the outpouring of the Spirit (Jl. 2: 28-32), fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2: 17-21); and the manifestations of nature may have an apocalyptic meaning (Jl. 2: 30-32 cf. Rev. 6: 12-13). Thus, after repentance the restoration of the people will come. Joel also reports the judgments of God against the enemy nations (Jl. 3: 13 cf. Rev. 14: 15-20; Rev. 19: 15).

In Jl 3: 8 the Lord mentions the name of a people, the Sabeans (Shba'iy or Shba'), referring to the first progenitors of a district of Ethiopia. Shba'iy is a variation of the Hebrew word Cba'iy, or Cba' (Isa. 45: 14), referring to the descendants of Cush, the son of Ham, who established his nation (Seba or Sheba; in Hebrew, s^ebha' or sh^ebha'), which later came to be Ethiopia. Seba is related to Sheba, also son of Cush, that settled down to the south of Arabia. Seba (s^ebha') and Sheba (sh^ebha') are the forms (ancient Arabic and Hebrew) of the people of the kingdom of Sheba. The bible talks about 'selling the sons of Tyre and the Philistines to the Sabeans' (Jl 3: 4-8, with focus on verse 8) – Darius II and Artaxerxes II (404-358 BC), his son, and especially Alexander the Great, reduced the power of the Phoenicians and the Philistines. According to the historian Flavius Josephus, after the capture of Tyre and Gaza by the latter conqueror, thirty thousand Tyrians and multitudes of Philistines were sold as slaves. Thus, God speaks to the Jews (Jl 3: 8), in the same way, to sell these foreign slaves to the Sabeans.

Another interesting quote is in Joel 3: 18 where the prophet speaks of a fountain of water that will come out of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim (or valley of acacias). Shittim (Num. 25: 1; Josh. 2: 1; Mic. 6: 5) was a place of idolatry and immorality, in front of Jericho in the plains of Moab, to the east of the Jordan River. This means that after sincere repentance, the people who were once depraved will receive the life-giving water on the Day of the Lord (The first coming of Jesus). Acacia is a shrub that only grows in desert regions; therefore, this also means that even the wilderness, a place devoid of life, will be watered by the blessing (the water) of Jerusalem. Hence, Ezekiel (Ezek. 47: 1-12) describes the waters coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the Dead Sea and making the salt water fresh. Also in Zech. 14: 8 the waters flow from one side to the Mediterranean, on the other side to the Dead Sea, nearby Shittim, signifying the gospel sprouting like a source of uninterrupted water for the whole world, for conversion of Jews and Gentiles.

Chapter 1

• Jl 1: 1-20 (An invasion of locusts): “The word of the Lord that came to Joel son of Pethuel: Hear this, O elders, give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your ancestors? Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten [NIV: What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten]. Wake up, you drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you wine-drinkers, over the sweet wine [NIV: the new wine], for it is cut off from your mouth. **6** For a nation has invaded my land, powerful and innumerable; its teeth are lions’ teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness. It has laid waste my vines, and splintered my fig trees [NIV: ruined my fig trees]; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches have turned white. Lament like a virgin dressed in sackcloth for the husband of her youth [NIV: Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the betrothed of her youth]. The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, the ministers of the Lord. The fields are devastated, the ground mourns [NIV: the ground is dried up]; for the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil fails. Be dismayed, you farmers, wail, you vinedressers, over the wheat and the barley; for the crops of the field are ruined [NIV: Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed]. The vine withers, the fig tree droops [NIV: The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered]. Pomegranate, palm, and apple – all the trees of the field are dried up; surely, joy withers away among the people. Put on sackcloth and lament, you priests; wail, you ministers of the altar. Come, pass the night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God! Grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly [NIV: Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly]. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes. Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed shrivels under the clods, the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are ruined because the grain has failed [NIV: for the grain has dried up]. How the animals groan! The herds of cattle wander about because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep are dazed [NIV: How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering]. To you, O Lord, I cry. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flames have burned all the trees of the field. Even the wild animals cry to you because the watercourses are dried up [NIV: Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up], and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.”

Joel describes a plague of locusts that attacked successively in groups of astounding dimensions, which devoured the bark of fig trees, wheat fields, vineyards and orchards, extinguishing the materials for the sacrifices of the priests.

In verse 6 the prophet mentions the word ‘nation’ that came against his land. In Hebrew, the word is *gowy* (Strong #1471), and means a foreign nation; therefore, a gentile nation; figuratively: a troop of animals or flight of locusts. *Goy* is the shortened

form of gowwy. Thus we may think that in verse 6, gowwy refers to the locusts, while in Jl 2: 2 'gowwy' concerns a foreign army, enemies of Judah, as Assyrians or Babylonians.

As to the fact that the description of this people seems somewhat imprecise on Joel's part, it is perhaps because he was not yet aware of who they were (unlike Jeremiah and Ezekiel), that is, as he probably prophesied around 830 BC, in the time of Joash (835-796 BC), the prophet still had no news of the Assyrian's intentions about Israel or Judah, for the bible only begin to talk about the oppression of Assyria in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), when Isaiah (740-681 BC) speaks with Ahaz (Isa. 7: 1-9) on the eve of the Syro-Ephraimite war, begun in 734 BC. Nor was there any mention of Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC). So they were characters who would only appear on the scene almost a hundred years later. Even because he could only prophesy what God was showing him. It is different from Isaiah, to whom God revealed the name of Cyrus, almost 150 years before his birth.

In Joel 1: 9; 13, the prophet says that the sacrifices are cut off from the House of the Lord, more specifically the grain offerings and the drink offerings of wine. The grain offerings were made with the fine flour, that is, the flour of the best quality and with olive oil. The libation ['wine offerings'] was an offering of liquids (usually wine and oil), poured out as a sacrifice of dedication to God; a portion of the liquid was poured **along with the grain offerings** of the 'regular offerings' presented every day (Ex. 29: 38-41; Num. 28: 1-8), or of voluntary offerings or on Sabbath Days (Num. 28: 9; 10) and at the appointed feasts (Num. 15: 3; 5; 7; 10): at New Moon feasts (Num. 28: 14), at Passover (Num. 28: 24), Pentecost or Feast of Weeks, also called the Feast of Harvest and Feast of Firstfruits (Shavuot – Num. 28: 26; 31), Rosh haShannah (the civil New Year – Num. 29: 1; 6), Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur – Num. 29: 7; 11), Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot – Num. 29: 12; 16; 19; 22; 25; 28; 31; 34; 38).

With a period of drought and famine, with bad harvests and the plague of locusts devouring fig trees, wheat fields, vineyards and orchards (apple trees, palm trees and pomegranates), it is understood why the grain offerings was cut off from the temple. In Joel 1: 18; 20, the bible says that the animals were also suffering because they had no pasture and because of the fire that took place during the drought (Jl. 1: 19). The invasion of locusts turns the land into a desolation. The plague is a symbol of divine wrath and His punishment against sin. The natural disasters mentioned in the first chapter are a figurative language in relation to the foreign enemies who would destroy Judah (Jl 2: 1-11).

They should mourn in the day of God's wrath, that is, on the day of His judgment (Jl 1: 13-16 cf. Jl 2: 12-17). The prophet mentions 'The Day of the Lord' many times: Jl 1: 15; Jl 2: 1; Jl 2: 11; Jl 2: 31; Jl 3: 14, that is, the day on which He rises to execute His judgment.

Verse 13 says: "Put on sackcloth and lament, you priests; wail, you ministers of the altar. Come, pass the night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God! Grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God."

The sackcloth was a coarse loose cloth (Hebrew: saq – Strong #8242: A mesh (such as allowing a liquid to run through), that is, a thick cloth (used in mourning and for bagging); therefore a bag (for grain, etc.): bag (bed linen, clothes); in Greek, sakkos (Strong #g4526) – Matt. 11: 21; Lk 10: 13], usually made of goats' hair or camel's hair and black in color (Rev. 6: 12). The same Hebrew word sometimes means 'sack' (of keeping money or food – Gen. 42: 27), which obviously was made of the same material. The sackcloth was a sign of mourning for the dead (Gen. 37: 34; 2 Sam. 3: 31; Joel 1: 8), or mourning for national or personal disaster (Job 16: 15; Lam. 2: 10; Est. 4: 1), or of penance for sins (1 Kin. 21: 27; Neh. 9: 1; Jon. 3: 5; Matt. 11: 21), or special prayer,

asking for deliverance (2 Kin. 19: 1; 2; Dan. 9: 3). The form of the sackcloth, as a symbol of humiliation before God, was often a sash or robe around the waist (1 Kin. 20: 31; 32; Isa. 3: 24; Isa. 20: 2; Ezek. 27: 31). It was usually worn on the skin (2 Kin. 6: 30; Job 16: 15), and sometimes was worn for an entire night (1 Kin. 21: 27; Jl. 1: 13). In some cases it replaced a cloak presumably over other clothes (Jon. 3: 6). Sometimes the sackcloth was stretched out on the floor to lie on (2 Sam. 21: 10; Isa. 58: 5). Palestinian shepherds used sackcloth because it was cheap and durable. Sometimes the prophets used it as a symbol of the repentance they preached (Isa. 20: 2; Rev. 11: 3). According to Jonah 3: 8, even the animals were clothed in sackcloth as a sign of national supplication. The use of sackcloth as lamentation and penance was practiced not only in Israel but also in Damascus (1 Kin. 20: 31), in Moab (Isa. 15: 3), in Ammon (Jer. 49: 3), in Tyre (Ezek. 27: 31) and in Nineveh (Jon. 3: 5).

Source: J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2nd edition 1995.

Chapter 2

• Jl 2: 1-11: “Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come. Fire devours in front of them, and behind them a flame burns. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, but after them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. They have the appearance of horses, and like war-horses they charge [NIV: They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry]. As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle. Before them peoples are in anguish, all faces grow pale. Like warriors they charge, like soldiers they scale the wall. Each keeps to its own course, they do not swerve from their paths [NIV: They all march in line, not swerving from their course]. They do not jostle one another, each keeps to its own track; they burst through the weapons and are not halted [NIV: They do not jostle each other; each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks]. They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls; they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The Lord utters his voice at the head of his army; how vast is his host! Numberless are those who obey his command. Truly the day of the Lord is great; terrible indeed—who can endure it?”

• v. 2; 5 – The description of the enemy as great and powerful army, innumerable, is repeated as in Jl 1: 6 (‘For a nation has invaded my land, powerful and innumerable’), as well as the mention of the fire again. In verse 7 it gives the impression that he is speaking again of locusts: “Like warriors they charge, like soldiers they scale the wall. Each keeps to its own course, they do not swerve from their paths [NIV: They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course].” Anyway, it’s a metaphor for some invading army.

The Assyrian or the Babylonian army was quite quick in its actions in war, as well as brought with it a destruction trail (verse 3). To make their works of siege, they felled many trees and set fire to the cities that were conquered, after looting them and killing or capturing their inhabitants. That’s why Joel mentions the fire here. His soldiers were nimble, swift, and did not stop for anything (verses 4-9).

• v.5 – ‘drawn up for battle’ – they knew the art of war and were disciplined, organized.

• ‘day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness’ – in the case of locusts, it is known that their flocks are so numerous that they cover the sun, as happened in Egypt with the plague of locusts sent by the Lord (Ex. 10: 15); the day becomes gloomy with their invasion. In the case of an invading army over Judah, this phrase may express a period of great affliction and calamity.

• v. 4 – ‘They have the appearance of horses, and like war-horses they charge’ – the head of a grasshopper or a locust, resembles the head of a horse. On the other hand, the Chaldeans are often represented as strong, mighty, ruthless, fierce and furious, and riding on horses swift like eagles (Jer. 4: 13; Jer. 5: 15-16; Hab. 1: 6-8).



Grasshopper



Locust

In Isa. 5: 27-30 there is a description of the army of the Assyrians: “None of them is weary, none stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps, not a loincloth is loose, not a sandal-thong broken; their arrows are sharp, all their bows bent, their horses’ hoofs seem like flint, and their wheels like the whirlwind. Their roaring is like a lion, like young lions they roar; they growl and seize their prey, they carry it off, and no one can rescue. They will roar over it [*over Judah*] on that day, like the roaring of the sea. And if one look to the land [*of Israel*] – only darkness and distress; and the light grows dark with clouds [NIV: even the sun will be darkened by clouds].”

Isaiah describes the Assyrian army as an army of fierce, agile and vigilant soldiers, and enabled to war. Their chariots are fast and they scream while they fight. Judah will feel distress, and the smoke of destruction and fire will darken the sky.

Also in Isa. 10: 16 he says that the Assyrian warriors are very strong (v.16: ‘stout warriors’, ‘sturdy warriors’); and in Isa. 10: 18-19 he says that his army is as numerous as a forest, but it would be consumed by the Lord.

- Jl 2: 12-17 (The Lord's mercy): "Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing [NIV: he relents from sending calamity]. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God? [NIV – translated from Portuguese: Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing – Thus, you shall bring grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God]. Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast [NIV: those nursing at the breast]. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy [NIV: her chamber]. Between the vestibule [NIV: the portico] and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep. Let them say, 'Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, Where is their God?'"

- v. 12-17 – The Lord calls both the priests and the people to a new time of prayer, confession of sins and repentance (Jl 1: 13-16 cf. Jl 2: 12-17). God wants sincere conversion in order to act.

- Jl 2: 18-27 (The Lord's answer): "Then the Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people. In response to his people the Lord said: I am sending you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a mockery among the nations [NIV: never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations]. I will remove the northern army far from you, and drive it into a parched and desolate land, its front into the eastern sea, and its rear into the western sea; its stench and foul smell will rise up. Surely he has done great things! [NIV: I will drive the northern horde far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land; its eastern ranks will drown in the Dead Sea and its western ranks in the Mediterranean Sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise. Surely he has done great things!] Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things! [NIV: Do not be afraid, land of Judah; be glad and rejoice. Surely the LORD has done great things!]. Do not fear, you animals of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and vine give their full yield. O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before [NIV: Be glad, people of Zion, rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given you the autumn rains because he is faithful; NIV 1993: "for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness." The note says: "the teacher for righteousness"]. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before]. The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you [NIV: I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten – the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm my great army that I sent among you]. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the Lord, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame."

- v. 18 – When the Lord saw that they had made their supplications in the temple, then He turned to them with mercy and began to talk about restitution of the years consumed by both the drought and the locusts, and it is interesting that He speaks with

the animals and with the nature also (Jl. 2: 21-22), and assures His people that He will not deliver them into the hands of the wicked (v.19), nor will He let them mock Israel. In the NIV, it is written, “I am sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations” (Jl. 2: 19).

- v. 20 – “I will remove the northern army far from you, and drive it into a parched and desolate land, its front into the eastern sea, and its rear into the western sea; its stench and foul smell will rise up. Surely he has done great things!” [NIV: I will drive the northern horde far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land; its eastern ranks will drown in the Dead Sea and its western ranks in the Mediterranean Sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise. Surely he has done great things!]

(Jl 2: 20 – NIV).

‘North’ – Assyria (Zeph. 2: 13) or Babylon (Jer. 1: 14-15).

‘Its stench and foul smell will rise up’ or ‘its stench will go up; its smell will rise’ – can mean the corpses of the enemy, killed in war against other nations. The drought and the devastation of the locusts will then be replaced by the abundance that the Lord will provide (Jl. 2: 18-27) through the outpouring of the Spirit (Jl. 2: 28-32), which was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 17-21). So, after repentance the restoration of the people will come.

- Jl 2: 28-32 (Promise about the outpouring of the Spirit): “Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh [NIV: And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people]; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit [NIV: Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days]. I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke [NIV: I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke]. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape [NIV: in Jerusalem there will be deliverance], as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.”

- v. 28-32 – here we can see a reference to the return of the Jews after the captivity, as well as a messianic reference, for the full and abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred even after the first coming of Christ. In this way, the language figures used to describe the strange events in nature (v. 30-31) may be a reference to the great changes of nations and rulers during the post-exile period until the birth of Jesus (Intertestamental Period) or be a symbol of the wrath and horror that His coming has to unbelievers. The holiness and the word of the truth of Jesus judged Jerusalem. Since the return of the Babylonian exiles the physical prodigies, massacres and conflagrations preceded the destruction of the Holy City and the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD. There were revolutions in politics and with the powerful rulers of the world, predicted by disasters and great afflictions amid a time of apparent prosperity and fullness (‘noon’ – Am 8: 9), before the total change in Jewish politics. Such manifestations may also have an apocalyptic meaning (Jl 2: 30-32, cf. Rev. 6: 12-13; Matt. 24: 29-31; Lk 21: 25-27), where these events will occur in a most amazing way until the final destruction of wickedness (The great and terrible Day of the Lord). Mal. 4: 5 may also be an allusion to this, as it also refers to the first coming of Jesus.

Chapter 3

• Jl 3: 1-17 (The nations judged): “For then, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat [*Jehoshaphat means: the Lord judges*], and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations. They have divided my land, and cast lots for my people, and traded boys for prostitutes, and sold girls for wine, and drunk it down. What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? [NIV: Are you repaying me for something I have done?] If you are paying me back, I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads swiftly and speedily. For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples. You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, removing them far from their own border. But now I will rouse them to leave the places to which you have sold them, and I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads. I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away; for the Lord has spoken. Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the warriors. Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up [NIV: Let all the fighting men draw near and attack]. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weakling say, ‘I am a warrior’ [NIV: I am strong!]. Come quickly, all you nations all around, gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O Lord. Let the nations rouse themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the neighboring nations [NIV: I will sit to judge all the nations on every side]. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great [NIV: Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness!]. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. So you shall know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it [NIV: never again will foreigners invade her].”

• v. 1-2 – ‘For then, in those days and at that time’ is an expression referring to the return of the Jews after the captivity, as well as to the first coming of Christ, which will be completed with His second coming, because there are verses that fit the context. These verses (1-17) refer to the restoration of Israel.

The ‘Valley of Jehoshaphat’ or ‘Valley of Beracah’ (from Hebrew, Beracah, ‘Praise’, ‘Blessing’) was where Jehoshaphat defeated the Ammonites, the Moabites and those from Mount Seir (2 Chr. 20: 26), or Meunites (2 Chr. 20: 1). Meunite refers to a hostile people of Transjordan, linked to the Amalekites and other oppressors of Israel (Judg. 10: 12, where it is written Maonites – NIV, NRSV; in the Septuagint, Midianites), and whose land of origin is Ma’ān, to the east of Arabah, southeast of Petra (in present-day Jordan). Against this hostile people of Transjordan is that Jehoshaphat and Uzziah had victory (2 Chr. 20: 1; 2 Chr. 26: 7). The biblical text of 2 Chr. 20: 1-2; 16; 20 shows us exactly the location of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, near other locations: it is sixteen miles south of Jerusalem in the Desert of Jeruel (2 Chr. 20: 16), which may

be another name for the Desert of Tekoa, or at least part of the same region, stretching from the western beaches of the Dead Sea to the north of En-Gedi. Tekoa (2 Chr. 20: 20 – Tqowa') was a city of Judah about six miles south of Bethlehem. After the exile the city was occupied again (Neh. 3: 5; 27). In the time of the Maccabees and in the Roman period its name became what it is today: Khirbet Taqū'a, a ruined village of about 20 square kilometers, which until almost the late twentieth century had not been excavated. In 2 Chr. 16: 16 there is mentioned the Pass of Ziz, near En-Gedi, where the stream flows into the Dead Sea. En-Gedi ('en-gedhī, 'fountain of the goat' or 'spring of the kid') is a fountain of fresh water to the west of the Dead Sea, in the desert of Judah. The fertility of this area, in the midst of a so barren region, made it appropriate for the outlaws, to find food (Song 1: 14) and as a hiding place (David, for example: 1 Sam. 23: 29; 1 Sam. 24: 1-3). His former name was Hazazon Tamar, 'clefs of the palm trees' (Gen. 14: 7; 2 Chr. 20: 2), because it was bathed by a constant hot stream, and was once famous for its palm trees and vineyards (Song 1: 14). En-Gedi (Josh. 15: 62; Song 1: 14; Ezek. 47:10) is the current Ain Jidi, to the west of the Dead Sea, and halfway between the north and south ends. Through En-Gedi passed the road that the Moabites and Ammonites followed when they attacked Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 20: 1-2). The fountain still exists, a fine spring rising on a kind of terrace and goes on forming a stream that comes from the hill, from a height of a hundred and thirty two yards above the level of the Dead Sea, where it empties. There, a steep slope began, 'the ascent of Ziz' (2 Chr. 20: 16), which seems to have been the present gorge that is still crossed. Thus, the Valley of Jehoshaphat may be understood as a place of God's judgment against the wicked nations.

Some points deserve to be emphasized:

- Jl 3: 2 – the bible writes 'The Valley of Jehoshaphat'
- Jl 3: 12 – the bible writes 'The Valley of Jehoshaphat'
- Jl 3: 14 – the bible writes 'The Valley of Decision'
- Jl 13: 16 – the bible suggests proximity to Zion, while the identical phrase with Am 1: 2 does not allow any conclusion about it, confirming this closeness.

Jehoshaphat means 'The Lord judges' or 'YHWH has judged'; therefore, 'The Valley of Jehoshaphat' can be symbolic, not topographical, of **a place of God's judgment**. In other words, 'The Valley of Jehoshaphat' can be a generic term to be used for a place of God's final judgments on the enemies of Israel, with an allusion to the judgment that was assigned to them by Jehoshaphat. Even because the bible speaks of the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16: 16; 2 Kin. 23: 29; 2 Chr. 35: 22), there will be the great Day of Almighty God (Rev. 16: 14b). The word 'Armageddon' comes from the Latin word 'Har-Magedone', which means Mount Megiddo; thus, Armageddon (Greek) can also refer to the valley of Megiddo, where King Josiah died in combat with Pharaoh Necho. Megiddo (or Armageddon, or Esdrelon) means: 'place of troops'; Armageddon (or mount of Megiddo) means: 'mount of the place of multitudes'. Therefore, Armageddon is the same name for Megiddo and Esdrelon (the Greek form of the name Jezreel). Jezreel (yizr'e'el) means 'God plants' or 'God sows'; therefore, it is a symbol of fertility and divine favor (Hos. 2: 21-23). However, it is also a symbol of the final judgment (Hos. 1: 4; 11). Through the Valley of Esdrelon (or Jezreel) flows the Kishon River (Judg. 4: 13; Judg. 5: 21) where Barak defeated the Canaanites. Mount Tabor is there, where under the command of Deborah, Barak attacked his enemies. In the valley of Esdrelon Saul's army camped before the battle of Gilboa (1 Sam. 28: 4; 1 Sam. 29: 1; 1 Sam. 31: 1) and where Joram and Ahaziah were killed by Jehu (2 Kin. 9: 16; 24; 27). It is in the north of Israel, opposite the 'Valley of Blessing' or 'valley of Jehoshaphat', to the south; therefore, there is no reason to link the 'valley of Jehoshaphat' with the

‘Valley of Armageddon’, topographically speaking, when referring to the Day of Judgment. So when Joel talks about the ‘valley of Decision’ he may be referring to any place where God made or will make His judgment, since it was done both in the northern valleys and in the valleys in the south of Israel.



‘Valley of Jehoshaphat’ or ‘Valley of Blessing’ or ‘Valley of Beracah’



Kidron Valley seen from the old city of Jerusalem
(Photo by Mark Wilson – wikipedia.org)

Since the fourth century AD, the name ‘Valley of Jehoshaphat’ has been given to the Kidron valley, where in Ancient times the brook Kidron flowed. The Kidron valley begins north of Jerusalem, passes between the temple hill and Mount of Olives towards the Dead Sea, which it reaches after crossing the desert of Judea.

The mention of the Mount of Olives in Zech. 14: 4, and the fact that this was the place of Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1: 9; 12; Lk. 24: 50; Lk. 19: 29), makes it the same setting for the coming of Christ (Acts 1: 11).

Returning to the reasoning about Jl. 3: 1-2, 'in those days and at that time' is an expression referring to the return of the Jews after the captivity, as well as to the first coming of Christ, which will be completed with His second coming. Therefore, in verse 2 it is written that the Lord would gather all the nations and enter into judgment with them in the 'Valley of Jehoshaphat', that is, those who mistreated Judah and Jerusalem, taking possession of that land without permission from God.

Then the prophet talks about some of the situations that have occurred on the part of those nations against the people of God: "and cast lots for my people, and traded boys for prostitutes, and sold girls for wine, and drunk it down. What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? [NIV: Are you repaying me for something I have done?] If you are paying me back, I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads swiftly and speedily. For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples. You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, removing them far from their own border. But now I will rouse them to leave the places to which you have sold them, and I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads. I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabians, to a nation far away; for the Lord has spoken" (Jl 3: 3-8).

- v. 3: 'cast lots for my people, and traded boys for prostitutes, and sold girls for wine, and drunk it down' – the wicked nations divided the Jewish prisoners among them as in a prize draw. It seems to be a custom among the peoples of Ancient times to divide prisoners by casting lots (Obad. 11; Nah. 3: 10). Instead of paying a prostitute for her prostitution in money, they gave her a Jewish captive boy as a slave. They considered a Jewish girl so worthless that they sold her for the wine they drank.

- v. 4: 'What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads swiftly and speedily', that is, what do we have in common? This means that there is no agreement between the two parts. The Lord's people were delivered to Edom by the Philistines and the Tyrians or Sidonians (Am 1: 6; 9). If the Philistines wanted to take revenge on the Jews (Ezek. 25: 15-17), God will make His vengeance fall on their heads. Amos rebuked the Tyrians for having given Hebrew prisoners to the Edomites (Am 1: 9-10), and Joel (Jl. 3: 6), for selling Hebrew prisoners as slaves to the Greeks. God used many prophets to prophesy the fall of Tyre: Isa. 23: 1-18; Ezek. 26: 1 – 28: 26; Am. 1: 9-10; Zech. 9: 2-4. The city of Sidon was denounced by the prophets along with Tyre: Isa. 23: 4-5; 12; Jer. 25: 22; Jer. 27: 3; Jer. 47: 4; Ezek. 28: 21-22; Jl. 3: 4; Zech. 9: 2-4. Philistia (the Philistines) is also rebuked: Isa. 14: 29-31; Jer. 47: 1-7; Ezek. 25: 15-17; Am. 1: 6-8; Zeph. 2: 4-7; Zech. 9: 5-7.

- v. 5: 'For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples' – The gold and silver of the people of God were taken by the enemies and placed in the temples of their gods. The Philistines and the Arabs (Arabians – KJV) took all the treasures of King Jehoram's house (2 Chr. 21: 16-17), son of Jehoshaphat. The same thing happened in 1 Kin. 15: 18 (Asa, with the Arameans or Syrians – KJV); 2 Kin. 12: 18 (Joash with the Arameans or Syrians – KJV), 2 Kin. 14: 14 (Jehoash king of Israel plundered the treasures of Amaziah king of Judah). Other kings of Judah and Israel did the same to get rid of the yoke of the enemy: Ahaz (2 Kin. 16: 8; 2 Chr. 28: 21) and Hezekiah (2 Kin. 18: 15-16; 2 Chr. 28: 21) gave the treasures to the king of Assyria.

- v. 6: ‘You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, removing them far from their own border [NIV: far from their homeland]’ – Greeks, literally, ‘Javanites’, that is, Ionians, were inhabitants of a Greek colony on the coast of Asia Minor, and the name by which the early Greeks were known by the Jews. The Greeks were descendants of Javan (Gen. 10: 2; 4), Japheth’s son. Probably the germ of Greek civilization came, in part, from the Jewish slaves imported into Greece by the slave traders of Phoenicia. Ezekiel (Ezek. 27: 13) mentions Javan (in NRSV; Greece, in NIV) and Tyre as trading people.

‘Removing them far from their own border’ or ‘that you might send them far from their homeland’, that is, away from Judea, so that the captives lost all hope of return.

- v. 7: ‘But now I will rouse them to leave the places to which you have sold them, and I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads’. ‘I will rouse them’ means: I will bring them back. According to the historian Flavius Josephus, Alexander and his successors rejected the Jewish slaves of Greece and allowed them to return to their country. It was the fulfillment of the prophecy, freeing the Jews that had been sold to the Greeks by the Philistines and Tyrians. In turn, the city of Tyre was invaded in 332 BC by Alexander the Great when he seized the Persian empire and established his (‘I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads’).

- v. 8: ‘I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away; for the Lord has spoken’ – that is, to sell the children of the Tyrians and of the Philistines to the Sabeans. Darius II and Artaxerxes II (404-358 BC), his son, and especially Alexander the Great, reduced the power of the Phoenicians and the Philistines. After the capture of Tyre and Gaza by the latter conqueror, multitudes of Philistines and thirty thousand Tyrians were sold as slaves. Thus, God tells the Jews, in the same way, to sell these foreign slaves to the Sabeans. The Sabeans (Shba’iy or Shba’) were the first progenitors of a district of Ethiopia. Shba’iy is a variation of the Hebrew word Cba’iy, or Cba’ (Isa. 45: 14), referring to the descendants of Cush, the son of Ham, who established his nation (Seba or Sheba; in Hebrew, s^ebha’ or sh^ebha’), which later came to be Ethiopia. Seba is related to Sheba, also son of Cush, that settled down to the south of Arabia. Seba (s^ebha’) and Sheba (sh^ebha’) are the forms (ancient Arabic and Hebrew) of the people of the kingdom of Sheba.

- v. 9: ‘Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the warriors. Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up [NIV: Let all the fighting men draw near and attack]’ – the nations hostile to Israel are summoned by God to bring their men of war up (‘let them come up’) against Jerusalem (because Jerusalem was on a hill), not to destroy it, but to be destroyed by Lord (Ezek. 38: 7-23; Zech. 12: 2-9; Zech. 14: 2-3).

‘Prepare war’ – As Babylon was planned by God to advance against it for its destruction (Jer. 6: 3-8), then now all its enemies will advance against it for their own destruction. The Assyrians, the Chaldeans, and the Greeks came successively, but anyway the Lord avenged His city. Sennacherib could not invade Jerusalem; the Chaldeans destroyed it, but they were destroyed in the same way, and Jerusalem was rebuilt. The Seleucids, in the person of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, invaded Jerusalem, but Judas Maccabee expelled them from there. The prophet not only speaks with the Gentile nations to come, but also to the Jews themselves. This part of the prophecy refers to all ages before the first coming of Jesus, pre and post-exile, when the nations one after another would come against Jerusalem, but the Lord would always defeat the enemies

of His people. It can also be extended to His second coming, with the definitive defeat of the spiritual enemies of the Church of Christ.

• v. 10: ‘Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weakling say, ‘I am a warrior’ [NIV: I am strong!]

 – here the Lord speaks to His children, more or less what He said to Hezekiah at the threat of Sennacherib: “Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. I myself will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land; I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land” (Isa. 37: 6-7). This meant that there would be real wars, yes; blood would be shed, but to the sons of God the wars would be ‘holy wars’, where they would not lean on human force or human arms, but would trust in the divine strength and justice. As in many passages of the OT God caused the enemies to slay each other (as happened to the enemies of Jehoshaphat and Gideon), He was encouraging them in some way to make weapons and to come against Jerusalem, not knowing that they would be defeated and caught by surprise. God would fight for His people and avenge them. This verse conveys the idea of a warning from God alerting the Jews to the dangers and tribulations to come, and no one would be spared. Therefore, they should be prepared, especially with faith in their God. It is as if the prophet said, ‘Let no one be absent from war, not even the weak’.

We can compare this passage with Lk. 22: 36: “He said to them, ‘But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.’” Jesus was not saying that it was for them to buy a sword, but was saying that from that moment their lives would be in danger; there would be persecutions, and they should be prepared, not to kill, but to rely on the strength of God, who could free them from physical death or would give them the strength to face it. In the previous verse He reminded them: when He sent them to preach without taking anything with them, the mission was different. Now, they would need a staff, a purse, sandals, a bag, that is, the material resources of the world; they would also need to know how to defend themselves against the persecutions of their enemies. It was He Himself who said: “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes” (Matt. 10: 23). It was not God’s desire that they killed people, or were killed for no reason, without fulfilling their true mission.

Returning to Joel 3: 10, if we think of the Intertestamental Period, for this verse follows events that occurred at that time (verses 7-8), we can call a ‘holy war’ the Maccabean revolt, which expelled Antiochus IV from Jerusalem. The Jews fought for the temple of the Lord and for their lives.

It is interesting that if we think of the Messianic times mentioned by Isaiah and Micah about the temple of the Lord being established on top of the mountains and where people will come to hear the doctrine of Jesus, the phrase above is written in reverse, namely:

“He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples [NIV: will settle disputes for many peoples]; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more [NIV: Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore]” (Isa. 2: 4);

“He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away [NIV: will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide]; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Mic. 4: 3).

This means the conversion of the Gentiles to the gospel, ceasing the war. Even the weak, the sick, the old, and the children would feel strong that they could partake of this 'holy war' of the Lord, the conversion of the Gentiles, and the defeat of Satan.

This prophecy also extends to the end of times where every child of God, children, youth, adults and old people, will want to participate in the war against evil, because they already have the promise of victory from the Lord.

- v. 11: 'Come quickly, all you nations all around, gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O Lord.'

The call continues to the enemies of Jerusalem and to the inhabitants of it, to whom the prophet calls, here, 'warriors.' The enemy warriors who consider themselves powerful are about to be overthrown by God.

- v. 12: Let the nations rouse themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the neighboring nations [NVI: I will sit to judge all the nations on every side] – thinking of the translation of the NRSV ('the neighboring nations'), the second part of the verse means the nations most commonly mentioned in the prophecies and that were around Israel, always attempting an attack and a destruction: Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, Phoenicia and Egypt. However, if we think more broadly about prophecy, 'to judge all the neighboring nations' or 'I will sit to judge all the nations on every side' concerns all the nations of all parts of the earth who have mistreated Israel, not merely the nations around Jerusalem, that is, Assyria, Babylon (Jer. 34: 22; Mic. 4: 11-13; Zeph. 3: 15-19; Zech. 12: 9; Zech. 14: 3-11; Mal. 4: 1-3) and Greece (the Seleucids), for example, symbol of the spiritual oppressors of God's people. Every nation, in its appointed time, came to Jerusalem. This has to do with God's judgment against the nations that came against it in the period pre and post-exile (in the Intertestamental Period), including in the Messianic period, like Rome. Despite its long domination over Israel and Jerusalem, the Roman Empire found opposition from the Jews (the Zealots and the Jewish-Roman wars), to whom God gave victories, even through the gospel that was being preached. The word of Christ was already judging the unbelievers, and will do it fully in the last days with all the spiritual enemies of His people (Ezek. 38: 15-23, Zech. 14: 3-11, Rev. 20: 9).

We spoke in Joel 3: 2 that the Lord would gather all the nations and would enter into judgment with them in the 'Valley of Jehoshaphat', that is, those who mistreated Judah and Jerusalem, taking possession of that land without permission from God. We also said that Jehoshaphat means, 'The Lord judges' or 'YHWH has judged'; therefore, the 'Valley of Jehoshaphat' may be symbolic, not topographical, of a place of God's judgment, with an allusion to the judgment assigned to them by Jehoshaphat. So when Joel talks about the 'Valley of Jehoshaphat' or the 'Valley of Decision' he may be referring to any place God made or will make His judgment, since it was done both in the northern valleys and in the valleys in the south of Israel. Let us also remember that since the fourth century AD, the name 'Valley of Jehoshaphat' has been given to the Kidron Valley, where in Ancient times the brook of Kidron flowed. Kidron Valley begins in the north of Jerusalem, passes between the mount of the temple and the Mount of Olives towards the Dead Sea, which it reaches after crossing the desert of Judea. It was in the Kidron Valley where the general of Sennacherib stood (at the end of the aqueduct of the upper pool– 2 Kin. 18: 17) to confront Hezekiah.

- v. 13: 'Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great [NIV: Swing the sickle, for the

harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness!])’ – This was a guidance given to the executors of God’s vengeance, for the iniquity of the enemy reached the full measure (for example, ‘for the sin of the Amorites, Gen. 15: 16). God’s righteousness in the OT is compared with the act of treading the wheat or treading the grapes in the winepress: Jer. 51: 33; Isa. 63: 2-3 and Lam. 1: 15.

Joel also reports God’s judgments against the enemy nations, using these very nations to perform His revenge against another wicked nation that destroyed His people: Tiglath-Pileser III destroyed Syria, which had oppressed Israel. Assyria, on its turn, was defeated by the Medes and Babylonians; these ones, by the Persians. Nebuchadnezzar was an instrument of God’s vengeance over the enemy nations of Israel: Ammon, Moab, Philistia, Egypt, Edom, Sidon and Tyre, among others. Alexander the Great defeated the Medes and Persians, and the Romans caused division within their own empire, leading it to its downfall. Thus, God will use the mighty ones to annihilate His enemies until the Day of Final Judgment when they will all be forever destroyed. In the NT, the bible compares the harvest to the end of the age (Matt. 3: 10; 12; Matt. 13: 27-30; Matt. 13: 38-42; Rev. 14: 15-19; Rev 19: 15; Rev. 20: 9).

‘Put in the sickle’ is a metaphor for the act of ‘cutting’, ‘uprooting’, the enemies of the Church, as well as ‘treading the winepress’, which compares the wine that flows from it with the shed blood of the Lord’s enemies.

God lets the wickedness of the wicked reach their limit so that He can execute His judgment in the proper way.

- v. 14: ‘Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision’ – this exclamation of the prophet refers to the vision he had of a wide variety of nations coming together. ‘Multitudes, multitudes!’ Is the Hebrew way of designating huge crowds. As I explained earlier, the ‘valley of Decision’ refers to any place where God makes His judgment, that is, where the wicked find their condemnation already determined by Him, where the controversy between God and the enemies of His people will be decided once for all. The repetition of the expression: ‘Valley of Decision’ increases its effect and expresses the terrible certainty of its destruction, the prodigious number of people who are killed there.

It is not known which characters Joel was referring to; perhaps, to all nations over the centuries, destroyed by God Himself, until the first coming of Jesus, not necessarily on a single day, since the verses that follow (verses 18-21) talk about the restoration of Israel, with a figure of speech that resembles the coming of the new dispensation of grace.

As in all the divine judgments described by the prophets in the bible, this verse can extrapolate the reasoning to the Day of Judgment.

- v. 15: ‘The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining’ – this phrase is very similar to those that were written in Isaiah to symbolize great changes of government or a great spiritual move of God. Often in the bible, fire, chariots, whirlwind and sword (Isa. 66: 15-17) are symbols of God’s judgment on those who reject His correction and despise Him. He comes into judgment against the wicked in the way that He wants, whether by using human armies on earth, whether by calamities of nature or any other form. He always performs His justice and His judgment, even though we do not understand His methods. The bible says that He withholds His fury, is slow to anger, but when He rises against something, no one can stop Him.

• v. 16: ‘The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel’ [NIV: The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel] – ‘The Lord roars from Zion’ may mean that He will strike the wicked with astonishment, as the roar of a lion haunts the beasts of the forest. Roaring like a lion (Jer. 25: 30; Am. 1: 2; Am. 3: 8) symbolizes God’s authority over the material and spiritual world. The bible uses other figures of speech to refer to this authority: ‘voice of thunder’, ‘flames of fire’ or ‘flashes of lightning’ (Ps. 18: 13-14; Ps. 29: 3-4; Ps. 29: 7).

‘Utters his voice from Jerusalem’ or ‘will thunder from Jerusalem’ emphasizes His preference for Mount Zion (Ps. 78: 68), where He will manifest Himself to men. It was on Mount Zion, in the temple at Jerusalem, where Jesus revealed Himself as the Son of God and the Messiah.

‘The mount of the House of the Lord’ in many prophetic passages is called Mount Zion. ‘Zion’ means ‘dry place’, ‘bathed with sun’, or ‘ridge’. Mount Zion is the name of one of the hills of Jerusalem and by the biblical definition is the City of David, and later became synonymous with the Land of Israel. Zion (in Hebrew צִיּוֹן – Tzion or Tsion or Tsiyyon; in Arabic, Şuhyūn) was the name specifically given to the Jebusite fortress that was located on the hill southeast of Jerusalem, called Mount Zion, which was conquered by David. After his death, the term ‘Zion’ came to refer to the hill where the Temple of Solomon was located (on Mount Moriah, to the north of Mount Zion) and then to the temple itself and its grounds. After that, the word ‘Zion’ was used to symbolize Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

• v. 17: ‘So you shall know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it [NIV: never again will foreigners invade her].’

God gives assurance that He dwells in the holy city; and strangers shall no more pass through it, that is, foreigners shall never conquer or invade it (NIV), they shall no more come to destroy it. The word ‘strangers’ or ‘foreigners’ in this text means people who have no part with God, with the Holy Spirit, with His will. No stranger will come to attack or to desecrate the holy city (Isa. 35: 8; Isa. 52: 1; Isa. 60: 18; Obad. 17; Zech. 8: 3; Zech. 14: 16).

God was not defeated or ceased to exist with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans. Although this figure of speech (‘I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain’) is common in the OT by the prophets in referring to the Messianic kingdom, Jesus made it clear that He would dwell in a temple of flesh (John 2: 20-21), and that after His ascension His Spirit would dwell in the spirit of all believers (1 Cor. 3: 16; 1 Cor. 6: 19; 2 Cor. 6: 16); therefore, Zion is a symbol of our spirit where God is, and of the Church of Christ, as His bride, His Body on earth. No stranger will pass through it or destroy it (Matt. 16:18).

• Jl 3: 18-21 (The restoration of Israel): “In that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the Wadi Shittim [NIV: In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the LORD’s house and will water the valley of acacias]. Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the people of Judah, in

whose land they have shed innocent blood. But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations. I will avenge their blood [NIV: Shall I leave their innocent blood unavenged?], and I will not clear the guilty, for the Lord dwells in Zion.”

- v. 18: ‘In that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the Wadi Shittim’ – ‘In that day’ means the day of the first coming of Christ. Wine is symbol of the abundance of vines that were grown in terraced areas on the hills of Palestine among the rocks (Amos 9: 13), vineyards planted on the mountains. Therefore, the prophet says that the mountains shall drip sweet wine (new wine).

- ‘The hills shall flow with milk’ – that is, herds producing milk abundantly, through the richness of the pastures in the mountainous regions.

- ‘the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water’ – in Palestine, where rain falls only during a certain period of the year, the landscape is cut by many narrow valleys and streams (Hebrew, *nahal*, or in Arabic, *wadīs*), which only exhibit water during the rainy season. Groundwater can often be found in these wadis during the summer months without rain (Gen. 26: 17; 19). Perennial rivers pass through valleys (in Hebrew, ‘*emeq* = valleys) and broad plains, or else cut narrow gorges through the rock. Thus, in the coming of Christ, the Lord promises abundance of the water of His word and the presence of His Spirit filling His people and quenching their thirst.

- ‘A fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the Wadi Shittim’ (the valley of acacias) – Shittim (Num. 25: 1; Josh. 2: 1; Mic. 6: 5) was a place of idolatry and immorality, in front of Jericho in the plains of Moab, to the east of the Jordan River. This means that after sincere repentance, the people who were once depraved will receive the life-giving water on the Day of the Lord (The first coming of Jesus). Acacia is a shrub that only grows in desert regions; therefore, this also means that even the wilderness, a place devoid of life, will be watered by the blessing (the water) of Jerusalem. Hence, Ezekiel (Ezek. 47: 1-12) describes the waters coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the Dead Sea and making the salt water fresh (Ezek. 47: 8). Also in Zech. 14: 8 the waters flow from one side to the Mediterranean, on the other side to the Dead Sea, nearby Shittim, signifying the gospel sprouting like a source of uninterrupted water for the whole world, for conversion of Jews and Gentiles.

- v. 19: ‘Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they have shed innocent blood’ – Egypt is the symbol of the world and therefore the symbol of all that is at its disposal to mislead, to defy, to corrupt, to oppress and to imprison the church, moving it away from the contact with the Lord, with His light, leading it to sin and spiritual death. Thus the prophecy says that with the coming of Jesus, Israel’s communion with God would be renewed, and the values of the world would be removed and destroyed from the midst of the church. This is valid for us today, when the true spiritual values in us are affronted by all that is present in the world, appearing larger and more powerful. The Lord says that He will destroy this ‘Egypt’ so that our holiness may be preserved, as well as eternal life. His values are stronger.

But speaking a little of History, Egypt under the rule of Shoshenk I or Sheshonk I (or Shishak I – 945-924 BC) invaded the kingdom of Rehoboam (930-913 BC – 2 Chr. 12: 1-12; 1 Kin. 14: 25-28), took the fortified cities of Judah and went up against Jerusalem and carried off the treasures of the temple of the Lord and the treasures of the king’s house; and took all the gold shields Solomon had made. However, Egypt fell into

the hands of the Assyrians in the reign of Sargon II, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, each of them leaving a greater destruction; and later fell into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. After the captivity in Babylon, in the period after the death of Alexander the Great, one of his generals (Ptolemy I Soter) stayed with Egypt as his part of the Greek empire, and he and the Ptolemaic dynasty dominated by about 125 years (323-198 BC), before Israel became a Seleucid domain, founded by another general of Alexander (Seleucus Nicator I). The Seleucid kingdom dominated over Israel (198-167 BC), and one of its kings, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, took Egypt (Dan. 11: 41-43), which was soon taken by the Romans. Over time, the nation has been reduced to a deplorable state, losing almost all the glory of its past.

Edom (or Esau) was a relentless enemy of Judah in his greatest anguish. Judah (a descendant of Jacob) is a symbol of the people of God, of the Church of Christ. Edom was subdued by David, but rebelled under Jehoram (2 Chr. 21: 8-10), the son of Jehoshaphat; and at every subsequent opportunity attempted to injure Judah. Edom was conquered in 736 BC by Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), according to the Assyrian inscriptions of this king, found by archaeologists. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 581 BC, five years after the Babylonian captivity of Judah (Mal. 1: 2). Afterwards, it fell into the hands of the Persians (539 BC), and in the third century BC was dominated by the Nabataeans (Arabs), who ended up pushing the inhabitants of Edom to the south of Judea, later called Idumea. Judas Maccabeus subdued the Edomites (2nd century BC), and John Hyrcanus I (2nd – 1st century BC) forced them to be circumcised in order to be incorporated by the Jewish people. Herod the Great descended from the Edomites. The people of Edom were definitely destroyed by Titus in 70 AD.

As a symbol of the spiritual enemies of Christ's church, Edom will be completely destroyed at the second coming of the Lord.

Thus both countries have suffered the judgment of God and the prophecies have been fulfilled (Isa. 19: 1-25; Jl. 3: 19, beyond the prophecies of Jeremiah).

• v. 20: 'But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations' – God fulfilled His promise of restoration of Israel through these prophets with the first coming of Jesus, for example, in Amos, where he talks about restoring David's fallen tent ['raise up the booth of David that is fallen'], concerning the spiritual Israel and a prophecy about the future conversion of the Gentiles (Am 9: 11-12 cf. Acts 15: 16-18). In Am 9: 11-12 it is written, "On that day I will raise up the booth of David [NIV, 'David's fallen tent'] that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, says the Lord who does this"... cf. Acts 15: 14-18: "... Simon [*Peter*] has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written, 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago.'"

Raising David's fallen tent ('to raise up the booth of David that is fallen') is a prophetic reference about the spiritual reign of Jesus, where Israel and Judah would be together and could live free before the Lord, worshiping Him without unnecessary and empty rituals, and a reign in which the Gentiles could also have the right to participate, for Jesus would be the shepherd of all. 'David's fallen tent' meant the humiliation of the House of David, with no reliable ruler in order that God might keep His promise of a Davidic descendant on the throne. And this had happened because of Israel's idolatry

and rebellion, which defiled the house of Judah, provoking likewise the wrath of God upon it. However, Jesus came to bring a spiritual kingdom for all who accepted Him as Lord and Savior. We the Gentiles are the spiritual Israel of God.

As I said in the previous verse, Judah is the symbol of the people of God, of Christ's Church, of His redeemed ones. Daniel expresses the same thought in other words: Dan. 7: 14; 18; 27; Dan. 2: 44 (the meaning of the stone that crushes the feet of Nebuchadnezzar's statue, which corresponds to the church of Christ). Jesus said, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

- v. 21: 'I will avenge their blood [NIV: Shall I leave their innocent blood unavenged?], and I will not clear the guilty, for the Lord dwells in Zion'. 'I will avenge their blood' is a prophecy fulfilled on the cross, through the sufferings of Jesus. When the bible speaks 'The blood is on your (their) hands' or 'your hands are full of blood' it is referring to the shedding of innocent blood (Isa. 4: 4; Ezek. 22: 13; Ezek. 23: 37; 45; Ezek. 24: 7).

The Lord eliminated from Judah the guilt for their blood crimes (Isa. 1: 15), for their kings and princes shed innocent blood in that land. With His Spirit and His sacrifice He forgave them and purified them (Isa. 4: 4).

Conclusion:

Observing the prophetic profile of Joel, we can draw the conclusion that he proclaimed the wickedness of his people and once again urged them to the covenant and commitment to the Lord, reinforcing in them the idea of the inevitable divine judgment over all kind of sin. Even though he lived in a different time than other brethren who brought the same message from YHWH to Israel, and which was rejected and disobeyed, this prophet obeyed the voice of the Most High to exhort His people again; he didn't give up to cry out, he continued to prophesy the word of justice, judgment, mercy and restoration, as a way of saying that the Creator always gives us a new chance to reassess our lives, to rethink about our attitudes and to exercise our free will, choosing between salvation and punishment. Hence, the prophet of God should not give up of exhorting, despite having proclaimed the same message previously, until He carries out what He promised. He should also call his brethren to the covenant and communion with their Creator, assuming the perfect commitment to be His instrument on earth. It is often the life example of the Prophet the best way to witness that what he preaches is true and thus be able to reveal his God to the world.

Amos

Amos (עָמוֹס – Amos – Strong #5986) lived during the reigns of Uzziah king of Judah (781-740 BC) and Jeroboam II king of Samaria (782-753 BC). Probably Amos acted in the midway between the parallel reigns of these two kings, between 760 and 750 BC, before the exile of Israel in 722 BC. His name means ‘carrier of burden’ or ‘burdensome’; unlike ‘Amoz’ (‘āmôç, or amots, אָמֹץ, Strong #531, the name of Isaiah’s father: 2 Kin. 19: 2; 20; 2 Kin. 20: 1; 2 Chr. 26: 20, 22, 32; Isa. 1: 1; Isa. 2: 1; Isa. 13: 1; Isa. 20: 2; Isa. 37: 2, 21; Isa. 38: 1), which means ‘strong, firm.’ Born in Tekoa, to the south of Jerusalem (Amos 1: 1), he was a herdsman of Judah, besides a gatherer of sycamore-fig trees [NRSV, dresser of sycamore trees] (Amos 7: 14-15), which meant that he did not belong to the class of which the prophets usually originated, or was trained to the prophetic office in the houses of the prophets. He was a prophet without known credentials, except by the fact that he had a word from God. Tekoa was in the south of Bethlehem in the hill country of Judah, which made it a city of defense (2 Chr. 11: 6). The surrounding lands provided pasture for the flocks, which Amos took care of. Although he was born in Judah, God led him to prophesy in Samaria in the northern kingdom. He was drove out by the idolatrous priest Amaziah, who made him returned to his homeland (Am 7: 10-15).



Sycamore (Hebrew, shiqmâ; in Greek sykomōraia) or sycamore-fig (*Ficus sycomorus* L.), a wild fig tree, is a big and vigorous tree, abundant in Egypt and the lowlands of Palestine (1 Kin. 10: 27; 2 Chr. 1: 15; 2 Chr. 9: 27). The fruit were edible (a fig flavor mixed with mulberry) and of great value to Israel, like the olive trees, for it was part of the agrarian production of the nation. Here in Am 7: 14, the translation ‘gatherer of sycamore fruit’ (KJV) is incorrect, since the Hebrew word means

‘cultivator’ of that tree (‘balac’ – Strong #1103: a primitive root, meaning ‘to pinch’ sycamore figs, a process necessary to ripen them), pruning the top of each fruit to ensure that it would ripen; or, according to some scholars, making incisions in its peel with a special instrument to loosen excess juice before it ripens; after four days the fruit was harvested.

Amos, like Isaiah, attacks the dominant groups of society: rulers, magistrates (judges), landowners, politicians, as well as the ladies of Samaria (Am 4: 1-3). Amos talks about God’s displeasure against the exploitation of the poor and defenseless (Am. 2: 6-7), and criticizes materialism and the low moral level of Israel, who had absorbed these characteristics from its pagan neighbors (Am. 2: 8-16). Justice leant towards those who could pay higher bribes. Although the people complied with the religious rituals, they remained internally in the wickedness and immorality, trying to mask the injustice of their daily lives, and God rejected these rituals (Am. 4: 4-5; Am 5: 21-27). Amos proclaims God’s trial against the surrounding peoples, against Judah and Samaria by their sins against the moral laws that underpin society (Am. 6: 1-14) and also talks about the Day of the Lord, when Assyria would be His rod to strike Israel (Am. 9: 1-10). The visions he had are symbols of God’s Judgment (locusts: Am. 7: 1-7; fire: Am. 7: 4-6; plumb line: Am. 7: 7-9; a basket of ripe fruit: Am. 8: 1-14).

The central message of his prophecy é the divine sovereignty over all things: nature, nations, human beings. Amos also considered justice the most important moral attribute of the Lord’s nature over injustice, immorality and dishonesty.

The book ends with a prophecy about the future conversion of the Gentiles (Amos 9: 11-12 cf. Acts 15: 16-18) – Raising David’s fallen tent (‘to raise up the booth of David that is fallen’) is a prophetic reference about the spiritual reign of Jesus, where Israel and Judah would be together and could live free before the Lord, worshiping Him without unnecessary and empty rituals, and a reign in which the Gentiles could also have the right to participate, for Jesus would be the shepherd of all. Jesus came to bring a spiritual kingdom for all who accepted Him as Lord and Savior. We the Gentiles are the spiritual Israel of God. What in the past (OT) was physical (material), now is spiritual (Eph. 6: 12; 2 Cor. 10: 3-6).

There is an interesting reference in Am. 8: 11-13 about the ‘thirst for the word of God’ in the end days, which makes us think not only in the probable apocalyptic content of the prophecy as well as the Intertestamental Period, when the people lived a long period of silence of God, who no longer spoke through the mouth of His prophets. This passage is also regarded by scholars as the moment of captivity in Assyria or the rejection of Christ by the Jews, which caused His word and His grace to be taken from them and passed to the Gentiles.

Chapter 1

- Am. 1: 1-15 – Judgment on Israel's neighbors

- Am. 1: 1-2: “The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake. And he said: The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem [NIV: and thunders from Jerusalem]; the pastures of the shepherds wither [or ‘shepherds mourn’], and the top of Carmel dries up.”

The prophet receives a vision from God and seems to be something very important for the nation, since he uses figures of speech compatible with the wrath of God (‘The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem’ – cf. Jl. 3: 16) and with His judgment upon Israel: ‘the pastures of the shepherds wither [or ‘shepherds mourn’], and the top of Carmel dries up.’

The earthquake that happened in the days of Uzziah is not reported in the bible, but it must have been of importance to the people, for nearly three hundred years later, in Zechariah's time, it was still remembered (Zech. 14: 5).

- Am. 1: 3-5 (Prophecy against Damascus): “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. So I will send a fire on the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad [NIV: Ben-Hadad]. I will break the gate bars of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven [KJV: ‘The plain of Aven’ or ‘Bikathaven’; NIV: I will destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven; Aven means ‘iniquity’ or ‘wickedness’], and the one who holds the scepter from Beth-eden [NIV: Beth Eden, ‘the house of Eden’, meaning ‘house of pleasure’]; and the people of Aram [KJV: Syria] shall go into exile to Kir, says the Lord.”

- v. 3 – ‘Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron’ – this may have happened in the days of Jehu (2 Kin. 10: 32-33) and of his son Jehoahaz (2 Kin. 13: 3-4; 7; 22) for returning to the sins of the idolatry of Jeroboam I, the former king of Israel (931-910 BC). As a punishment, God brought Hazael, king of Syria (Aram), who struck many cities of Gilead and Bashan, belonging to the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and East Manasseh. In the days of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, Israel was again attacked by Hazael and Ben-Hadad III, his son (2 Kin. 13: 3; 22). Jehoash (son of Jehoahaz and the grandson of Jehu) also faced the Aramaeans (2 Kin. 13: 19), now ruled by Ben-Hadad III, the son of Hazael, who had died.

The expression ‘For three transgressions... and for four’ refers to the countless wicked acts that were committed by the Syrians [transgression, in the Hebrew text, *pesha*, Strong #6588 means a revolt (national, moral or religious); rebellion, sin, transgression or trespass] and indicates that God's patience was already running low. Therefore, He says He will not revoke the punishment, that is, He will not suspend, He will not interrupt, He will not stop the punishment; His punishment will be inevitable. ‘They have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron’ shows the violence of the war, where the bodies of the victims were torn like a cereal field is threshed by the threshers' teeth.

• v. 4 – ‘So I will send a fire on the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad [NIV: Ben-Hadad].’ Because of what they had done to His people, the Lord would now destroy the descendants of Hazael and would set fire to the strongholds built by Ben-Hadad. Hazael had his ascent to the throne predicted by Elisha (2 Kin. 8: 7-13), and was the founder of the Syrian dynasty (Aramaean dynasty) that ruled in the times of the kings of Israel: Jehoram (852-841 BC – 2 Kin. 3: 1; 2 Kin. 8: 29), Jehu (841-814 BC – 2 Kin. 10: 30-32) and Jehoahaz (814-798 BC – 2 Kin. 13: 22). The son of Hazael, Ben Hadad III, was his successor (2 Kin. 13: 3; 24-25).

• v. 5 – ‘I will break the gate bars of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven [KJV: ‘The plain of Aven’ or ‘Bikathaven’; NIV: I will destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven; Aven means ‘iniquity’ or ‘wickedness’], and the one who holds the scepter from Beth-eden [NIV: Beth Eden, ‘the house of Eden’, meaning ‘house of pleasure’]; and the people of Aram [KJV: Syria] shall go into exile to Kir, says the Lord.’

‘The gate bars of Damascus’ were the iron rods placed at the gates of the fortified cities. God would break the defenses of Damascus.

‘I will... cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven [KJV: ‘The plain of Aven’ or ‘Bikathaven’; NIV: I will destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven, ‘iniquity’ or ‘wickedness’].’ In Am 1: 5 this name (Bikathaven or the plain of Aven) probably refers to the valley of Beqa’ (called El-Bekaa), between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, in the Aramaean kingdom of Damascus, where are the ruins of the temple of Baal-Bek, the sun-god. It is a four-hour journey from Damascus.

Aven (cf. Hos. 10: 8) is the abbreviated form of Beth-aven [Beth Aven], a derogatory way of calling Bethel (Hos. 4: 15). Aven (in Hebrew, ‘awen or ‘âven), means ‘wickedness, iniquity, tribulation, idolatry; more specifically, an idol, vanity.’ Beyth ‘Aven (Beth Aven) means: ‘House of vanity’ or ‘house of iniquity’, ‘house of wickedness.’ Bethel means ‘House of God’, and it was where Jacob saw the ladder [or stairway – NIV] to heaven (Gen. 28: 17; 19: 22) when he fled from Esau on his way to Haran. But it was also the place where Jeroboam I (1 Kin. 12: 25-31) placed one of the golden calves for idolatrous worship in Israel. He placed one in Dan, the other in Bethel (1 Kin. 12: 28-29), where he was rebuked by a man of God because of this attitude (1 Kin. 13: 1-5). Therefore they called Bethel Beth-aven.

Therefore ‘Bikathaven’ (in the kingdom of Damascus) was ‘the valley of vanity’ or ‘the valley of wickedness’, because of the idolatrous worship in it.

‘The one who holds the scepter from Beth-eden [NIV: Beth Eden] – means the ruler of Beth-Eden, or the highest official.

Thus God would destroy both the inhabitants of the valley and the ruler. Beth Eden is a comparison with Beth Aven. We have seen that Aven means: ‘wickedness, iniquity, tribulation, idolatry; more specifically, an idol, vanity’. The term Eden or Edin first appear in Sumer, the Mesopotamian region that produced the first written language in the world. This occurred in the third millennium BC. In Sumerian, the word Eden simply means ‘the fertile plain’ (in Hebrew means ‘delight’, ‘place of delights’, ‘place of pleasure’). Therefore, if God said that He would destroy the inhabitants of Bikathaven, He would destroy the ruler of that place of delights and pleasure to them, which was a place of idolatry and iniquity. God would destroy who ruled that ‘House of pleasure’. Beth Eden seems to have been the king’s summer residence, not far from Damascus. Was this place, by any chance, related to Telassar or Tell Assar, where the children of Eden lived (Beth-Eden; Heb.: benê ‘edhen – 2 Kin. 19: 12; Isa. 37: 12), in the area between the Euphrates and Bali rivers (or Belikh), which the Assyrians called Bîti-Adini or ‘the House of Adinu’, ‘house of evil’ or ‘house of delight?’

‘The people of Aram [KJV: Syria] shall go into exile to Kir, says the Lord’ – It is thought that the 65 years of the prophecy mentioned in Isa. 7: 8 (cf. Isa. 17: 1-3) correspond to this same passage written in Am. 1: 1; 3-5. According to the prophet, the people of Syria [Aram] were taken by the Assyrians to Kir (unknown location). Kir means ‘city.’ Although some scholars put it on the plain of Mesopotamia, between the cities of Cuthah, Babylon and Borsippa, it is more probable that in this location one is speaking of the city of Kish; in Sumerian: Kiš; transliteration: Kiški; Acadian: kiššatu; modern Tell al-Uhaymir in the province of Babylon in Iraq, about seven miles and a half to the east of the city of Babylon and fifty miles to the south of Baghdad.

As for the years prophesied by Isaiah and this prophecy of Amos, probably it is about Assyria between the reigns of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) and Sargon II (722-705 BC). Tiglath-Pileser III conquered Damascus in 732 BC and it was reduced to subsidiary town within the Assyrian province of Hamath. Thenceforth it lost its political influence, remaining with only economic influence (Ezek. 27: 18). It was once again capital during the Seleucid rule of Antiochus IX in 111 BC. Aretas (Nabataean) conquered the city in 85 BC, later handing it over to Tigranes II of Armenia (83-69 BC). From 64 BC until 30 AD was Roman domain. Shalmaneser V and Sargon II conquered Samaria, and in 722 BC it fell, also being taken into captivity in Assyria. Jeremiah (Jer. 49: 23-27) prophesied about Damascus much later. The kingdom of Damascus was destroyed by Assyria, but the city remained, and it is to this city that Jeremiah prophesies. The fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy occurred, probably, in 581 BC, about five years after the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC) by Nebuchadnezzar. Tiglath-Pileser III fulfilled this prophecy of Amos when Ahaz asked for help against Rezin, king of Aram, who threatened Judah with Pekah the king of Israel. Tiglath-Pileser III killed Rezin and took the inhabitants of Damascus captive to Kir.

- Am 1: 6-8 (prophecy against Philistia): “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they carried into exile entire communities, to hand them over to Edom [NIV: Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom]. So I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, fire that shall devour its strongholds [NIV: that will consume her fortresses]. I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod [NIV: I will destroy the king of Ashdod], and the one who holds the scepter from Ashkelon; I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, says the Lord God [NIV: till the last of the Philistines are dead, says the Sovereign LORD].”

- v. 6 – ‘For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they carried into exile entire communities, to hand them over to Edom’ – Edom received Israelite prisoners, both from the hands of the Philistines, and from the hands of the Tyrians. Joel (Jl. 3: 4-8) rebuked the Philistines and the Tyrians for selling Hebrew prisoners as slaves to the Greeks. Amos rebuked the Philistines (v. 6) and the Tyrians (v. 9) for having given Hebrew prisoners to the Edomites (Am. 1: 9-10). The Philistines rebelled against Jehoram (son of Jehoshaphat) during his reign (848-841 BC). In the days of Ahaz (732-716 BC), the Edomites invaded Judah and took hold of the Israelite captives (2 Chr. 28:17) and still received Israelite prisoners captured by Tyre and Gaza (Am. 1: 6; 9). Gaza was the most important city of the five Philistine cities (1 Sam. 6: 17). The city was in the way of some trade routes, and it was accustomed to the slave trade.

- v. 7-8: 'So I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, fire that shall devour its strongholds. I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod [NIV: I will destroy the king of Ashdod], and the one who holds the scepter from Ashkelon; I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, says the Lord God [NIV: till the last of the Philistines are dead]' – cf. Isa. 14: 20-31; Jer. 47: 1-7; Ezek. 25: 15-17; Joel 3: 4-8; Zeph. 2: 4-7; Zech. 9: 5-7.

We can see that Uzziah (2 Chr. 26: 6-7) went to war against the Philistines and broke down the walls of Gath, Jabneh and Ashdod. And he rebuilt cities in the territory of Ashdod, and among the Philistines. The bible says that God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabs who lived in Gur Baal (unknown place) and against the Meunites (see 2 Chr. 20: 1; 2 Chr. 26: 7; actually, the correct term is Maonites – see below). Meunites were descendants of the Calebite branch of Judah (Caleb). Meunite is the name of the inhabitant of Maon, whose village was in the highlands of the tribe of Judah (Josh. 15: 55; 1 Chr. 4: 41) identified in modern times with Khirbet Ma'in (or in Hebrew, Horvat Ma'on), about eight miles to the south of Hebron. In Ezra 2: 50 and Neh. 7: 52 it is written 'Meunim.' According to 1 Sam. 23: 24 the wilderness of Maon, in the plain to the south of Jeshimon, was one of the places where David hid from King Saul. Nabal (1 Sam. 25: 1-11) was from Maon. In the Septuagint version of 1 Samuel (1 Sam. 23: 24), David retreated into the wilderness of Maon after Samuel's death, but in the Masoretic Text he went into the wilderness of Paran. Here there was a mistake, for Paran (Hab. 3: 3) is a desert situated in the central-eastern region of the Sinai peninsula, northeast of traditional Sinai and south-west of Kadesh, with the Arabah and Gulf of Aqaba on its eastern border. Abraham sent Ishmael and Hagar there (Gen. 21: 21). The wilderness of Paran was part of the Israelite resting places on their pilgrimage in the desert (Num. 10: 12; Num. 12: 16), and from there Moses sent the spies to explore the conditions of the land of Canaan (Num. 13: 3; 26). It was crossed by Hadad the Edomite in his flight to Egypt (1 Kin. 11: 18). Mount Paran from the song of Moses (Deut 33: 2) and Habakkuk (Hab. 3: 3) was probably a prominent peak in the mountain range on the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Because of this, perhaps, the confusion with the other meaning of the name Meunite, which also refers to a hostile people of Transjordan, linked to the Amalekites and other oppressors of Israel (Judg. 10: 12, where it is written Maonites – NRSV / NIV; in the Septuagint, Midianites), and whose land of origin is Ma'ān, to the east of the Arabah, southeast of Petra (in current Jordan). Against this hostile people of Transjordan is that Jehoshaphat and Uzziah had victory (2 Chr. 20: 1; 2 Chr. 26: 7).

In the reign of Hezekiah, he fought against the Philistines and defeated them as far as Gaza and its territory (2 Kin. 18: 8). But they were very small victories and did not really bring a great expansion to the territory of Israel, nor did it eliminate the enemy effectively.

- **Gaza:** Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) captured Gaza in 734 BC, and then his grandson Sargon II (722-705 BC) repeated the feat, for the city stayed for a time out of control of Assyria; perhaps, by dispute with Egypt, which fell into the hands of Sargon in 716 BC. Pharaoh of Egypt would come one day to smite the Philistines and enter Gaza (Jer. 47: 1). Darius II and Artaxerxes II (404-358 BC), his son, and especially Alexander the Great, reduced the power of the Phoenicians and the Philistines. After capturing Tyre (thirty thousand Tyrians were sold as slaves), Alexander the Great followed the coastline to Egypt, taking the cities of Philistia. When passing through Gaza, he found resistance. The city was fortified and built near mountains, and the Macedonians besieged it for five months. Alexander was wounded during the battle, but his army destroyed the city (332 BC), killing ten thousand of its inhabitants and selling

thousands of others as slaves. Gaza occupied an important position on the trade routes between Egypt and western Asia. Alexander followed along the Mediterranean coast, taking all the cities of the Philistines and entered Egypt, hailed as the deliverer of the people, and founding the city of Alexandria in 332 BC. The Greeks and Maccabees undertook several attacks on Gaza for their continued idolatry. The city was finally desolated in 93 BC by Alexander Jannaeus, as had been prophesied by Am. 1: 6-7; Zeph. 2: 4 and Zech. 9: 5. Alexander Jannaeus was of Hasmonean lineage and ruled as high priest in Judah in the period of 103-76 BC. In 57 BC, Aulus Gabinus (Roman Proconsul in Syria – 57-55 BC) rebuilt the city in a new location, south of the former location, closer to the sea, which remains occupied until today, but the archaeological sites discovered very little about it.

If we read the text of Zech. 9: 5-7, we can see that not only Gaza, but the other important Philistine cities were conquered and destroyed by Alexander the Great, followed by Alexander Jannaeus. Zechariah mentions the destruction of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod. Gath is omitted here, perhaps because it is somewhat far away from the route of Alexander the Great to Egypt.

- **Ashdod:** in 711 BC Ashdod was looted by Sargon II (Isa. 20: 1; Isa. 14: 29). In 604 BC Ashdod had refused to pay tribute to Nebuchadnezzar and was plundered by him as well. Herod restored it and named it Azotus (Acts 8: 40).

Zephaniah (Zeph. 2: 4-5) quotes the same cities (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron) and also mentions the Kerethites, and utters a ‘woe’ to them. Kerethites are also mentioned in Ezek. 25: 16 and refers to a tribe living in the south of the land of the Philistines (1 Sam. 30: 14; 16). The island of Crete was a colony of the Philistines. The land of the Philistines was called Philistine (hence the term ‘Palestine’); Kerītha, by the Arabs; Creth, by the Syrians; and by the Hebrews: the land of the Kerethites. They were a people originally from the island of Crete (Greek: Κρήτη, Kríti) and scattered among the Philistines and who were part of David’s personal guard (2 Sam. 23: 8-39; 1 Ch. 11: 10-47; 11: 36). The Kerethites were mercenaries. The word kerethites comes from the Hebrew Cherethites or Cherethims. The singular is Krethiy (Strong #3774), originated from ‘karath’ (Strong #3772) and meaning: executioner; Kerethite or member of the royal guard, which in turn, derives from ‘tabbach’ (Strong #2876), which means: a butcher; therefore, a life guardsman, a member of the royal guard (because he was acting like an executioner), guard.

- Am 1: 9-10 (Prophecy against Tyre): “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they delivered entire communities over to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of kinship [NIV: Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, disregarding a treaty of brotherhood]. So I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre, fire that shall devour its strongholds.”

Many prophets prophesied against Tyre: Isa. 23: 1-18; Ezek. 26: 3-9; Am. 1: 9-10. The city of Sidon was denounced by the prophets along with Tyre (Isa. 23: 1-18; Jer. 25: 22; Jer. 27: 3; Jer. 47: 4; Ezek. 28: 21-22; Joel 3: 4; Zech. 9: 2-4).

As I commented in v. 6 Edom received Israelite prisoners, both from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hands of the Tyrians. Joel (Jl. 3: 4-8) rebuked the Philistines and the Tyrians for selling Hebrew prisoners as slaves to the Greeks. Amos rebuked the Philistines (v. 6) and the Tyrians (v. 9) for having given Hebrew prisoners to the Edomites (Am. 1: 9-10). In the days of Ahaz (732-716 BC), the Edomites invaded Judah and carried away captives (2 Chr. 28: 17) and received Israelite prisoners captured by Tyre and Gaza (Am. 1: 6; 9).

Like Gaza, Tyre was concerned with the slave trade (Ezek. 27: 13).

‘They did not remember the covenant of kinship’ or ‘disregarding a treaty of brotherhood’ – this is a reference to the covenant between Solomon and Hiram (1 Kin. 5: 12), which had spiritual implications besides political agreements (1 Kin. 5: 7), and perhaps prohibited the trade of Hebrew slaves. Hiram calls Solomon his brother (1 Kin. 9: 13). For a long time Israel and Tyre enjoyed friendly relations (2 Sam. 5: 11; 1 Kin. 5: 1-12). Hiram had been David’s friend: 1 Kin. 5: 1, and helped Solomon in the construction of the harbor of Ezion Geber in the Red Sea (Gulf of Aqaba) to facilitate trade to the south. One of the successors of Hiram I, nearly a century later, was Ethbaal I (or Ithobaal I – 915-856 AC), whose daughter Jezebel married Ahab (874-853 BC), king of Israel (1 Kin. 16: 31). At the time, it was common for the inhabitants of Tyre to be called Sidonians; but the Sidonians are not called Tyrians. Therefore it is written in the bible that Ethbaal was king of the Sidonians, but in fact he was king of Tyre and had usurped the throne from his predecessor.

Tyre is an ancient town in Phoenicia, Lebanon, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It was the main seaport on the coast of Phoenicia. In Ancient times, Tyre was divided into two parts: one, called ‘Old Tyre’, which lay on the mainland (where the ‘old’ harbor was), and the city built on a small rocky island about seven hundred and sixty-five yards off the coast (The ‘New Tyre’). Today the ancient ruins of the old city of Tyre remain, next to the new city, called Sour. Around 1200 BC, the Philistines surrounded Sidon, and its inhabitants fled to Tyre, which became known as ‘daughter of Sidon’ (Isa. 23: 12). It was called the ‘the marketplace of nations’ or ‘the merchant of the nations’ because of its great trade with countless nations (Is 23: 2-3). Its merchants were the first to sail through the Mediterranean, founding colonies on the coast and neighboring islands of the Aegean Sea (Greece), on the North of Africa coast (in Carthage), Sicily, Corsica and the Iberian peninsula. The city was Assyrian domain for nearly two centuries and suffered many sieges:

- Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC) – he besieged Tyre in 841 BC
- Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) + Sargon II (722-705 BC) – 724-720 BC
- Sennacherib (705-681 BC) – 701 BC
- Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) – 671 BC,
- Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) – but the city fell in 664 BC

The prophecy of Isaiah 23: 12 seems to refer to the destruction by the Babylonians, for it implies that after seventy years, Tyre should regain part of its earlier power and glory before its destruction by Alexander.

- Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC) – laid siege to Tyre for thirteen years (582-569 BC), and when the city surrendered he appointed judges to govern it; but was unable to capture the Island of Tyre (the New Tyre).

In 539 BC Cyrus conquered the city for the Persian Empire and it remained under its dominion. The inhabitants of Tyre supplied Israel with cedar wood for the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 3: 7). At this point in History, Tyre was an arrogant and proud city that relied on itself, thinking it was unassailable because of its fortresses; also boasted in its riches and in the power of its commerce (Zech. 9: 3). It closed the gates to the Greeks under the command of Alexander the Great, but after the seven-month siege and the construction of a new bridge (a causeway on a natural land bridge) to the island’s fortress (New Tyre), Alexander conquered it in 332 BC. This bridge, made of stone, exists until today and connects the mainland to the island where the city of Tyre was located. It is one kilometer long and two meters deep. Thus the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezek. 26-28) was fulfilled fully. The great and arrogant Tyre has finally become a place for fishermen to dry their nets.

Even so, Tyre still suffered several sieges in later centuries:

- Antigonus I Monophthalmus, successor of Alexander – 315-314 BC
- Fatimid Caliphate – 996-998 AD
- The Crusaders (Baldwin I of Jerusalem) – 1111-1112 AD
- Venetian Crusaders – 1124 AD
- Ayyubid dynasty (1171-1246 DC), under Saladin – 1187 AD

• Am 1: 11-12 (Prophecy against Edom): “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity; he maintained his anger perpetually, and kept his wrath forever [NIV: Because he pursued his brother with a sword and slaughtered the women of the land, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked]. So I will send a fire on Teman, and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah.”

Other prophets prophesied against Edom: Isa. 34: 1-10; Isa. 63: 1-6; Jer. 49: 7-22; Ezek. 25: 12-14; Ezek. 35: 1-15; Obad. 1-14.

Esau or Edom (Gen. 36: 19) was Jacob’s brother, and lived in Seir a mountain previously belonging to Seir the Horite (Gen. 36: 8- 9; Gen. 36: 20); therefore, Edom is often called Seir. Discord between Edom and Israel comes from a long time ago. Some examples are: Num. 20: 17-21; 2 Kin. 8: 20-22; 2 Chr. 21: 8-10.

Jehoshaphat king of Judah, in the land of Edom, defeated the inhabitants of Mount Seir, Moab and the Ammonites (2 Chr. 20: 22) with the help of the Lord, because by putting the Levites before the army, these people ended up fighting against themselves and they slew each other. The bible says that Edom rebelled against Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat (2 Kin. 8: 20-22; 2 Chr. 21: 8-10). In the days of Ahaz (2 Chr. 28: 1-6; 2 Kin. 16: 1-4), the Edomites invaded Judah and carried off the captives of Israel (2 Chr. 28: 17) and also received Israelite captives captured by Tyre and Gaza (Am. 1: 6; 9), because the Lord humbled him because of his sins of idolatry.

During the time of Babylonian exile, the Edomites not only saw the destruction of Jerusalem, but helped the Babylonians in the plunder, and killed the Jews who were fleeing the invasion. Therefore God rebuked them and punished them (Obad. 10-14).

Assyrian inscriptions show that Edom became a vassal state of Assyria in 736 BC in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC). Edom was destroyed five years after the captivity of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, that is, in 581 BC. Afterwards, it fell into the hands of the Persians (539 BC), and in the third century BC was dominated by the Nabataeans (one of the Arab tribes), who ended up pushing the inhabitants of Edom to the south of Judea, later called Idumea. Judas Maccabeus subdued them (2nd century BC), and John Hyrcanus I (2nd – 1st century BC) forced them to be circumcised in order to be incorporated by the Jewish people. Herod the Great descended from the Edomites.

Bozrah or Botsra or Botzrah (Hebrew: בֹּצְרָה, botsrâh) was the capital of the people of Edom, and whose king was Jobab (Gen. 36: 33; 1 Chr. 1: 44). Bozrah means ‘sheepfold’, indicating that it was a city of shepherds in the southeast of the Dead Sea in the land of Edom. Today it is a small city in Jordan in the state of Tafilah, called Buseirah (Bouseira or Busairah). The prophets Amos and Jeremiah predicted the destruction of Bozrah (capital of Edom) by Nebuchadnezzar in 581 BC. The people of Edom were definitely destroyed by Titus in 70 AD.

Teman (têmân) was the son of Eliphaz and the grandson of Esau (Gen. 36: 9-11; 1 Chr. 1: 36), and may have given his name to the district to the north of Edom (cf. Jer. 49: 20; Ezek. 25: 13; Am. 1: 12, Obad. 8-9). Its inhabitants were famous because of their wisdom (cf. Jer. 49: 7). Eliphaz the Temanite was one of the comforters of Job

(Job 2: 11). A prince of Teman is named among the chiefs of Edom (Gen. 36: 15; 42; 1 Chr. 1: 53), and Husham was one of its first rulers (Gen. 36: 34). In his vision, Habakkuk saw God the Holy One coming from Teman (Hab. 3: 3). Although the exact location of Teman remains unknown, there is strong evidence in favor of the Jordanian city of Maʿān. There were many water springs in the area, and this made it attractive to the caravans between the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant. Here, Teman is used as a synonym for Edom.



Edom – Mount Seir

‘Because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity; he maintained his anger perpetually, and kept his wrath forever [NIV: Because he pursued his brother with a sword and slaughtered the women of the land, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked]’ – this attitude of Edom is very similar to that described in Obad. 10-14, which fits into the period of Judah’s exile in Babylon, and which, in this prophecy of Amos, had not yet occurred.



The ruins of Bozrah

- Am 1: 13-15 (Prophecy against Ammon): “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead in order to enlarge their territory. So I will kindle a fire against the wall of Rabbah, fire that shall devour its strongholds, with shouting on the day of battle, with a storm on the day of the whirlwind [NIV: amid violent winds on a stormy day]; then their king shall go into exile, he and his officials together, says the Lord” – cf. Jer. 49: 1-6; Ezek. 21: 28-32; 25: 1-7; Zeph. 2: 8-11.

Ammon or Ben-Ami was the name of the land of Lot’s descendant (Gen. 19: 37), of his incestuous relationship with the youngest daughter, and means, ‘son of my people’ (Ben-Ammi) and ‘craftsman’ (Ammon). He was the brother of Moab, the name of the land of the descendant of Lot (Gen. 19: 37), of his incestuous relationship with his eldest daughter. Moab means, ‘desire’, ‘family of a father.’ Therefore, they were peoples related to Israel.

Marriage between Jews and Moabites was not forbidden by the Lord, only the Moabites and Ammonites were forbidden to enter the tabernacle (Deut. 23: 3-4), not exactly by the sin of incest of their ancestors, but because they hired Balaam to curse the Israelites (Num. 22: 1-6).

Although being people related to Israel by Lot, the children of Ammon were always at war with the Israelites, as did Moab and Edom.

When God speaks, ‘because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead in order to enlarge their territory’, He was referring to the days of the Judges (Jephthah), when the people corrupted themselves with the Ammonite gods (Judg. 10: 6) and the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites for eighteen years (Judg. 10: 8). These ones came to oppress Israel, especially the tribes that were beyond the Jordan (Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh in the region of Gilead – Judg. 10: 8; Judg. 11: 4). Then they crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah and Benjamin (Judg. 10: 9), but were expelled by Jephthah (Judg. 11: 32-33). Before the time of Jephthah, the Ammonites helped Moab and Eglon its king to subdue the Israelite territory (Judg. 3: 13). In the time of Samuel, Nahash king of the Ammonites besieged Jabesh Gilead just before he became king. Saul gathered Israel and scattered Nahash’s army (1 Sam. 11: 1-2; 11; 1 Sam. 12: 12; 1 Sam. 14: 47). Nahash became David’s friend (2 Sam. 10: 1-2), but his son Hanun did not, what led Joab the general of David to war

(2 Sam. 10: 1-19; 1 Chr. 19: 1-19). One year later the Israelites took Rabbah, the Ammonite capital (2 Sam. 12: 26-31; 1 Chr. 20: 1-3), and subjected the people to forced labor.

Solomon had many Ammonite women and went on to worship Milcom (Molech) and Chemosh (1 Kin. 11: 1, 5, 7, 33). One of these women, Naamah, was the mother of Rehoboam (1 Kin. 14: 21; 31; 2 Chr. 12: 13). Therefore, the LORD forsook him and delivered him into the hand of his enemies. In the time of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 20: 1-30), the Ammonites allied themselves with the Moabites and the Edomites against Judah, but they were defeated. In the days of Uzziah and Jotham the Ammonites paid tribute to Judah (2 Chr. 26: 8; 2 Chr. 27: 5). In the time of Jehoiakim, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Syrians, and the Chaldeans were raised by the Lord against the king of Judah, because of his sinful acts; and after the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC), Baalis the Ammonite king caused other troubles (Jer. 40: 11-14 cf. 2 Kin. 25: 25).

‘So I will kindle a fire against the wall of Rabbah, fire that shall devour its strongholds, with shouting on the day of battle’, probably refers to the taking of Ammon by the Babylonians, not long after the fall of Jerusalem (Jer. 49: 2-5; Ezek. 21: 28-32; Ezek. 25: 2-7; Zeph. 2: 8-11; Am. 1: 13-15). Rabbah (2 Sam. 12: 26-31) was the capital of the Ammonites. We may also think of the Assyrians, although this reference is not very clear in the bible, if we take into account some archaeological findings saying to have been found in the inscriptions of the palace of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) a list of kings who were obliged to pay tribute to him; among them, Sanipu the king of Ammon. Other nations and their kings were also recorded: Salamanu king of Moab; Qaushmalaca king of Edom; Mitinti king of Ashkelon; Hanno king of Gaza; Ahaz king of Judah, and Menahem king of Samaria. Sennacherib (705-681 BC) also wrote the names of other nations and kings who revered him and paid tribute: Buduilu king of Ammon; Ethbaal king of Sidon; and the king of Ashdod.

‘Their king shall go into exile, he and his officials together, says the Lord’ – it is probably Baalis that the prophet was speaking of (Jer. 40: 14). Like Edom, Ammon also rejoiced over the captivity of Judah, and therefore the Lord would punish them too.

After the exile, Tobiah the governor of Ammon tried to prevent the building of the walls by Nehemiah (Neh. 2: 10-19; Neh. 4: 3; 7).

In the Hellenistic period there was the rise of a pro-Hellenic Jewish party that first developed in the Jewish Diaspora of Alexandria and Antioch (Syria), and then spread to Judea, for example, in the family of the Tobiads, of which Menelaus or Menahem the high priest, was probably part, being one of those sympathizers. The Tobiads were from the land of Ammon. Willreich (a German bishop of Bremen, Germany, ninth century) associates them with Tobiah, the Ammonite servant mentioned by Nehemiah, and who consequently came from the Eastern Jordanian district. Antiochus IV Epiphanes supported the party favoring Hellenization and Romanization. Among the Jews and the high priests there were unbelievers, such as Menelaus (probably from the Tobiads’ family) and Jason (another Ammonite), who facilitated the infiltration of Antiochus Epiphanes into the Holy City. The prophet Daniel, in his prophecy, calls them ‘those who have violated the covenant’ – NIV – or ‘those who violate the covenant’ – NRSV (Dan. 11: 32).

This situation (Romanization and Hellenization of Judea) generated discontent among the faithful Jews like Mattathias and his sons: John, Simon, Judas (Maccabeus), Eleazar and Jonathan (the Hasmonean family, known as the Maccabees). The Ammonites survived until the second century BC. Judas Maccabeus had to fight them in his days.

Chapter 2

- Am. 2: 1-3 (Prophecy against Moab): “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because he burned to lime [NIV: to ashes] the bones of the king of Edom. So I will send a fire on Moab, and it shall devour the strongholds of Kerioth [Kerioth means ‘city’], and Moab shall die amid uproar, amid shouting and the sound of the trumpet [NIV: Moab will go down in great tumult amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet]; I will cut off the ruler from its midst, and will kill all its officials with him, says the Lord.”

Kerioth was a city of Moab (Jer. 48: 24). There was a shrine there, dedicated to Chemosh, the Moabite god. This city gained importance because of another city to the east of the Jordan called Ataroth, which was a city built by the kings of Israel for the men of Gad. It was captured by Mesha, king of the Moabites, who slew its inhabitants; and its leader, Arel, was dragged before Chemosh in Kerioth (Qeriot).

As I said in the excerpt about Ammon, Moab was the name of the land of Lot’s descendant (Gen. 19: 37), from his incestuous relationship with the eldest daughter. Moab means desire, family of a father. He was the brother of Ammon or Ben-Ami, a descendant of Lot’s incest with his youngest daughter, and means son of my people (Ben-Ammi) and craftsman (Ammon). Therefore, they were peoples related to Israel. Marriage between Jews and Moabites was not forbidden by the Lord, only the Moabites and Ammonites were forbidden to enter the tabernacle (Deut. 23: 3-4), not exactly by the sin of incest of their ancestors, but because they hired Balaam to curse the Israelites (Num. 22: 1-6).

Other prophets prophesied against Moab: Isa. 15: 1 – 16: 14; Isa. 25: 10-12; Jer. 48: 1-47; Ezek. 25: 8-11; Zeph. 2: 8-11.

Geographically speaking, Moab is the historical name for a strip of mountainous land in what is now Jordan, along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. Moab was a land of fortified cities with many rivers and streams to water the fields, suitable for grazing and cultivation of grapes and many species of trees, such as balsam.

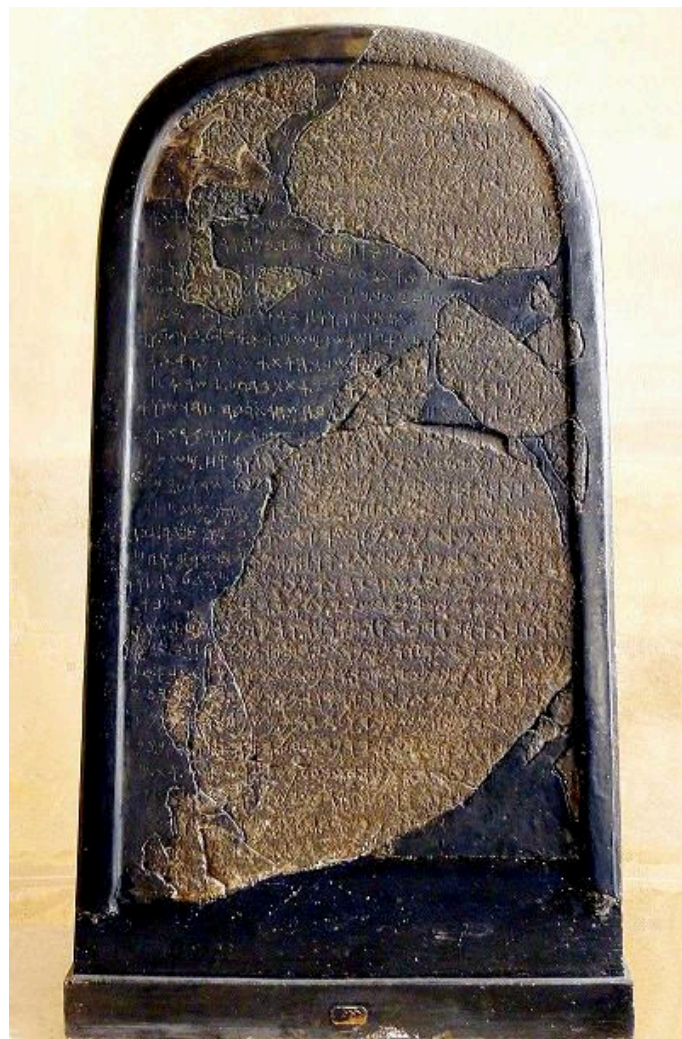
Therefore, Lot chose that region to dwell in (Gen 13: 10-12); more specifically in a cave near Zoar, formerly called Bela (Gen. 14: 8), on the plain located along the lower Jordan Valley and the plain of the Dead Sea. Because of the waters that flow from the mountains of Moab, Zoar was a flourishing oasis. Zoar means ‘small.’ This place probably can be presently identified as Safi (some say it is called Tell Esh-Shaghur), behind which the ground rises for three or five kilometers, and there are many caves there. Zoar was one of the five cities described in Gn 14: 8 [Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim [NIV: Zeboyim], Bela (Zoar – Gen. 19: 20; 22)] which was spared in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19: 23-25; 29; 30; Deut. 29: 23).

From the time of David, Moab and Edom were submissive to Israel and paid tribute to the king of Judah (2 Sam. 8: 2). Then the kings of Moab began to pay their tribute to the kings of Israel with a hundred thousand lambs and the wool of a hundred thousand rams until the death of Ahab (2 Kin. 3: 4-5, around 853 BC), when Mesha, king of Moab rebelled and ceased to pay the tribute. He threatened to invade Israel in the reign of Jehoram the son of Ahab, who along with Jehoshaphat king of Judah and the king of Edom went to war against Moab (2 Kin. 3: 7-9). The war was succeeding in favor of Jehoshaphat and Joram, until Mesha, in despair, sacrificed his eldest son to his god Chemosh (2 Kin. 3: 26-27). When Amos speaks, ‘he burned to lime [NIV: to ashes] the bones of the king of Edom’ he refers to the revenge of the king of Moab because of the war, that is, for having sacrificed his own son and being not able to kill the king of

Edom at that time, he desecrated the tomb of this king and burned his bones years later, when he was already dead, according to the opinion of some historians.

Mesha rebuilt some cities of Moab at the expense of forced labor from the Israelites, including reservoirs and cisterns, walls, gates, towers, and the king's palace, built in the city of Qarhoh (Karchah).

All details of the achievements of Mesha the Moabite king can be found in the Mesha Stele (dated 840-810 BC), also known as 'Moabite Stone', discovered intact in 1868 by an Anglican missionary (Frederick Augustus Klein) in the ancient city of Dibom (now Dhiban, Jordan). Subsequently the stone was broken by local villagers during a dispute over its property. The fragments with most of the inscription (613 of the 1,000 letters that the stone contains) were later recovered and collected. The Moabite stone, rebuilt in the 1870s by a Frenchman, Ganneau, is housed in the Louvre Museum.



Moabite Stone (Mesha Stele): The brown fragments are pieces of the original stele, whereas the smoother black material is Ganneau's reconstruction from the 1870s – Wikipedia.org

During the last half of the 8th century BC, Moab was subdued by Assyria (Shalmaneser, Sennacherib or Esarhaddon), and compelled to pay tribute, but after the fall of Assyria, Moab was free again. Moabites entered Judah in the days of Jehoiakim (2 Kin. 24: 2). At the time of the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC), some Jews found refuge in Moab, but returned when Gedaliah was appointed governor (Jer. 40: 11). Moab was finally subdued by Nebuchadnezzar and fell successively under the control of the Persians and various Arab groups in northern Arabia, including the Qedarites (the allies of the Nabataeans). The Moabites ceased to have independent existence as a nation, although in post-exile times they continued to be recognized as a race (Ezr. 9: 1; Neh. 13: 1; 23), i.e., the land of Moab continued to be known by its biblical name for a while. Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC), king of Judea of Hasmonean priestly lineage, subdued them at the end of the second century BC, annexing their territory to those of Samaria and Idumea, who were already under the control of Jerusalem. Later, the ancient land of Moab was occupied by the Nabataeans.

- Am. 2: 4-5 (prophecy against Judah): “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the Lord, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked [NIV: because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed]. So I will send a fire on Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.”

The prophet directed the earlier prophecies to the people of Israel, saying that the wicked nations would suffer the punishment of God. Now, he talks about the southern kingdom, Judah, who by consciously following idolatry and turning away from His commandments will also have to settle accounts with God. When the Lord speaks, ‘I will send a fire on Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem’ He refers to the Babylonian invasion, which will destroy the royal palace and the great houses of the nobles of Jerusalem. The false gods deceived the people as to their ability to save them from their tribulations. And the people believed in these lies, but they would be disappointed later. Judah had fallen into the very sins of Israel (2 Kin. 17: 19; 2 Chr. 36: 14-16).

This speech of Amos was preparatory to the next, directed specifically to the nation of Israel.

- Am. 2: 6-16 – Judgment on Israel:

- Am 2: 6-7: “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous [NIV: the innocent] for silver [in Hebrew, keseph, silver, usually translated as money], and the needy for a pair of sandals—they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way [NIV: and deny justice to the oppressed]; father and son go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned [NIV: Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name].”

In the time of Jeroboam II (782-753 BC – 2 Kin. 14: 23-29), the oppression of Syria had diminished over Israel because of the victories God had given to Jehoash, the father of Jeroboam II (2 Kin. 13: 22-25), and he resolved to extend his borders (2 Kin. 14: 25) and to develop profitable trade, which created a powerful class of merchants in Samaria. But wealth was not evenly distributed among the people. It remained in the hands of rich merchants. Oppression against the poor was common (Am. 2: 6). The rich were hardened in heart and indifferent to the afflictions of the hungry (Am. 6: 3-6). Justice

leant towards those who could pay higher bribes (Am. 2: 6; Am. 8: 6). In times of drought (Am. 4: 7-9) the poor could only obtain funds from the moneylenders (Am. 5: 11; Am. 8: 4-6) and were forced to mortgage their lands and their people; even their loved ones.

Amos talks about God's displeasure against the exploitation of the poor and defenseless (Am. 2: 6-7). The judges sold the righteous [NIV: the innocent] for money ['silver'], and for a pair of sandals they condemned the needy; humiliated the less privileged ('they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth') and denied justice to the oppressed. They transgressed the law of God even in relation to marriage, for father and son had a relationship with the same girl and no one went against this. The name of the Lord was profaned by these attitudes. The prophet was probably referring to the cultic prostitutes [NRSV: temple prostitutes; NIV: shrine prostitution] who participated in the ritual of fertility cult of the Canaanites at the Temple of Astarte, a ritual with which the Israelites had engaged.

- Am. 2: 8: "They lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God [NIV: 'god', with lowercase letter] they drink wine bought with fines they imposed [NIV: In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines]."

Amos also criticizes materialism and the low moral level of Israel, who had absorbed these characteristics from its pagan neighbors (Am. 2: 8-16).

Religion was perverted, with the worship of false gods, even with rich ceremonies and sacrifices offered at the expense of the poor. The clothes of the poor were square pieces of cloth, and they covered themselves at night with them. The lenders were demanding as a pledge for the debt even the clothing necessary for survival. The money collected from the poor, unfairly, was spent to buy wine for the feasts of the gods. The law spoke of the pledge (Ex 22: 26-27; Deut 24: 12-13), but no one remembered it:

- Ex 22: 26-27: "If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate" – NIV.

- Deut. 24: 12-13: "If the person is poor, you shall not sleep in the garment given you as the pledge. You shall give the pledge back by sunset, so that your neighbor may sleep in the cloak and bless you; and it will be to your credit before the Lord your God."

- Am. 2: 9-10: "Yet 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 beneath. Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite."

Here the Lord reminds them that it was He who destroyed the Amorites before them when they entered the Promised Land, for the Amorites were one of the strongest tribes of Canaan, a people of great stature, strength, power, and magnificence, like the cedars and the oaks.

- Am. 2: 11-12: "And I raised up some of your children to be prophets and some of your youths to be nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel? says the Lord. But you made the nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, 'You shall not prophesy'" (cf. Isa. 28: 7).

The Nazirites (consecrated to God, like Samuel, Samson and John the Baptist) should follow certain rules, among them, not to drink wine. But in the midst of a corrupt society and irreverent priests, they made even what was forbidden to them.

Nazirite comes from the Hebrew *nāzīr* (vine), derived from *nāzar*: to separate, to consecrate, to abstain; compared with the word *nezer*: diadem, crown of God, sometimes identified with the long hair of Nazirites. Although the Law of Moses talks about Naziriteship (Num. 6: 1-21), the origin of the practice is pre-Mosaic and obscure (Semites and other primitive peoples). There were three rules to be respected by the Nazirite:

- To renounce wine and other fermented drink, or grape juice and not to eat anything that comes from the grapevine, fresh or dried, not even the seeds or the skins (Num. 6: 3-4) to maintain his integrity and holiness and not to be possessed by any other than the spirit of God (Prov. 20: 1; Lev. 10: 9-11). Thus, he approached Him in a more worthy way. For us, the spiritual significance of this abstinence is to renounce carnal passions and emotional imbalance, submitting to the control of the Holy Spirit.

- Not to cut the hair (Num. 6: 5). The hair, for the Jews of that time, symbolized the source of life, as well as the vine (*nāzīr* = unpruned vine – Lev. 25: 5; 11 [NRSV]; at the end of separation time the hair was burned on the altar – Num. 6: 18-19). For us, the spiritual meaning of this practice is not to leave the spiritual covering of God, but to be aware of His protection and the presence of His Spirit.

- Not to approach any corpse (Num. 6: 6), even if relatives and this applied also to the high priest (Aaron could not mourn the death of his sons Nadab and Abihu who were killed by the Lord for burning incense on the altar without His order, nor could go to the funeral because he was high priest: Lev. 10: 6-7). Other references: Lev. 21: 1-4; 10-12. For us, the meaning of this is not to touch the old things again, things that had passed away; not to touch dead things; not to touch sin.

The Naziriteship was usually done to get certain favors from God. Some men made temporary vow (at least for thirty days, as in the case of Paul – Acts 18: 18; Acts 21: 23-24); others did so as a vow for life: Samuel, Samson and John the Baptist.

- Am. 2: 13-16: “So, I will press you down in your place, just as a cart presses down when it is full of sheaves [NIV: Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain]. Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain their strength, nor shall the mighty save their lives [NIV: The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength, and the warrior will not save his life]; those who handle the bow shall not stand, and those who are swift of foot shall not save themselves, nor shall those who ride horses save their lives; and those who are stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, says the Lord.”

Because of so much transgression of Israel (cf. 2 Kin. 17: 7-23), the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Assyrians, who led them into captivity.

‘So, I will press you down in your place, just as a cart presses down when it is full of sheaves’ or ‘I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain’ – it means that security would be taken from them; what they trusted would be removed and they would experience deprivation, in order to give value to what God gave them and to what was prophesied by His prophets.

‘Those who handle the bow shall not stand, and those who are swift of foot shall not save themselves, nor shall those who ride horses save their lives; and those who are stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, says the Lord’ – it means that not even the most experienced warrior could stand in his position, nor the most agile and capable could flee. The Lord would deliver them totally into the hands of the enemy.

Hoshea (732-723 BC) was the last king of Israel (the northern kingdom, ruling in Samaria, the capital). In the seventh year of Hoshea (725 BC), Shalmaneser V of

Assyria came up against Israel and defeated the king because he asked for help from Pharaoh So of Egypt (2 Kin. 17: 4, probably an abbreviation of (O)so(rkon), Osorkon IV, of the 22nd dynasty – 730-712 BC, and who reigned in Tanis and Bubastis – or Tefnakht from the 24th dynasty, who reigned at Sais, 732-725 BC). Hoshea was imprisoned. Samaria was besieged for three years (2 Kin. 17: 5-6; 2 Kin. 18: 9-11). In the ninth year of Hoshea (2 Kin. 18: 9-11), Israel was taken over by Sargon II (722-705 BC) and exiled. The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria, settled them in Halah, on the Habor (2 Kin. 17: 6; 2 Kin. 18: 11; 1 Chr. 5: 26), the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. Habor is a river (now Habür), which flows into the Euphrates. It crossed the Assyrian province of Gozan (n^ehar gôzân, ‘river of Gozan’). In the place of the Israelite population were brought (2 Kin. 17: 24; 30-31) the inhabitants of Babylon, of Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim. Nimrod dwelt between Nineveh and Calah (Gen. 10: 11, probably Halah).

Chapter 3

- Am. 3: 1-15 – Punishment against the wickedness of Israel

- Am. 3: 1-2: “Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities [NIV: You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins].”

The Lord tells His people that among all the families of the earth He has chosen them and brought them out of Egypt. And when He speaks ‘the whole family’ He is referring to all twelve tribes. He chose them to have a special relationship with Him and to be His voice in the midst of all nations. Through them all the families of the earth would be blessed; and that was a responsibility that God gave them.

But as a father punishes his children when it is necessary (Deut. 8: 5; Job 5: 17; Prov. 3: 12; Heb. 12: 6-7, Rev. 3: 19), He would punish them for what they did, for their sins (2 Kin. 17: 7-23): they worshiped other gods, instead of worshiping the Lord; they walked in the statutes of the heathen nations, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had introduced (Jeroboam I – 1 Kin. 12: 25-33); they built for themselves high places; they set up for themselves pillars and sacred poles [NIV: sacred stones and Asherah poles] for them to worship; they burnt incense in all the high places; they did wicked things, provoking the Lord to anger and served the idols; they made for themselves cast images of two calves; they made a sacred pole, worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. They made their sons and their daughters pass through fire; they used divination and augury. Hence, the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel; he punished them and gave them into the hands of the Assyrians, who plundered them, and cast them out from His presence. The children of Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam I had committed. The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all the prophets to keep His commandments and His statutes, but they did not listen to them and became even more obstinate. Judah followed the example of Israel.

As for Jeroboam I (1 Kin. 12: 25-33), the king of Israel (the ten tribes that separated), fearing that the people would return to worship in Jerusalem and return to Rehoboam, the king of Israel made two golden calves and told the people that these were the gods who brought them up out of the land of Egypt. He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. He also made houses on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not Levites. They burnt incense there. At his pleasure Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the Feast of Tabernacles that was celebrated in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar to the calves that he had made in Bethel and Dan.

The people and kings of Israel followed his example for two centuries.

- Am. 3: 3-7: “Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment? [NIV: Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?] Does a lion roar in the forest, when it has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from its den, if it has caught nothing? Does a bird fall into a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? [NIV: Does a bird swoop down to a trap on the ground when no bait is there?] Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing? Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are

not afraid? Does disaster befall a city, unless the Lord has done it? Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret [NIV: his plan] to his servants the prophets.”

Here the Lord uses various metaphors to say things to the Israelites: two people can not walk together unless they agree about something (that is, unless they have a commitment); and that no animal roars without having caught the prey, as no bird falls into the snare if there is no trap ready for it. Likewise, the snare does not move until it has caught the prey; a people does not tremble in fear in the city if the trumpet does not sound warning of an attack, nor will disaster befall a city unless the Lord has done it or permitted. All this means that nothing happens by chance, and that there is always a consequence in all acts, there is always reciprocity, there is always a warning first.

Therefore, He says that He will not do anything without first using His prophets to give them the warning: ‘Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret [NIV: his plan] to his servants the prophets.’ When God sends a calamity, He also reveals its purpose.

- Am. 3: 8-10: “The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy? Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod [Septuagint says: Assyria], and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt, and say, ‘Assemble yourselves on Mount Samaria, and see what great tumults are within it, and what oppressions are in its midst’. They do not know how to do right, says the Lord, those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds [NIV: They do not know how to do right, declares the LORD, who store up in their fortresses what they have plundered and looted].”

Then the prophet says that the lion has already roared (the lion may be the symbol of the Assyrian army’s march). He has already spoken and continues speaking through the mouths of His prophets what will happen, and even the enemy already knows. Philistia, Assyria, and Egypt are being called to come to Samaria and see how many sins there are in the city, how much corruption. There is violence, theft and greed, money gained in an illicit manner accumulated in their palaces. Israel has lost all moral sense.

- Am. 3: 11-15: “Therefore thus says the Lord God: An adversary shall surround the land, and strip you of your defense; and your strongholds shall be plundered. Thus says the Lord: As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs [NIV: two leg bones], or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed [NIV: so will the Israelites living in Samaria be rescued, with only the head of a bed and a piece of fabric from a couch]. Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob, says the Lord God, the God of hosts: On the day I punish Israel for its transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. I will tear down the winter house as well as the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end [NIV: the mansions will be demolished], says the Lord.”

Then Amos warns again that an enemy (Assyria) will surround the land of Israel, overthrow the fortified cities and plunder their strongholds. The Lord will save only a remnant, a little bit of what is left in the clutches of the enemy, those poor and insignificant ones the enemy neglected; or those who, by their poverty, have only a corner of a bed or a piece of fabric from a couch to lie down; and their escape will be like a miracle. On the day that He punishes them for their transgressions, the altar of Bethel shall also be destroyed; nothing will be left. The horns of the altar were the place where animals were tied for the sacrifice. They were sacred to the Israelites because the blood of sacrifice was put on them (Lev. 4: 30); therefore, cutting them off was an act of

desecration. Whoever held the horns of the altar was protected by God, until his guilt or his innocence were proven, as was the case with Adonijah (1 Kin. 1: 50). The palaces of the kings and the houses of the nobles will be utterly ruined.

Chapter 4

- Am. 4: 1-3 – Prophecy against the women of Samaria

- Am. 4: 1-3: “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor [NIV: you women who oppress the poor], who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, ‘Bring something to drink’! The Lord God has sworn by his holiness: The time is surely coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. Through breaches in the wall you shall leave, each one straight ahead; and you shall be flung out into Harmon [Harmon means ‘mountain of oppression’], says the Lord [NIV: You will each go straight out through breaches in the wall, and you will be cast out toward Harmon declares the LORD].”

- The prophet Amos, like Isaiah (Isa. 3: 16-26; Isa. 4: 1; Isa. 32: 9-19), is a little harsh with the women of Samaria, who seemed to enjoy good social status and still partook in the covetousness and greed of their husbands. They had their share of guilt in the injustices they committed. Amos refers to them as ‘cows of Bashan’, for they had the appearance of a well-fed person, and has a luxurious life. Bashan was east of the Sea of Galilee. There, wheat was planted and there were many pastures. Its cattle were fat and with shiny hair (Deut. 32: 14; Ps. 22: 12; Ezek. 39: 18).

- ‘The Lord God has sworn by his holiness’ – perhaps because of this phrase we can say that besides the social injustices of which these women were part, there was the practice of formal worship with a mixture of pagan rites in their sanctuaries. Therefore, the Lord would deliver them into exile to vindicate His holiness.

- ‘Breaches’ refer to the breaches made by enemies on the city wall.

- ‘Through breaches in the wall you shall leave, each one straight ahead’ – The Lord was already saying that they would go to bondage, one after the other, men and women of Samaria would be taken captive.

- ‘You shall be flung out into Harmon’ or ‘you will be cast out toward Harmon declares the LORD’ – the word Harmon, in Hebrew is, Harmown (Strong #2038), different from Hermon (Strong # 2768 – Chermown, the mountain to the north of Israel). Harmown means a castle, a palace, a stronghold. This means that they would be cast as prisoners in the stronghold, in the castle, in the palace (of the enemy), which is the ‘mountain of oppression’ to which the NIV refers, that is, the enemy’s fortress is ironically called ‘palace’, and the inhabitants of Samaria would be thrown into it.

- Am. 4: 4-13 – The spiritual blindness of Israel:

- Am. 4: 4-5: “Come to Bethel—and transgress; to Gilgal—and multiply transgression [NIV: sin yet more]; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days [NIV: Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years]; bring a thank offering of leavened bread (*referring to the Fellowship Offering or peace offering*), and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them; for so you love to do, O people of Israel! says the Lord God.”

Although the people complied with the religious rituals, they remained internally in the wickedness and immorality, trying to mask the injustice of their daily lives, and God rejected these rituals (Am. 4: 4-5; Am. 5: 21-27). The Israelites continued to worship at Bethel, where there were also the golden calves of Jeroboam I (cf. Hos. 10: 5). The more they visited their sanctuaries, the more they departed from God; therefore, the prophet speaks with irony, ‘Come to Bethel—and transgress; to Gilgal—and multiply

transgression' or 'sin yet more.' Even if they offered their tithes every three years ('the second tithe' – Deut. 14: 28; Deut. 26: 12), and their regular offerings*, their 'Fellowship offerings' or 'peace offerings' ('thank offering of leavened bread') and their freewill offerings (Deut. 12: 6-7), they would not be offerings accepted by the Lord. Unleavened bread was used at Passover (Ex. 23: 18) and the grain offerings (Lev. 2: 11), but in the peace offerings or fellowship offerings (Lev. 7: 12-13) where the priest partook of communal meals leaven was permitted. Freewill offerings (Deut. 12: 6-7) refer to the spontaneous offerings, which were the sincere expression of their devotion to God.

Regular offerings (*) – in Ex. 29: 39-42; Ex. 30: 7-8 and Num. 28: 1-8 it is written about the regular offerings or daily offerings, which were offered: a lamb a year old, the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour (1 ephah = 17.60 liters) mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil (1 hin = 3.47 liters) from pressed olives, and a quarter of a hin of wine ('fermented drink') as a drink offering twice a day, besides the sacred incense burned on the golden altar by Aaron and his sons in the morning and at twilight.

Grain Offering	Lev. 2: 1-16	Choice flour (Fine flour), olive oil, incense, cakes or wafers (boiled, baked or fried) with salt. No yeast or honey. It accompanied the burnt offerings and peace offerings (along with a libation). Note: Wafer: folder mass that is made the unleavened bread.	Voluntary act of worship. Recognition of the goodness and providence of God. Dedication to God. The oil symbolizes joy.
Fellowship Offering or peace offering (symbolizes the supper with the Lord)	Lev. 3: 1-17	Any animal without flaw from the flock. Variety of bread.	Voluntary act of worship. Thanksgiving and Communion (it was accompanied by a communal meal).

• Am. 4: 6-9: "I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities [NIV: I gave you empty stomachs in every city], and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return to me, says the Lord. And I also withheld the rain from you when there were still three months to the harvest; I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city; one field would be rained upon, and the field on which it did not rain withered [NIV: I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up]; so two or three towns wandered to one town to drink water, and were not satisfied; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord. I struck you with blight and mildew; I laid waste your gardens and your vineyards; the locust devoured your fig trees and your olive trees; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord."

The Lord had punished them with drought, famine, blight and mildew, but not even so they turned from their evil ways. Their gardens, vineyards, fig trees, and the olive trees were devoured by the locust (cf. Am. 7: 1-3), but this did not bring them back to God too.

- Am. 4: 10-11: “I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt; I killed your young men with the sword; I carried away your horses; and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord. I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a brand snatched from the fire [NIV: You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire]; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.”

Just as God punished Egypt, He punished them with pestilence, diseases. Their young men died by the sword and their horses were stolen. The camps became smelly because of the dead, yet they did not remember the Lord in their tribulations. The Lord even destroyed some of their cities like Sodom and Gomorrah, and many were burnt and died but they did not turn from their ways. All this is a reference to the severity of the punishment and destruction caused by the Egyptian plagues (cf. Deut. 28: 21-27; 31; 45; 48; 60).

- Am. 4: 12-13: “Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel! For lo, the one who forms the mountains, creates the wind, reveals his thoughts to mortals [NIV: mankind], makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth—the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name!”

The Lord would bring upon them a much greater judgment and would make them turn to Him for help. It was not a warning that Israel would prepare to face the punishment, but a call to repentance (The Septuagint says: Prepare, O Israel, to cry to your God). The prophet ends by describing the majesty, power, and sovereignty of God over all things. Nature reveals His majesty.

Chapter 5

- Am. 5: 1-20 – Seek me and live

- Am. 5: 1-3: “Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel: Fallen, no more to rise, is maiden Israel; forsaken on her land, with no one to raise her up [NIV: Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up]. For thus says the Lord God: The city that marched out a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which marched out a hundred shall have ten left.”

The prophet mourns over the land of Israel, which will be desolated in such a way that she will no longer be the same. He already sees her destroyed, without having anyone to help her. Her princes and her inhabitants were slain by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, or taken captive, and thus they cannot give her assistance; her idols, whom she worshiped, cannot either. Amos reminds his people of their past, when the cities had a large army that went to war, and returned victorious. But after the Lord begins to deal with them, the cities will be reduced in number of their inhabitants, and even of their army. 90% of the soldiers will be destroyed. He calls Israel a maiden (virgin) because until then the nation had never been subdued by strangers (cf. Jer. 18: 13; Jer. 31: 4; Jer. 31: 21; Lam. 2: 13), or because from the spiritual point of view, the nation was welcomed by the Lord as a virgin and, ironically, had become an adulteress, worshipping the calves at Dan and Bethel.

- Am. 5: 4-6: “For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beer-sheba [NIV: do not journey to Beersheba]; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing. Seek the Lord and live, or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire, and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it [NIV: Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire; it will devour them, and Bethel will have no one to quench it].”

The Lord makes a last appeal, ‘Seek me and live.’ He warned them not to seek the false gods in the centers of worship created by Jeroboam I (from the time of the split of the nation into two kingdoms) and followed by all the other kings of Israel. Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba became centers of corrupt worship. Bethel was in the tribe of Ephraim; Gilgal, in the territory of West Manasseh, near the border of Ephraim; and Beersheba, in the south, in the territory of Simeon. As for Dan, where was the other golden calf of Jeroboam I, it was to the north of Israel, in the tribe of Naphtali.

If the people sought God and returned to their worship in Jerusalem, as it was prescribed in the law, they would obtain the favor of the Lord and have life. Otherwise, they would be consumed in the fire of His wrath.

Although the people complied with the religious rituals (even more, mixed with idolatrous worship) they remained internally in the wickedness and immorality, trying to mask the injustice of their daily lives, and God rejected these rituals.

- Am. 5: 7-9: “Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground! [NIV: There are those who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground]. The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD (YHWH, יהוה) –

Strong #3068, the same name given to Moses on Sinai) is his name, who makes destruction flash out against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress [NIV: With a blinding flash he destroys the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin].”



Artemisia absinthium – plant and inflorescence (1st and 2nd images)

God goes on saying that the leaders, the judges, turn justice into something very bitter and very poisonous, because they corrupt that justice. Wormwood (cf. Rev. 8: 11) is a bitter and poisonous herb (Jer. 9: 15; Deut. 29: 18), whose scientific name is *Artemisia absinthium*, of the family Asteraceae, genus *Artemisia*. In Ancient Greece, this plant was dedicated to the goddess Artemis (Diana, among the Romans, the goddess of hunt and chastity, and protector of the forest and children); hence, the origin of its scientific name (*Artemisia absinthium*). It is a woody shrub cultivated as an ornamental plant. Its leaf has a bitter taste and was formerly used as a medicinal plant in Europe (to stimulate appetite and for dyspepsia and various infectious diseases – since 1792 by a French physician) and as an ingredient of absinthe (distilled beverage), banned in many countries in 1915 because of a supposed hallucinogenic effect. It contains an active ingredient that can cause epileptic seizures, spasms and kidney failure when ingested in large quantities. It is different from what is now known as Vermouth (In German, ‘wermut’ means absinthe; but the current Vermouth is a wine-based alcoholic drink with added flowers or herbs).

They must seek the One who made the constellations of Pleiades and Orion, and is able to turn darkness into morning and day into night; He who created the sea and his movement on the earth, and who is capable of doing something more impressive, which is the destruction of all that He has created, including the fortresses, where men feel safe and think that they hide from divine justice or, metaphorically, the pride of men.

- Am. 5: 10-12: “They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth [NIV: There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth]. Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins—you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate [NIV: For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts].”

The prophet began to show the errors openly. The judges hated those who defended justice and those who spoke the truth. Since there was injustice toward the poor, the Lord tells them that they would no longer dwell in rich houses, nor drink the wine from the vines they planted. Oppression against the poor was common. The rich were hardened in heart and indifferent to the afflictions of the hungry (Am. 6: 3-6). Righteousness leant towards those who could pay higher bribes (Am. 2: 6; Am. 8: 6). In times of drought (Am. 4: 7-9) the poor could only obtain funds from the moneylenders (Am. 5: 11; Am. 8: 4-6) and were forced to mortgage their lands and their people; even their loved ones.

The Lord knew that their transgressions were many, and their sins were great. Formerly, the city gate was not only a point of honor in a fortified city as a symbol of its power, but it was the place where judges and elders sat down; it was the center of commercial and legal activities. The power of any city was the place where justice was administered (Deut. 22: 15). A judge or prophet who rebuked injustice lost his popularity (Isa. 29: 21).

- Am. 5: 13-15: “Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time. Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in

the gate [NIV: maintain justice in the courts]; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.”

The prophet continues to exhort the people to repentance, especially to practice justice, for if they repent of their ways and turn to the Lord, they may find His favor again. The prudent man that is conscious of the sins of Israel will keep silence and understand the reason for the wrath and punishment of the Lord. The remnant (‘remnant of Joseph’) will be saved by Him.

- Am 5: 16-20: “Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord: In all the squares there shall be wailing; and in all the streets they shall say, ‘Alas! alas!’ They shall call the farmers to mourning, and those skilled in lamentation, to wailing [NIV: Therefore this is what the Lord, the LORD God Almighty, says: “There will be wailing in all the streets and cries of anguish in every public square. The farmers will be summoned to weep and the mourners to wail]; in all the vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through the midst of you, says the Lord. Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?”

As in all other prophecies of the Old Testament, the Day of the Lord (‘day of the Judgment of God’ or ‘the day of the coming of Christ’) is described as a day of judgment, of darkness, not of light, as reflecting the righteousness of the attitudes of God’s judgments toward those who are in conscious sin and of hardened heart to His voice. His authority is feared on earth and in heaven.

The prophet says that there will be weeping, anguish, and wailing in all the streets and among those in the fields. Do not think that the Day of the Lord will come with joy to them, as if it were a day of God’s vengeance against the enemies of Israel; but it will be as if a man fled from a lion, and suddenly was met by a bear; or went into the house and resting a hand against the wall, was bitten by a snake. They will be taken by surprise. There will be nowhere to run or where to flee, for there will be destruction of an apostate nation.

- Am. 5: 21-27 – God demands justice not sacrifices

- Am. 5: 21-24: “I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies [NIV: I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me]. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon [NIV: Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them]. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

God tells them that he does not take pleasure in any of their religious feasts and solemn assemblies, even though they offer Him sacrifices. It is no use singing to Him when their hearts are corrupt and their devotion is hypocritical. He does not like sacrifices, but he wants justice, and that it flows continuously. In fact, He was declaring that now He would make His judgment prevail until what was crooked was corrected in His sight.

• Am. 5: 25-27 (NRSV): “**25** Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? **26** You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images, which you made for yourselves; **27** therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.”

NIV: “**25** Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? **26** You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god—which you made for yourselves (or lifted up Sakkuth your king and Kaiwan your idols, your star-gods). **27** Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God Almighty.”

The Septuagint says in v. 26: “lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, their idols.” (cf. Acts 7: 43: “No; you took along the tent of Moloch, and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; so I will remove you beyond Babylon.”). Rephan (in Greek, ρεμφαν, Remphan) is an incorrect transliteration for a word of Hebrew origin (Kiyuwn), an Egyptian idol.

The Lord reminds these people of the moment of the exodus. They presented offerings to other gods in the wilderness, and therefore His wrath was so great that it consumed all that generation.

This means that God was already warning Israel of their deportation to Assyria (‘therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus’) after the invasion of Samaria in 722 BC because of their idolatry. ‘Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god’ (v. 26) concerns Assyrian gods, but also worshiped in Egypt. Sakkuth (Hebrew, Sikkuth) was an idol who was given the title of king. Chiun or Khiun (Hebrew: Kiyyun, Kiyuwn) means: an image, a pillar. It was probably a statue of the Assyrian-Babylonian god of the planet Saturn, and sometimes called Kewan or Kaiwan, meaning ‘star.’ The star of Saturn was a god, the god of war and light. Kēwān is another pronunciation of the Old Persian word of Kayvān, meaning Saturn.

We know that Haran or Padam-Aram, from the time of Abraham, had commercial and friendly relations with Egypt. No wonder the people of Israel have knowledge of them!

Sakkuth or Kaiwan or Chiun are Assyrian gods and objects of idolatrous worship which, in Akkadian, mean ‘the planet’ or ‘star’, Saturn; also worshipped in Egypt. Though they were delivered from Egypt, the people of Israel remembered those gods in the wilderness.

Now, with deportation to Assyria, the idols could be carried into exile by their worshipers, where these deities reigned sovereign, just as they had been carried by them when they left Egypt (cf. Acts 7: 43, where Stephen says ‘so I will remove you beyond Babylon’ instead of ‘beyond Damascus’).

Chapter 6

- Am. 6: 1-14 – The corruption and the destruction of Israel

- Am. 6: 1-2: “Alas for those who are at ease in Zion [NIV: Woe to you who are complacent in Zion], and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria, the notables of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel resorts! Cross over to Calneh, and see [NIV: go to Kalneh and look at it]; from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is your territory greater than their territory. [NIV: Are they better off than your two kingdoms? Is their land larger than yours?]

Amos talks about the bad times (‘Alas’, ‘Woe’) to come upon the men and women who were at ease and felt secure in Samaria and Judah, trusting in the strength of their city and in their own strength, for the judges and leaders of Israel and their inhabitants came to Samaria in search for justice. He compares Samaria to the cities that were the pride of the Assyrians, and to the city of the Philistines, Gath.

Calneh or Kalneh may be a city whose location is still uncertain. Some scholars have also associated this place (Calneh or Kalneh) with Calno, which is mentioned in similar terms in the Book of Isaiah (Isa. 10: 9) and is identified by some archaeologists as Kulnia, Kullani or Kullanhu, the modern Kullan-Köy, between Carchemish in river Euphrates and Arpad, near Aleppo, in northern Syria, about nine kilometers and six hundred meters southeast of Arpad. Calno stayed in Syria, before being captured by the Assyrians. Calno or Calneh was associated with Canneh (Ezek. 27: 23), as one of the cities with which Tyre maintained commercial relations.

In Gen. 10: 10 it is written that it was one of the four cities founded by Nimrod: Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh [in NRSV: ‘The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar’]. But it is probably not the same city, since these four cities were located in Chaldea, north of Sumer, and not in the region of Mesopotamia (in the North), where the Assyrian empire was later established. In the case of Nimrod (Gen. 10: 10), W. F. Albright (1944) says that the word did not refer to a city but was corrupted from an expression meaning ‘all of them.’

Arpad was first captured by the Assyrians in 754 BC, in the reign of Ashurnirari V (755-745 BC), in his efforts to control the route to Hamath and Damascus, who were its allies (Jer. 49: 23). Arpad was sacked by Tiglath-Pileser III in 740 BC, after two years of siege, and again by Sargon II, in 720 BC. Its fall symbolized the overpowering power of Assyria (Isa. 10: 9). Today there are ruins of it in Tell Rifa’ad, thirty-two kilometers northwest of Aleppo (Syria).

Hamath, ‘Fortress’ or ‘sacred enclosure’ was a city and kingdom of upper Syria, on the banks of the Orontes River. The entrance to Hamath is an opening that led to the Syrian valley. It was the boundary of that territory, given to the Israelites (Num. 13: 21), but they didn’t get to possession of that land. Hamath was of great importance and prosperity in the time of David (2 Sam. 8: 9-10) and Solomon, who built storehouses there (2 Chr. 8: 4; 2 Kin. 14: 28). After Solomon’s death, Hamath became a free state again, and retained its independence until King Jeroboam II of Israel (782-753 BC) took it from Judah, destroying its fortifications (2 Kin. 14: 28-29). Later, Hamath became part of the Assyrian empire (2 Kin. 18: 34; Isa. 10: 9), passing to the Chaldeans in the time of Zedekiah (Jer. 39: 5; Jer. 49: 23; Jer. 52: 9; 27). It was not only an important commercial center, but had also become remarkable due to its irrigation system by

means of large wheels (‘norias’), which brought up the water from the river Orontes to be taken to the upper city. It is now known by the name of Hama.



Hamath

In the time of the Assyrian splendor, these cities were their pride. They thought they were invincible and that their commanders were as powerful as kings, but God says that His power would reach all those kingdoms, whose gods were more numerous than those of Samaria.

There is an interesting comparison with Isa. 9: 8, which was prophesied against Israel (the northern nation): the stripping of the cities of Samaria and Damascus (Isa. 8: 4), the deportation of the inhabitants of Damascus to Kir (2 Kin. 16: 9) and its destruction. Then, in Isa. 9: 13-21, the prophet describes a disunited people, living in contention, full of violence against one another; a people of evil nature, with leaders who teach lies; and the people receive their lies without questioning. Even those who seem more humble and helpless as orphans and widows displease God, for they do not fear Him. The tribes of the north fight among themselves and also attack Judah. Then, in Isa. 10: 1-4 it is written: “Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.” These four verses are a continuation of the last verses of chapter 9, where the prophet describes the wickedness of his people and even so they show no repentance or change; therefore, the Lord continues with His hand stretched out in anger against them. Here God asks them what they will do in the day they go to captivity. All that is left to them is to be silent and humiliated among the prisoners of war or fallen among the slain.

This was the description of what happened in Israel and Samaria, as Amos had also said.

Gath continued to be subordinate to Judah until the time of Rehoboam, who fortified it (2 Chr. 11: 8). It was captured by Hazael (843-796 BC), from Damascus, at the end of the ninth century BC (2 Kin. 12: 17, when this one soon invested against Judah under the rule of Joash – 835-796 BC), and may have regained its independence until the time of Uzziah, when he overthrew his wall, when he went to war against Philistia (2 Chr. 26: 6 – he also broke down the wall of Jabneh and Ashdod); soon after, Amos describes the city as belonging to the Philistines (Am. 6: 2), for it is possible that it was a Philistine territory embedded in Jewish territory, to which it rendered some kind of vassalage. Gath was besieged and conquered by Sargon II of Assyria (722-705 BC), at the end of the 8th century BC. The site was not identified with certainty, although it is thought to have been to the northeast of Gaza.

The fact of Amos having written: “Cross over to Calneh, and see [NIV: go to Calneh and look at it]; from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is your territory greater than their territory?” may be related to Isaiah’s verse (Isa. 10: 10), which says: “As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols whose images were greater [NVI: excelled] than those of Jerusalem and Samaria.”

This means that, just as the king of Assyria boasted of having power to destroy idolatrous kingdoms greater than Samaria, God would also have it to correct His own people.

- Am. 6: 3-6: “O you that put far away the evil day, and bring near a reign of violence? [NIV: You put off the day of disaster and bring near a reign of terror]. Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall [NIV: You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves]; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!”

As I spoke previously about the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kin. 14: 23-29) when Amos lived, the rich with a hardened heart were indifferent to the afflictions of the hungry (Am. 6: 3-6), for they ate well and lived very well. They imagined that the time of trial was still far off, but they were wrong. The way they behaved, they attracted the wrath of God to themselves, more and more.

‘Drink wine from bowls’ – the ordinary cups were not big enough; therefore, in their idleness and to give them pleasure, they took hold of the vessels commonly used in the sacrifices to God (Ex. 38: 3; Zech 14: 20).

- Am. 6: 7-11: “Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away [NIV: Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end]. The Lord God has sworn by himself (says the Lord, the God of hosts): I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds; and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it. If ten people remain in one house, they shall die. And if a relative, one who burns the dead, shall take up the body to bring it out of the house, and shall say to someone in the innermost parts of the house, ‘Is anyone else with you?’ the answer will come, ‘No.’ Then the relative shall say, ‘Hush! We must not mention the name of the Lord.’ See, the Lord commands, and the great house shall be shattered to bits and the little house to pieces.”

‘The Lord God has sworn by himself (says the Lord, the God of hosts)’ – the Lord was swearing by His own holiness. This expression is seen only in the bible in Am. 4: 2 (‘The Lord God has sworn by his holiness’); Am 6: 8 (‘The Lord God has sworn by

himself, says the Lord, the God of hosts') and Jer. 51: 14 ('The Lord of hosts has sworn by himself'). There is an expression similar to this in Gen. 22: 16 (By myself I have sworn, says the Lord) and Heb. 6: 13 (When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself).

The Lord speaks plainly that He will take them to captivity, and thus the banquets of those who live in idleness, not working, and living at the expense of the poor will cease. He also says that He abhors their pride and hates their strongholds (their large and sumptuous houses). The arrogance of the people of Israel seemed to be attached to their cities and to their palaces, of which they were proud.



He will forsake the city and all that is in it. Its inhabitants will be destroyed and this will also instill fear in their relatives that remain.

'If ten people remain in one house, they shall die' means that whoever does not die by the sword will die of the plague. Where there is sin, the Lord will bring destruction.

The burial for the Hebrews was the usual way of proceeding to the dead. The reference here to cremation is probably because of the plague, to avoid contamination. It was done in cases of necessity, as was the case with Saul and his sons (1 Sam. 31: 12), when the men of Jabesh-gilead (Jabesh Gilead) took their bodies from the walls of Beth-shan (Beth Shan) and burned them not to be insulted by the Philistines. In the case described by Amos it seems so many would die that a single man could not carry all the bodies to the grave to bury them; therefore, first the corpses were burned, and then the bones were buried.

“‘Hush! We must not mention the name of the Lord.’ See, the Lord commands, and the great house shall be shattered to bits, and the little house to pieces” – this means that relatives and friends would be careful to avoid mentioning the name of the Lord because of the fear of the judgment of God (Am. 8: 3; Hab. 2: 20; Zeph. 1: 7).

- Am. 6: 12-14: “Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow the sea with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood [NIV: into bitterness; KJV: Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? for

ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock]—you who rejoice in Lo-debar [NIV: you who rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar (it means ‘nothing’)], who say, ‘Have we not by our own strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?’ [Karnaim means ‘horns.’ Horn here symbolizes ‘strength’]. Indeed, I am raising up against you a nation, O house of Israel, says the Lord, the God of hosts, and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath [NIV: Lebo Hamath, or ‘from the entrance to’] to the Wadi Arabah [NIV: to the valley of the Arabah].”

The prophet speaks again in the name of the Lord about the judges, who have turned justice and righteous judgment into something poisonous and bitter (wormwood), for they were prone to bribes and favored the strongest and most powerful, neglecting the poor and weaklings. It was not possible to judge causes by wrong methods, perverting justice, as one could not plow the sea with oxen, or run on rocks on horseback. There are natural, spiritual, and moral laws in the universe that cannot be ignored. They conquered little or nothing (‘Lo-Debar’ – lo = nothing, debar = pasture) and still boasted on it as if they had much power, or if they had conquered anything by their own power (Karnaim = ‘horns’, symbolizing strength and glory). Lo Debar, here, is placed as the symbol of trifle, of nothing, of small and insignificant things in which people believed, because it came from their imagination.

- The bible speaks of a city named Lo-Debar (2 Sam. 9: 4-5; 2 Sam. 17: 27), near Mahanaim, where David received help from some friends when he fled from Absalom. This word (Lo-Debar) is written as Lo’ Dbar or Low Dbar or Lidbir or Lidebir in the Masoretic text (Josh. 13: 26 – it is written: Debir) – Strong #3810, and refers to a city on the border of Gad, near Mahanaim, and which is probably the present Umm Ed Debar, fifteen kilometers south of the Sea of Galilee; it would be better to write it as Lodbar, ‘without pasture’; sometimes called Debir. There is another city called Debir (Josh. 15: 7) on the northern border of Judah, today Tugret ed Debr, three kilometers west of Ma’ale Adummim.

- Then the Lord says that He will raise up against them a nation (Assyria) that will oppress them from north to south, that is, from Hamath (in the north, in Syria) to the Arabah. As we saw in Am. 6: 2 Hamath was a city and kingdom of upper Syria, in the valley of Orontes. It was the limit spied on by the Israelites (Num. 13: 21), but it was not conquered. Arabah (‘arabah = wilderness – Strong #6160) is a word that means ‘desert (in the sense of sterility); dry, desolate land, field, desert, plain’ and is used to describe the desert steppes. Arabah (Deut. 1: 1; Isa. 33: 9; Isa. 35: 1 – where it is written: ‘wilderness’), specially with the article ‘the’, is a valley full of crevices that runs from the Sea of Galilee to the Gulf of Aqaba. The Dead Sea is also called the Sea of Arabah. It is a really dry and desert region.

- As we also saw in Am 5: 7 wormwood (cf. Rev. 8: 11) is a bitter and poisonous herb (Jer. 9: 15; Deut. 29: 18), whose scientific name is *Artemisia absinthium*, of the family Asteraceae, genus *Artemisia*. In Ancient Greece, this plant was dedicated to the goddess Artemis (Diana, among the Romans, goddess of hunt and chastity, and protector of the forest and children; hence the origin of its scientific name, *Artemisia absinthium*). It is a woody shrub cultivated as an ornamental plant. Its leaf has a bitter aromatic taste and was formerly used as a medicinal plant in Europe (to stimulate appetite and for dyspepsia and various infectious diseases – since 1792 by a French physician) and as an ingredient of absinthe (distilled beverage), banned in many countries in 1915 because of a supposed hallucinogenic effect. It contains an active ingredient that can cause epileptic seizures, spasms and kidney failure when ingested in large quantities. It is different from what is now known as Vermouth.

Chapter 7

- Am. 7: 1-17 – Locusts, fire and a plumb line

• Am. 7: 1-3: “This is what the Lord God showed me: he was forming locusts at the time the latter growth began to sprout (it was the latter growth after the king’s mowings) [NIV: This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: He was preparing swarms of locusts after the king’s share had been harvested and just as the late crops were coming up]. When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said, ‘O Lord God, forgive, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!’ The Lord relented concerning this; ‘It shall not be’, said the Lord.”

The visions that Amos had are symbols of God’s judgment (locusts: Am 7: 1-7, fire: Am 7: 4-6, plumb line: Am 7: 7-9, and a basket of summer fruit or ripe fruit: Am 8: 1-14).

The **first** of these was that of a swarm of **locusts** that ate the shoots in the harvest season in the spring (March-April / April-May, barley and wheat harvest). Amos interceded and God did not send the destroying locusts.

‘Latter growth’ or ‘late crop’ is the wheat or barley that grows after the later rains (March and April) that prepares the field for the harvest.

‘The king’s mowings’ or ‘the king’s share’ – the first cut of the ear of wheat and barley was set aside to feed the king’s horses, before the people cut off the rest.

So what he was talking about was that the locusts would eat the produce of the harvest intended for human subsistence, not what was given to the king’s horses.

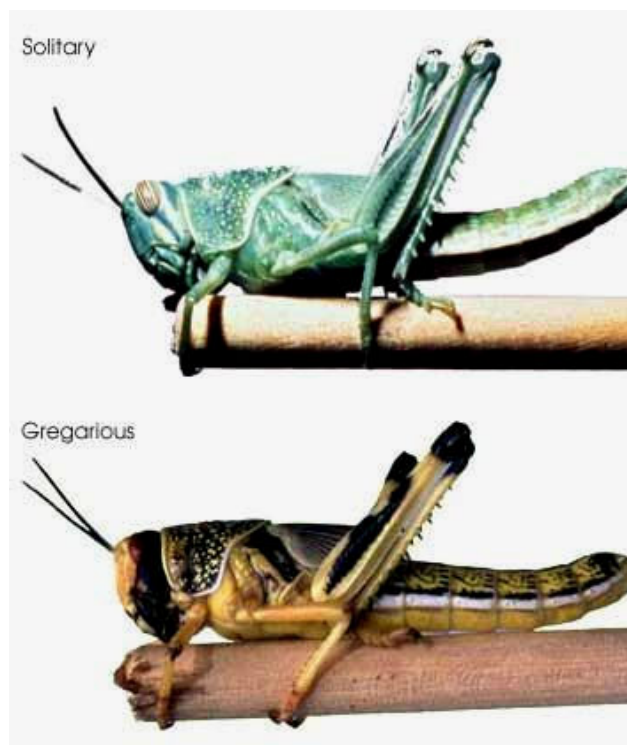
Locust is the word used for some short-horned grasshoppers in the Acrididae family, with powerful hind legs that allow them to jump larger distances, and which under certain environmental conditions and by the tactile stimulation of the hind legs they change color, eat much more and breed much more easily, forming swarms. No taxonomic distinction is made between grasshopper and locusts species. Grasshoppers are usually solitary insects. The image below shows the phases: solitary (grasshopper) and gregarious (swarming) of the desert locust.



Locust



Grasshopper



Locust of the desert – Wikipedia.org

• Am. 7: 4-6: “This is what the Lord God showed me: the Lord God was calling for a shower of fire [NIV: judgment by fire], and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. Then I said, ‘O Lord God, cease, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!’ The Lord relented concerning this; ‘This also shall not be’, said the Lord God.”

Again the prophet had a vision, now with a consuming fire that devoured the land of Israel. He interceded and the Lord stopped the punishment. It was the symbol of

another conflict between the Lord and His people, as if He expected the ‘measure of their iniquity’ to be full. He would execute His judgment through the fire.

‘It (*the fire*) devoured the great deep’ – probably it is about the intense heat of a severe summer that dried the streams of water of the springs and the rivers and thus affected the land.

The first two visions are parallel with the punishments of God, written in Am. 4: 6-11.

- Am. 7: 7-9: “This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, ‘Amos, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘A plumb line.’ Then the Lord said, ‘See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by [NIV: I will spare them no longer]; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

For the third time the prophet has a vision concerning the judgment of God against His people, this time with a plumb line in His hand. The plumb means that the judgment of God is according to the most exact rules of justice.

- ‘In the midst of my people Israel’ – refers to Shalmaneser V, who besieged Samaria for 3 years and his son Sargon II led the captive people to Assyria.

- ‘I will never again pass them by [NIV: I will spare them no longer]’ – means not to forgive them anymore, to exercise the complete punishment.

We can say that the patience of God with them was exhausted. The idolatrous places (‘the high places of Isaac’) would be desolate, as well as the sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel, erected from the time of Jeroboam I and accepted by the kings who followed to Jeroboam II (when this prophecy was made), and by the kings who succeeded him (2 Kin. 17: 22) till Hoshea, when the fall of Samaria (722 BC) occurred, and the people were taken captive.

- ‘I will rise with the sword’ – means the Assyrian army (cf. Am. 6: 14).

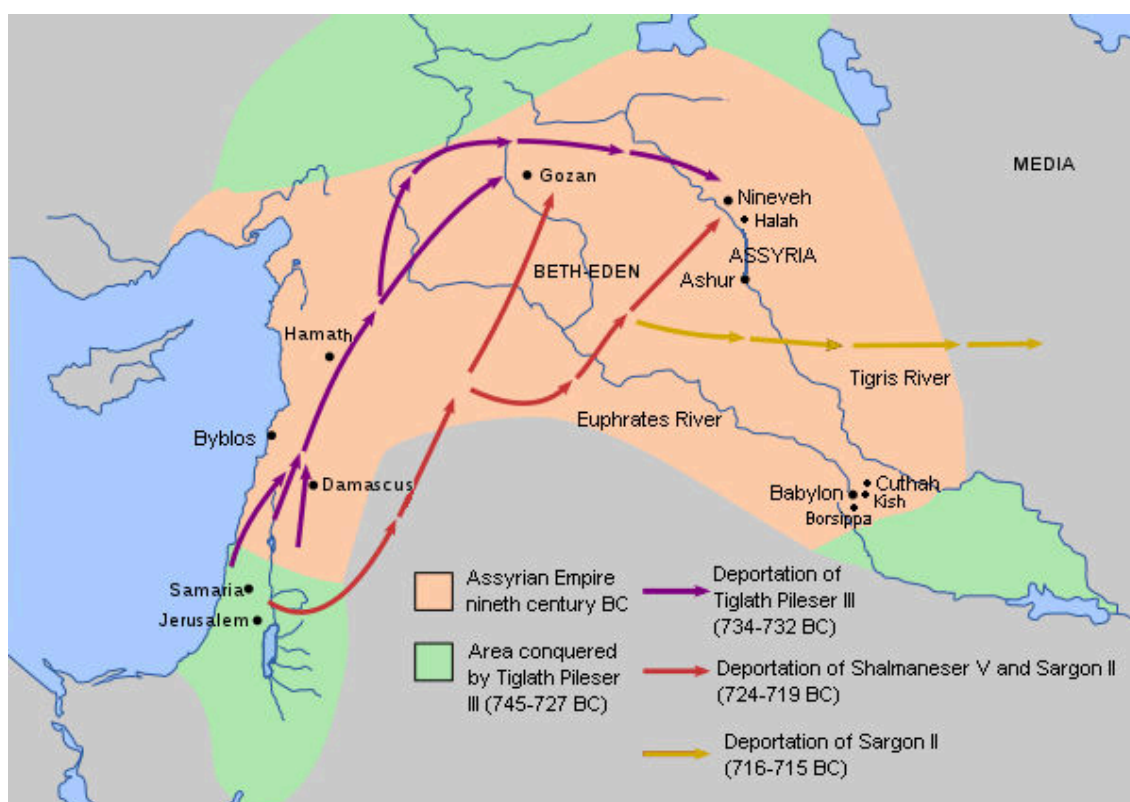
- ‘The house of Jeroboam’ was not necessarily the blood progeny of Jeroboam II, but his successors, for many kings rose to the throne through conspiracies against their predecessors. After Jeroboam II came: Zechariah (His son – 2 Kin. 14: 29), Shallum (conspired against Zechariah – 2 Kin. 15: 10), Menahem (conspired against Shallum – 2 Kin. 15: 14), Pekaiiah (his son – 2 Kin. 15: 22-23), Pekah (a captain, conspired against Pekaiiah – 2 Kin. 15: 25) and Hoshea (conspired against Pekah and killed him – 2 Kin. 15: 30).

Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) conquered three regions of Israel between 734-732 BC: Zebulun, Naphtali and Galilee (2 Kin. 15: 29: “In the days of King Pekah of Israel, King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria”). The cities of Naphtali that were conquered are Ijom (1 Kin. 15: 20; 2 Kin. 15: 29; 2 Chr. 16: 4, to north of Naphtali), Abel-Beth-Maacah (or Abel Beth Maacah, 1 Kin. 15: 20; 2 Kin. 15: 29; 2 Chr. 16: 4 – called Abel-Maim; Abel-Beth-Maacah = ‘meadow of the house of oppression’), Janoah (2 Kin. 15: 29. Janoah means ‘rest’), Kedesh (2 Kin. 15: 29) and Hazor (2 Kin. 15: 29. It means ‘village.’ It is southwest of Lake Huleh or Hula Lake, in Galilee).

Although the greatest destruction of Tiglath-Pileser III was in Damascus (732 BC), deporting its people to Kir in Assyria (2 Kin. 16: 9), some inhabitants of Samaria went along with the Damascenes to Gozan and Nineveh, occurring on a larger scale ten years later, under the rule of Sargon II (2 Kin. 17: 6; 2 Kin. 18: 11; 1 Chr 5: 26). Tiglath-

Pileser III killed Rezin the king of Syria and confirmed the kingdom to Hoshea, who killed Pekah (2 Kin. 15: 29; 2 Kin. 17: 1), letting him rule in Samaria as his vassal (2 Kin. 17: 3). When Hoshea rebelled (In the 7th year of his reign) and asked for help from Egypt (2 Kin. 17: 4), Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) besieged Samaria for three years (2 Kin. 17: 3-6; 2 Kin. 18: 9-11). In the ninth year of Hoshea (2 Kin. 18: 9-11), Israel was taken by Sargon II (722-705 BC – 2 Kin. 18: 9-11) and exiled. In the place of the Israelite population, the inhabitants of Babylon were brought from Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim (2 Kin. 17: 23-24).

In earlier visions God attended to the intercession of the prophet, but now He no longer allowed his prayer. The just punishment would happen.



- Am. 7: 10-17 – Amos accused by Amaziah of raising a conspiracy

• Am. 7: 10-13: “Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, ‘Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.’ And Amaziah said to Amos, ‘O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.’”

The idolatrous priest of Bethel rose up against Amos because of his prophecies, and accused him of conspiring against king Jeroboam. He commanded the prophet to return to Judah. And he said to him, ‘earn your bread there, and prophesy there.’

- Am. 7: 14-17: “Then Amos answered Amaziah, ‘I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees [NVI: Amos answered

Amaziah, ‘I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees’], and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel. Now therefore hear the word of the Lord. You say, Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.’ Therefore thus says the Lord: Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parceled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land [NIV: Your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a pagan country], and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.”

Amos answered that he spoke by order of God. Born in Tekoa, to the south of Jerusalem (Amos 1: 1), he was a herdsman of Judah, besides a gatherer of sycamore-fig trees [NRSV, dresser of sycamore trees] (Amos 7: 14-15), which meant that he did not belong to the class of which the prophets usually originated, or was trained to the prophetic office in the houses of the prophets. He was a prophet without known credentials, except by the fact that he had a word from God. Here in Am 7: 14, the translation ‘gatherer of sycamore fruit’ (KJV) is incorrect, since the Hebrew word means ‘cultivator’ of that tree (‘balac’ – Strong #1103: a primitive root, meaning ‘to pinch’ sycamore figs, a process necessary to ripen them), pruning the top of each fruit to ensure that it would ripen; or, according to some scholars, making incisions in its peel with a special instrument to loosen excess juice before it ripens; after four days the fruit was harvested. Sycamore (Hebrew, shiqmâ; in Greek sykomōraia) or sycamore-fig (Ficus sycomorus L.), a wild fig tree, is a big and vigorous tree, abundant in Egypt and the lowlands of Palestine (1 Kin. 10: 27; 2 Chr. 1: 15; 2 Chr. 9: 27). The fruit were edible (a fig flavor mixed with mulberry) and of great value to Israel, like the olive trees, for it was part of the agrarian production of the nation.



After confirming the origin of his ordination as a prophet, Amos made a prophecy against the priest Amaziah: because he was prevented from prophesying in the name of

the Lord, He Himself told him that the priest's wife would prostitute herself in the city (she would be raped by the invading soldiers); his sons and daughters would be slain by the sword, his land would be measured and divided up, and he would be exiled and die in a pagan country. Israel, certainly, would be taken captive too.

Chapter 8

- Am. 8: 1-3 (A basket of summer fruit): “This is what the Lord God showed me—a basket of summer fruit [NIV: a basket of ripe fruit]. He said, ‘Amos, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘A basket of summer fruit’ [NIV: a basket of ripe fruit]. Then the Lord said to me, ‘The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by [NIV: The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer]. The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day’, says the Lord God; ‘the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place. Be silent!’”

Amos had a fourth vision as a basket of summer fruit, that is, of fully ripe fruit, implying that Israel was already at the point of being ‘harvested’ by the Assyrians, or that God’s punishment was already ready to be exercised.

- ‘The end has come’ or ‘the time is ripe’ – the end was near to the northern kingdom.

- ‘The songs of the temple shall become wailings’ – the songs of worship and jubilation would give way to cries of pain and terror because of the invasion. Many would be the dead bodies everywhere in the nation.

- ‘Be silent!’ – a word from the Lord that there would be no intercession on the part of the prophet, or because of the cries, that is, God would no longer hear the prayers of that people, for now it was too late.

Although Tiglath-Pileser III began to act in the region of Syria around 743 BC and Menahem king of Israel have paid a high tribute at this time for him to help him consolidate his kingdom and leave the land (2 Kin. 15: 19-20), he eventually returned in 734 BC, when the Syro-Ephraimite war began, in the reign of Pekah of Israel (740-732 BC), and Ahaz of Judah (732-716 BC).

- Am. 8: 4-14 (The ruin of Israel is near):

- Am. 8: 4-6: “Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, ‘When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? [NIV: that we may market wheat?] We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances [NIV – skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales], buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat’ NIV: selling even the sweepings with the wheat].”

As commented in previous chapters, in the time of Jeroboam II (782-753 BC – 2 Kin. 14: 23-29), he resolved to develop a profitable trade, which created a powerful class of merchants in Samaria. But wealth was not evenly distributed among the people. It remained in the hands of rich merchants. Oppression against the poor was common (Am. 2: 6). The rich were hardened in heart and indifferent to the afflictions of the hungry (Am. 6: 3-6). Justice leant towards those who could pay higher bribes (Am. 2: 6; Am. 8: 6). In times of drought (Am. 4: 7-9) the poor could only obtain funds from the moneylenders (Am. 5: 11; Am. 8: 4-6) and were forced to mortgage their lands and their people; even their loved ones.

The New Moon Feast (Num. 28: 11; 14; 1 Sam. 20: 5; 18; 24; Isa. 66: 23; 2 Chr. 8: 13), as well as the Sabbath Day (Ex. 23: 12; Ex. 35: 1-3), were sacred days when usual tasks were forbidden because they were days of rest. And this irritated the greedy merchants, who thought only of money and profit. The month (yerah or yare’ach =

moon) began (Num. 10: 10) when the crescent of the new moon was first seen at sunset. Thus, the New Moon Feast celebrated the beginning of the months.

‘We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances’ – merchants used measures smaller than fair, and heavier weights to deceive, receiving more than due in business. They altered their scales so that their customers could lose their money when they bought something, weighting the product.

• Am. 8: 7-8: “The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds [NIV: The LORD has sworn by himself, the Pride of Jacob: I will never forget anything they have done]. Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who lives in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt? [NIV: The whole land will rise like the Nile; it will be stirred up and then sink like the river of Egypt].”

The Lord said that He would not forget their evil deeds, and because of them there would be a manifestation of His displeasure; the land would tremble and many would mourn. The next sentence is a figure of speech to describe the great changes He would operate there, moving the government and even nature, if necessary, bringing a calamity upon the people that would seem like an earthquake shaking the earth or like the overflowing of the Nile, which brings a great flood, and after the water drains, it leaves mud spread in great quantity on its banks, and it takes about two months to see the fields again. The sooner the husbandmen plow and sow the earth the better will be the crops. The flood is higher in Middle and Upper Egypt during the summer because of rain, and is needed to irrigate the land, but it does not happen so intensely in Lower Egypt (in the Delta), where it rains more frequently. However, if the flood is greater than expected, the waters will drown the cattle and all other animals. This prophecy of Amos seems more likely a reference to the Assyrian invasion of Shalmaneser V and his son Sargon II.

• Am. 8: 9-10: “On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head [NIV: I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads]; I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day.”

In the midst of prosperity (‘noon’, ‘broad daylight’, meaning fullness), when they think that everything is safe and well-established, God will send great affliction. Other prophets also describe calamities with this kind of metaphor: Jer. 15: 9, Ezek. 32: 7-8.

‘I will darken the earth in broad daylight’ – The dark cloud of the conspiracies was the beginning for the later desolation of the Assyrians, turning Israel into a completely dark realm, where the feasts ceased and mourning came, the songs turned into lamentations; the garments gave way to the sackcloth, as a mourning that is experienced by the death of an only child (‘an only son’).

But we may ask, “And was there still any moment of true prosperity for Israel with a government like that of Jeroboam II and with what happened to his successors?”

Let’s remember what God said in Am. 7: 9: “I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.” From the carnal point of view, in the reign of Jeroboam II (782-753 BC – 2 Kin. 14: 23-29), the oppression of Syria had diminished over Israel because of the victories God had given to Jehoash (798-783 BC) the father of Jeroboam II (2 Kin. 13: 22-25), and he resolved to extend his borders (2 Kin. 14: 25) and to develop a profitable trade, which created the powerful class of merchants already

mentioned above. But from the spiritual point of view, the nation was already walking in darkness.

‘The house of Jeroboam’ (Am. 7: 9) was not necessarily the blood lineage of Jeroboam II, but his successors, for many kings rose to the throne through conspiracies against their predecessors. After Jeroboam II came: Zechariah (His son – 2 Kin. 14: 29), Shallum (conspired against Zechariah – 2 Kin. 15: 10), Menahem (conspired against Shallum – 2 Kin. 15: 14), Pekaiiah (his son – 2 Kin. 15: 22-23), Pekah (a captain, conspired against Pekaiiah – 2 Kin. 15: 25) and Hoshea (conspired against Pekah and killed him – 2 Kin. 15: 30).

Although Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) began to act in the region of Syria around 743 BC, and Menahem king of Israel has paid him a high tribute at this time for him to help him consolidate his kingdom and leave the land (2 Kin. 15: 19-20), he ended up returning in 734 BC, when the Syro-Ephraimite war began, in the reign of Pekah of Israel (740-732 BC), and Ahaz of Judah (732-716 BC). The Assyrian king conquered three regions of Israel between 734-732 BC: Zebulun, Naphtali and Galilee (2 Kin. 15: 29). Although the greatest destruction was in Damascus (732 BC – 2 Kin. 15: 29), deporting its people to Kir in Assyria (2 Kin. 16: 9), some inhabitants of Samaria went along with the Damascenes to Gozan and Nineveh, occurring on a larger scale ten years later, under the rule of Sargon II (2 Kin. 17: 6; 2 Kin. 18: 11; 1 Chr 5: 26).

Tiglath-Pileser III killed Rezin the king of Syria and confirmed the kingdom to Hoshea, who killed Pekah (2 Kin. 15: 29; 2 Kin. 17: 1), letting him rule in Samaria as his vassal (2 Kin. 17: 3). When Hoshea rebelled and asked for help from Egypt (2 Kin. 17: 4), Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) besieged Samaria for three years (2 Kin. 17: 3-6; 2 Kin. 18: 9-11). In the ninth year of Hoshea, Israel was taken over by Sargon II (722-705 BC – 2 Kin. 18: 9-11) and exiled. In the place of the Israelite population, the inhabitants of Babylon were brought from Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim (2 Kin. 17: 23-24).

- Am. 8: 11-14: “The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread [NIV: food], or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it [NIV: People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it]. In that day the beautiful young women and the young men shall faint for thirst. Those who swear by Ashimah [NIV: by the shame; or by the idol] of Samaria, and say, ‘As your god lives, O Dan’, and, ‘As the way of Beer-sheba lives’—they shall fall, and never rise again [NIV: Those who swear by the sin of Samaria—who say, ‘As surely as your god lives, Dan’, or, ‘As surely as the god of Beersheba lives’—they will fall, never to rise again].”

‘The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread [NIV: food], or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord’ – here is an interesting reference to the ‘thirst for the word of God’, which makes us think not only in the probable apocalyptic content of the prophecy, but also about the Intertestamental Period, when the people lived through a long period of silence from God, who no longer spoke through the mouth of His prophets. This passage is also regarded by scholars as the moment of captivity in Assyria or the rejection of Christ by the Jews, which caused His word and His grace to be taken from them and passed to the Gentiles. In any case, this means that the people would long to

hear the words they ignored for so long. The idolatrous worship services of Samaria and Beersheba would be abolished.

Chapter 9

- Am. 9: 1-11 – Israel to be destroyed

• Am. 9: 1-2: “I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said: Strike the capitals [NIV: Strike the tops of the pillars] until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people; and those who are left I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall flee away, not one of them shall escape. Though they dig into Sheol [NIV: Though they dig down to the depths below – Sheol = grave, hell, pit; death, dust], from there shall my hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down.”

The Lord gave a last vision to the prophet, where He was standing beside the altar and told Amos to strike the tops of the temple pillars so that the door shook, until everything shattered and fell on the people and killed them. For this was His purpose: He would slay them with the sword, and none of them could escape, though they tried to hide in the most absurd places, in heaven or in the grave, in the depths (Sheol was the place of the dead). God would find them anyway.

This vision is different from the others because the Lord appeared to the prophet and therefore he does not use symbols. The Lord stood beside the altar and from that place the destruction began, that is, by the center of idolatry.

• Am. 9: 3-4: “Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search out and take them; and though they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the sea-serpent, and it shall bite them. And though they go into captivity in front of their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them; and I will fix my eyes on them for harm and not for good.”

Carmel is a hill in the north of Israel where the vegetation is quite abundant and therefore a favorable place for someone to hide. That’s why the Lord says that even if they hid in Carmel, He would search them out and take them out from there. If they hid themselves in the bottom of the sea, the Lord would command the sea serpent to bite them. If they go into captivity, they will be slain by the sword. The Lord tells Amos that His eyes will be upon them for evil and not for good. What we can say is that there is no place where one can hide from the presence of the Lord, for everything is clear in His eyes. That is why David said in Ps 139: 7-12, “Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night’, even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.”

• Am. 9: 5-6: “The Lord, God of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who live in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile, and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt; who builds his upper chambers [NIV: his lofty palace] in the heavens, and founds his vault upon the earth [NIV: and sets its foundation on the earth]; who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the surface of the earth—the Lord is his name.”

Amos describes here the majesty of God, His sovereignty over all things (nature, nations and human beings). If He has dominion over so many things, would He not have

dominion over those people of Israel? He talks again about the floods of the Nile, as in Am. 8: 8, which reaffirms His message that He will make changes in that nation.

- Am. 9: 7-8: “Are you not like the Ethiopians [NVI: Cushites] to me, O people of Israel? says the Lord. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor [Note NIV: Crete] and the Arameans from Kir? The eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth—except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, says the Lord.”

The Lord tells them that He has formed all the nations, and that they are not better than the Ethiopians [NVI: Cushites]. He took Israel out of the land of Egypt, as He brought out the Philistines from Crete, and the Aramaeans from Kir. If once He has moved the people from their place, He can do it again. He also says that He is displeased with this sinful people and will destroy them, but will leave a remnant.

- Am. 9: 9-10: “For lo, I will command, and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve [NIV: as grain is shaken in a sieve], but no pebble shall fall to the ground. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, Evil shall not overtake or meet us.”

The Lord speaks of the dispersion of His people among the nations, and also of His purification, like the wheat is sifted to remove the chaff and other residues, but the grain remains there, without falling to the ground. Sinners would die by the sword, which makes us think that the good wheat, those who belonged to Him would be the holy remnant that would see the restoration of God, for this leads us to the reasoning of the next verses, which is the restoration of the kingdom of David, more specifically the Messiah. Amos knew that the will of God would be done in History.

- Am. 9: 11-12 (Israel’s restoration): “On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old [NIV: In that day I will restore David’s fallen shelter—I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins—and will rebuild it as it used to be]; in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name [Septuagint: ‘So that the remnant of men and all the nations that bear my name may seek the Lord’], says the Lord who does this.”

- ‘On that day’ concerns the first coming of Jesus and the conversion of the Gentiles – cf. Acts 15: 14-18: “... Simon [*Peter*] has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written, ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago.’”

- ‘Raising David’s fallen tent’ (‘to raise up the booth of David that is fallen’) is a prophetic reference about the spiritual reign of Jesus, where Israel and Judah would be together and could live free before the Lord, worshiping Him without unnecessary and empty rituals, and a reign in which the Gentiles could also have the right to participate, for Jesus would be the shepherd of all. ‘David’s fallen tent’ meant the humiliation of the House of David, with no reliable ruler in order that God might keep His promise of a Davidic descendant on the throne. And this had happened because of Israel’s idolatry and rebellion, which defiled the house of Judah, provoking likewise the wrath of God upon it. However, Jesus came to bring a spiritual kingdom for all who accepted Him as

Lord and Savior. We the Gentiles are the spiritual Israel of God. What in the past (OT) was physical (material), now is spiritual (Eph. 6: 12; 2 Cor. 10: 3-6).

Amos' vision of the messianic kingdom on the throne of David includes the Gentiles (here represented by Edom).

- Am. 9: 13-15: "The time is surely coming, says the Lord, when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed [NIV: and the planter by the one treading grapes]; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel [NIV: and I will bring my people Israel back from exile], and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the Lord your God."

'The time is surely coming, says the Lord, when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed [NIV: and the planter by the one treading grapes]' – this means prosperity, fertility, a constant fructification. The work of the hands will bear fruit throughout the year. This thought may extend to the coming of the Messiah, to the first coming of Christ, although many reason about it by putting the text from the standpoint of the Jewish millennium (material). The spiritual kingdom brought by Jesus supplied His children (those who received Him with an open heart) with the certainty that whoever is in Him is in constant process of spiritual fructification and under His prosperity. There is no reason to think of a material millennium when we know that the coming of Christ was a plan of God the Father that astonished mankind in what it thought about His righteousness and His ability to restore His children. Although they were used by God to reveal His designs to men, the prophets of that time had their thoughts permeated with human opinion and limited vision of something they could not understand or imagine ("And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets" – 1 Cor. 14: 32).

- 'The mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it' – this is very similar to Joel's prophecy (Joel 3: 18): "In that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the Wadi Shittim [NIV: In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the LORD's house and will water the valley of acacias]" – 'In that day' means the day of the first coming of Christ. Wine is symbol of the abundance of vines that were grown in terraced areas on the hills of Palestine among the rocks (Am. 9: 13), vineyards planted on the mountains. Therefore, the prophet says that the mountains shall drip sweet wine (new wine).

- 'The hills shall flow with milk' – that is, herds producing milk abundantly, through the richness of the pastures in the mountainous regions.

- 'the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water' – in Palestine, where rain falls only during a certain period of the year, the landscape is cut by many narrow valleys and streams (Hebrew, *nahal*, or in Arabic, *wadīs*), which only exhibit water during the rainy season. Groundwater can often be found in these wadis during the summer months without rain (Gen. 26: 17; 19). Perennial rivers pass through valleys (in Hebrew, *'emeq* = valleys) and broad plains, or else cut narrow gorges through the rock. Thus, in the coming of Christ, the Lord promises abundance of the water of His word and the presence of His Spirit filling His people and quenching their thirst.

- ‘A fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the Wadi Shittim’ (the valley of acacias) – Shittim (Num. 25: 1; Josh. 2: 1; Mic. 6: 5) was a place of idolatry and immorality, in front of Jericho in the plains of Moab, to the east of the Jordan River. This means that after sincere repentance, the people who were once depraved will receive the life-giving water on the Day of the Lord (The first coming of Jesus). Acacia is a shrub that only grows in desert regions; therefore, this also means that even the wilderness, a place devoid of life, will be watered by the blessing (the water) of Jerusalem. Hence, Ezekiel (Ezek. 47: 1-12) describes the waters coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the Dead Sea and making the salt water fresh (Ezek. 47: 8). Also in Zech. 14: 8 the waters flow from one side to the Mediterranean, on the other side to the Dead Sea, nearby Shittim, signifying the gospel sprouting like a source of uninterrupted water for the whole world, for conversion of Jews and Gentiles.

- v. 14-15: “I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel [NIV: and I will bring my people Israel back from exile], and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the Lord your God.”

‘I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel [NIV: and I will bring my people Israel back from exile] – restoring the fortunes of His people was a promise that Israel would be a restored nation to his land; Israel would be rebuilt and would prosper. It may refer to the return of the captivity [NIV: and I will bring my people Israel back from exile]; but we may also think that ‘to bring my people Israel back’ or ‘I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel’ refers to bring them back to the spiritual communion with their God. He was not only giving them the promise to dwell in their land after the return from captivity (Jer. 24: 6; Jer. 32: 41; Jer. 42: 10-12), but to dwell in His kingdom, from where they would never be taken out.

Thus, Amos ends his prophecy by giving the people the certainty that these things would really happen. He regarded justice as the most important moral attribute of the Lord’s nature over injustice, immorality and dishonesty.

Conclusion:

Observing the prophetic profile of Amos, we can draw the conclusion that he proclaimed the wickedness of his people and once again urged them to the covenant and commitment to the Lord, reinforcing in them the idea of the inevitable divine judgment over all kind of sin. Even having lived long after other brethren who brought the same message of YHWH to Israel, and which was rejected and disobeyed, this prophet obeyed the voice of the Most High to exhort His people again; he didn’t give up to cry out, he continued to prophesy the word of justice, judgment, mercy and restoration, as a way of saying that the Creator always gives us a new chance to reassess our lives, to rethink about our attitudes and to exercise our free will, choosing between salvation and punishment. Hence, the prophet of God should not give up of exhorting, despite having proclaimed the same message previously, until He carries out what He promised. He should also call his brethren to the covenant and communion with their Creator, assuming the perfect commitment to be His instrument on earth. It is often the life example of the Prophet the best way to witness that what he preaches is true and thus be able to reveal his God to the world.

Obadiah

Obadiah (‘Obhadhyāhii or ‘Obhadhyâ = ‘servant of YHWH’ or ‘worshiper of YHWH’) comes from the same Hebrew root of Obed (‘he who worships YHWH’), and prophesied between 605 and 583 BC (during the exile of Israel) and was a prophet of Judah. In fact, there is very little information about Obadiah. He talks about the strife between Israel and Edom (a distant relative of Israel through Esau) because when Judah was invaded and conquered by Babylon, Edom not only didn’t help Judah but also helped the enemy to plunder it, delivering its inhabitants into the hands of the Babylonians. God condemned the Edomites by arrogance and treason, therefore, they would be judged by their inhumanity to Israel (Obad. 10-11). Besides the trial of Edom, Obadiah preaches the universal trial and the restoration of the chosen nation.



Obadiah begins his prophecy saying that he received a vision from the Lord concerning Edom. Obadiah is considered to be an exilic prophet, just as Jeremiah was a pre-exilic and exilic prophet; therefore, many of his prophecies agree with this latter (Jer. 49: 7-22, where he prophesies against the Edomites).

- Obad. 1-14 – The sins and the punishment of Edom

- Obad. 1-9: “The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom: We have heard a report from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: ‘Rise up! Let us rise against it for battle!’ (cf. Jer. 49: 14). I will surely make you least [NVI: small] among the nations; you shall be utterly despised. Your proud heart has deceived you, you that live in the clefts of the rock [*or ‘of Sela’*], whose dwelling is in the heights. You say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to the

ground?’ Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord. If thieves came to you, if plunderers by night [NIV: robbers in the night]—how you have been destroyed! [NIV: oh, what a disaster awaits you!]-would they not steal only what they wanted? If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? [NVI: would they not leave a few grapes?] How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures searched out! [NIV: But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged!] All your allies have deceived you, they have driven you to the border; your confederates have prevailed against you; those who ate your bread have set a trap for you – there is no understanding of it [NIV: All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it]. On that day, says the Lord, I will destroy the wise out of Edom, and understanding out of Mount Esau. Your warriors shall be shattered [NIV: will be terrified], O Teman, so that everyone from Mount Esau will be cut off [NIV: everyone in Esau’s mountains will be cut down in the slaughter].”

- v. 1: “The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom: We have heard a report from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: ‘Rise up! Let us rise against it for battle!’” (cf. Jer. 49: 14; Ps. 137: 7-9).

Obadiah heard the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning Edom, and he knew that an ambassador was sent to the neighboring peoples to assemble them to a war against Edom. He should be a diplomat of some enemy nation of the Edomites.

- v. 2: “I will surely make you least [NVI: small] among the nations; you shall be utterly despised” (cf. Mal. 1: 3-4).

Obadiah was referring to a situation that would occur in the near future. With the destruction decreed by God, Edom would have its limits greatly reduced and would be completely destroyed. The prophets Amos and Jeremiah predicted the destruction of Bozra (capital of Edom) by Nebuchadnezzar in 581 BC. The people of Edom were definitely destroyed by Titus in 70 AD.

- v. 3: “Your proud heart has deceived you, you that live in the clefts of the rock [*or of Sela*], whose dwelling is in the heights. You say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to the ground?’”

In Isa. 34: 5-17; Isa. 63: 1-6; Jer. 49: 7-22; Ezek. 25: 12-14; Ezek. 35: 1-15; Am. 1: 11-12 there is also a prophecy against Edom. Except in the time of David, they were a people that had always been at war against Israel. Jehoshaphat the king of Judah defeated the inhabitants of Mount Seir, of Moab and the Ammonites in the land of Edom (2 Chr. 20: 22) with the Lord’s help, because by putting the Levites before the army, these people ended up fighting against themselves and they slew each other. Esau or Edom is a descendant of Isaac son of Abraham and Sarah. Esau or Edom (Gen. 36: 19) was Jacob’s brother, and lived in Seir a mountain previously belonging to Seir the Horite (Gen. 36: 8- 9; Gen. 36: 20); therefore, Edom is often called Seir.

Edom trusted too much in the protection of his fortresses in the mountains. Seir is a rocky mountain range, stretching north-south, about twenty-four to thirty-two kilometers width, reaching six hundred and fifteen meters high, with some peaks about one thousand and eight hundred meters high. In this mountain range there was (and still there is) a large rocky plateau where the Edomite city of Sela was located. This fortress on the rock could only be reached through a narrow ravine, a cleft of one mile long between the stones, and which in some points is so narrow that it is possible to touch the

two side walls, only opening the arms. Edom thought that no enemy could bring down his defenses, and that region was impregnable. Therefore, his haughtiness was very great, and because of it, the Lord says that He would demean him.



Edom – Mount Seir

Assyrian inscriptions show that Edom became a vassal state of Assyria in 736 BC in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC). Edom was destroyed five years after the captivity of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, that is, in 581 BC. Afterwards, it fell into the hands of the Persians (539 BC), and in the third century BC was dominated by the Nabataeans (one of the Arab tribes), who ended up pushing the inhabitants of Edom to the south of Judea, later called Idumea. Judas Maccabaeus subdued them (2nd century BC), and John Hyrcanus I (2nd – 1st century BC) forced them to be circumcised in order to be incorporated by the Jewish people. Herod the Great descended from the Edomites. The people of Edom were definitely destroyed by Titus in 70 AD. Bozrah or Botsra or Botzrah was the capital of the people of Edom, and whose king was Jobab (Gen. 36: 33; 1 Chr. 1: 44). Bozrah means ‘sheepfold’, indicating that it was a city of shepherds in the southeast of the Dead Sea in the land of Edom. Today it is a small city in Jordan in the state of Tafilah, called Buseirah (Bouseira or Busairah).

- ‘Your proud heart has deceived you, you that live in the clefts of the rock [*or ‘of Sela’*], whose dwelling is in the heights’ – the word ‘rock’ in this verse, in the original version in Hebrew is Sela’ or has-sela’ or Cela’ (Strong #5553), with the simple meaning of rock, stone, stony, rocky place; a craggy rock; rough rock, stronghold, a fortress (place of defense). Other bible verses are also translated as Sela’ or has-sela’ or Cela’ (Strong #5553), as a simple noun:

- Isa. 42: 11 – ‘Let the desert and its towns lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let the inhabitants of **Sela** sing for joy, let them shout from the tops of the mountains’ (NRSV); ‘Let the wilderness and its towns raise their voices; let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of **Sela** sing for joy; let them shout from the mountaintops’ (NIV).

- Judg. 1: 36, as the border of the Amorites – ‘The border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from **Sela** and upward’ (NRSV); ‘The boundary of the Amorites was from Scorpion Pass to **Sela** and beyond’ (NIV).

- 2 Chr. 25: 12 – ‘The people of Judah captured another ten thousand alive, took them to the top of **Sela**, and threw them down from the top of **Sela**, so that all of them were dashed to pieces’ (NRSV); ‘The army of Judah also captured ten thousand men alive, took them to the top of a cliff and threw them down so that all were dashed to pieces’ (NIV).

But there is a specific Sela (or Selah) (Strong #5554) that can be identified with the great rocky plateau mentioned earlier, now called Umm el-Biyara (or Umm Al-Beyyara), which rises three hundred meters above the level of the ruins of Petra (Greek translation of the Edomite word Sela) and more than one thousand and one hundred meters above sea level. Sela or Selah was the principal city of the kingdom of Edom, and whose meaning is ‘rock.’ This Edomite village existed since the Iron Age I (1200-970 BC) and still existed in the Iron Age II (970-580 BC). It was near Mount Hor, where Aaron died. It remained under the dominion of Edom until the time of the Persian Empire (Achaemenid Dynasty of Persia). Sela (in Edomite), originally known by the Nabataeans as Raqmu, is called Pétra (πέτρα) by the Greeks, or Petra, in Latin. In Arabic it is called Al-Bitrā or Al-Batrā. During the sixth century BC, Sela was an important trade route between the Arabian Peninsula and Damascus. The village was conquered by the Nabataeans, one of the Arab tribes, in 312 BC, forcing the Edomites to move to southern Palestine, a region that became known as Idumea, a name derived from the Edomites or Idumeans. Then Petra passed to Roman rule; and in 106 AD Trajan placed it under direct control of Rome, rather than the control of Nabataea, when the city became the capital of the region known as Arabia Petra or Arabia Petraea or the Roman Arabian Province, or simply, Arabia. The city suffered a great earthquake in 363 AD and was almost destroyed. In 551 AD it suffered another earthquake, more intense than the first one, and almost it was destroyed completely. The change in the commercial routes diminished the commercial interest by the city, besides the earthquake that it had suffered, and it was not able to recover any more. Today, Petra is territory of Jordan and its ruins are considered by UNESCO as part of the World Heritage Site. It is known as Rose City due to the color of the stone out of which it is carved.

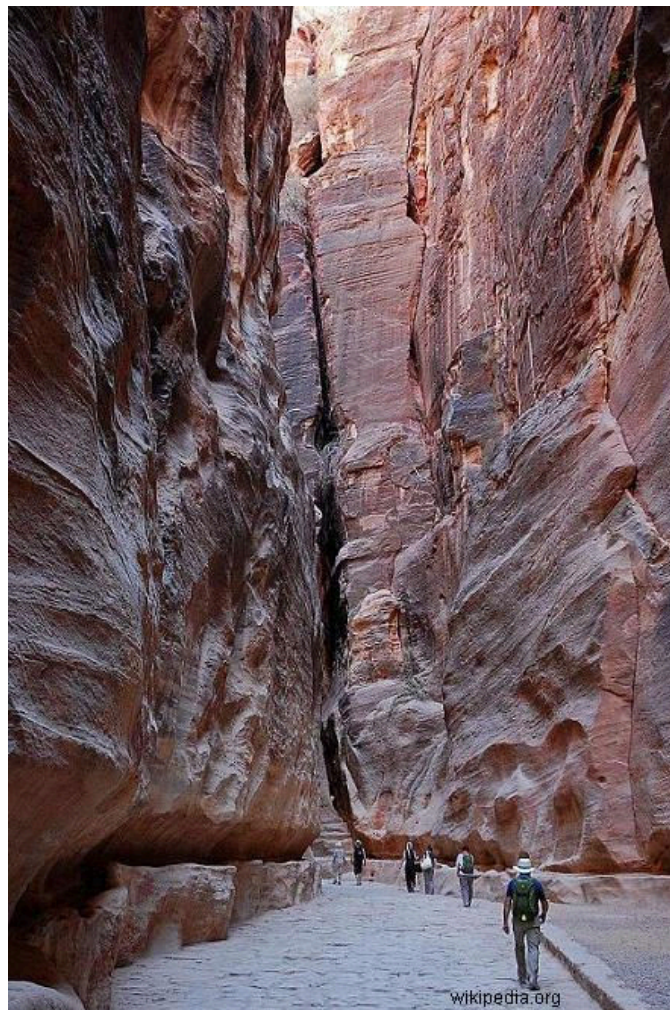
The bible verses that refer to this place are:

- 2 Kin. 14: 7 – Strong #5554 – Cela’, Sela, the rocky city of Idumea (Sela or Petra) – taken by Amaziah king of Judah, when he smote the Edomites in the valley of Salt. He changed the name of the city to Joktheel.

- Isa. 16: 1 – Strong #5554 – Cela’, Sela, the rocky city of Idumea (Sela or Petra) – when Isaiah speaks to the Edomites to send tribute to Zion.

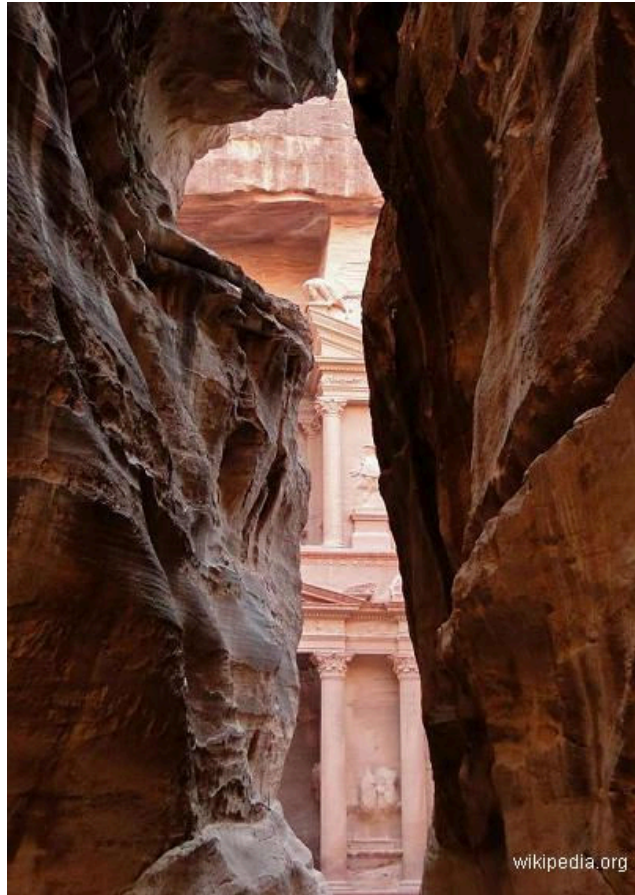


View of Petra



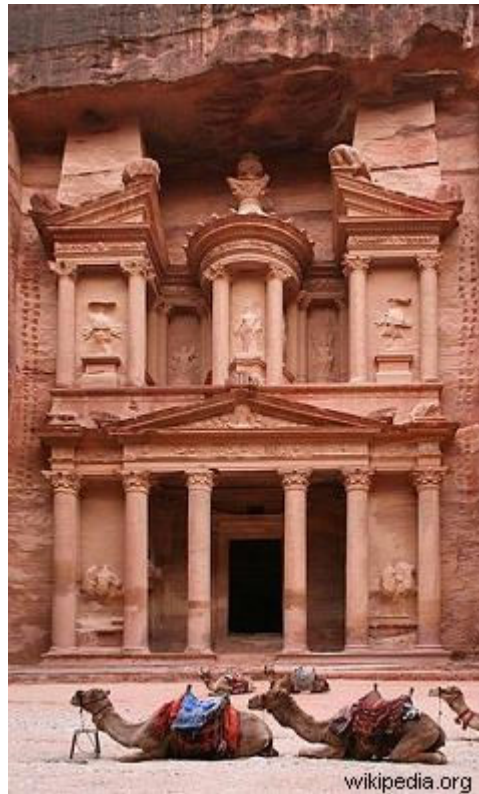
Siq (al-Sīq)

The Siq (al-Sīq) – literally ‘the Shaft’, also known as Siiq or Siqit is the main entrance to Petra; a dim and narrow gorge (in some points has no more than 3 meters or 10 feet wide) with approximately 1.2 kilometers (0.75 mi) long, which ends at Petra’s most elaborate ruin, Al-Khazneh (‘The treasury’). The Siq was used as entrance to the great caravan into Petra.



The end of the Siq, with its view of Al Khazneh (‘The Treasury’)

The ‘Treasury’ (In the picture below) is one of the temples in the city of Petra; in fact, a tomb excavated on the face of the cliff and whose facade with pillars was rebuilt according Greek standards.



‘The ‘Treasury’ (Al Khazneh)



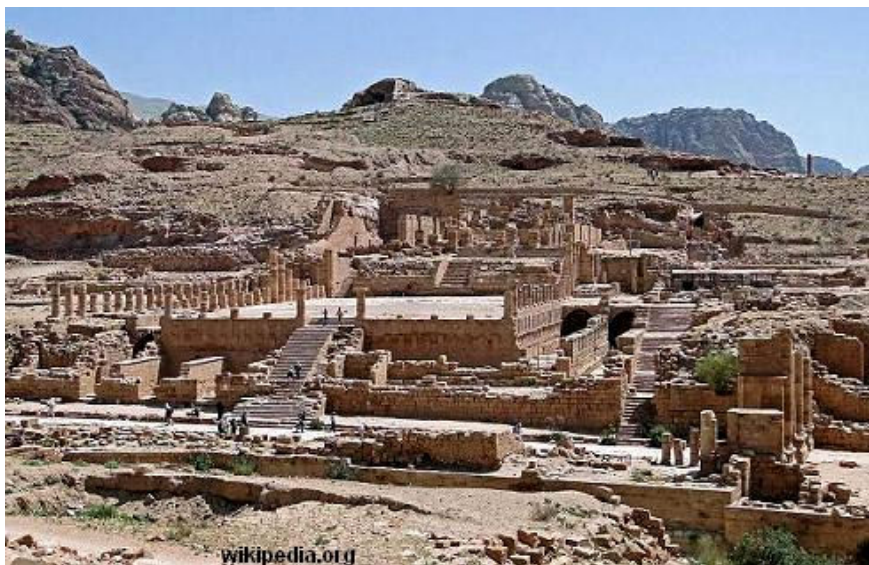
The temple of the Garden



Theatre of Petra



Al-Deir ('the Monastery')



The great temple of Petra

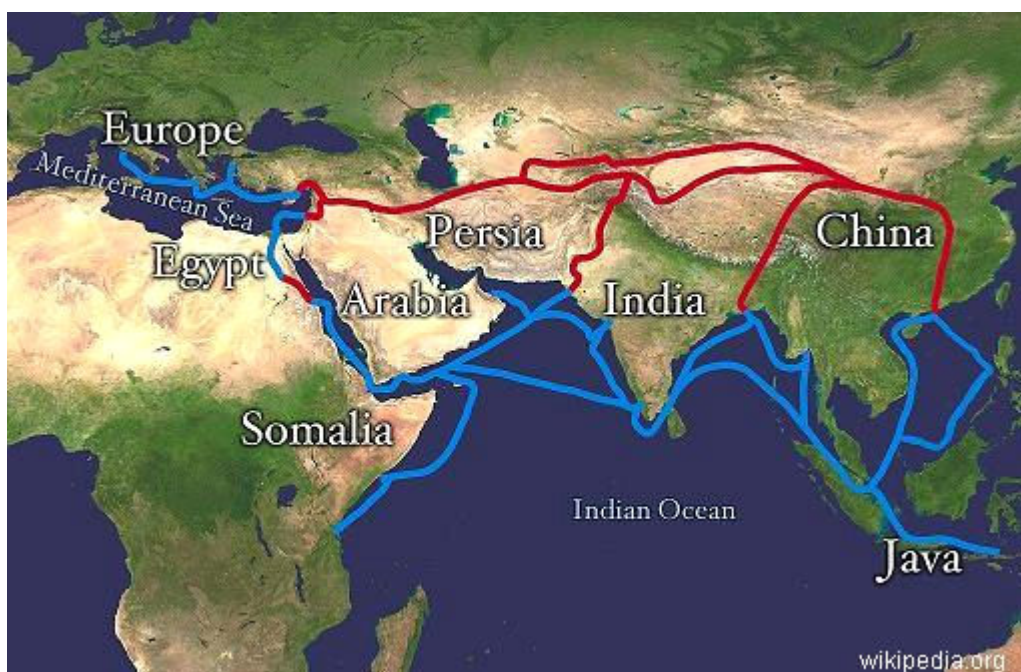


Ancient columns of the Great temple

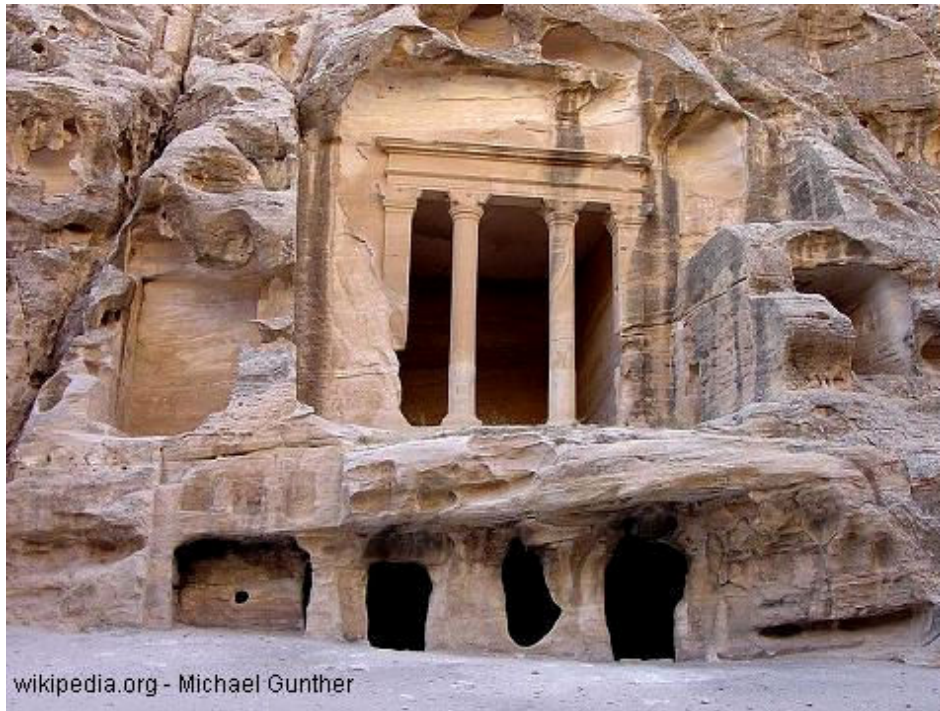
Five kilometers to the north of Petra, in the Ma‘ān Governorate of Jordan, there is another Nabataean archeological site built during the 1st century AD, called ‘Little Petra’ (In Arabic: al-batrā aṣ-Ṣaġīra), also known as Siq al-Barid (or Siiq al-bariid, in Arabic, literally ‘the cold canyon’).



Its name, literally ‘cold canyon’, comes from its geographic orientation and its high walls, preventing the entry of great part of sunlight. The narrow gorge is similar to the one that leads to the city of Petra, however with small extension (450 meters or 1,476 ft). In the end of it appears a facade of a colossal tomb and a great number of rooms carved in the rocks. The modern name ‘Little Petra’ comes from its similarities to the larger site to the south. The buildings are carved into the walls of the sandstone canyons. Archaeologists believe that the whole complex was a suburb of Petra, the Nabataean capital, which housed visiting traders of the Silk Road, an ancient network of terrestrial and the maritime trade routes, connecting Asia with Africa, the Middle East and southern Europe, from Japan, China and Korea to the Mediterranean Sea. It’s called Silk Road because of the profitable trade of silk, among other goods. Along with its neighboring city Beidha, Little Petra was excavated in the later 20th century by British archaeologists.



One of the most famous buildings in Siq al-Barid (‘Little Petra’) is a colonnades classically styled temple carved out of rock cliff face and supported by two columns. Inside it there is no decoration or sculpture. Below the chamber there is a kind of cave with three rooms, and in one of them there are recessed shelves in the walls. It is probable that the upper chamber was a kind of chapel for worship, and the house below was a dwelling place for those who ministered the rituals.



Temple of Siq al-Barid



Mount Seir (Edom) and Sela (or Petra)

- v. 4: “Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord.”

‘Though you soar aloft like the eagle’ refers to the height of the caves of Edom, which served as a refuge. Even if the Edomites tried to flee from God’s punishment, and however much they put themselves higher in the mountains to escape their enemies, even there the Lord would reach them and bring them down. The height of the land of Edom became a metaphor for his haughty spirit.

• v. 5: “If thieves came to you, if plunderers by night [NIV: robbers in the night] – how you have been destroyed! [NIV: oh, what a disaster awaits you!] – would they not steal only what they wanted? If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings?” – Thieves or plunderers or grape-gatherers concern the looters of Edom. God says that even the looters of Edom would leave something, but He would not let anything of them remain, after His judgment was accomplished.

• v. 6: “How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures searched out! [NIV: But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged!]” – The prophet exclaims as confirming the desolation they would suffer and how they would be stripped of their treasures, even the most hidden. Nebuchadnezzar actually took possession of all the kingdoms to the west of the Euphrates and took all the treasures he found in all of them.

• v. 7: “All your allies have deceived you, they have driven you to the border; your confederates have prevailed against you; those who ate your bread have set a trap for you – there is no understanding of it [NIV: All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it].”

We may think that the ancient allies of Edom were Moab and Ammon, at least in the days of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 20: 22). But it is not spoken of in History that they drove Edom out of his land. Edom rebelled against Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat (2 Kin. 8: 20-22; 2 Chr. 21: 8-10). The Philistines also rebelled against Jehoram during his reign, but they were not allies of the Edomites. In the days of Ahaz, the Edomites invaded Judah and seized the Israelite captives (2 Chr. 28: 17) and received Israelite prisoners captured by Tyre and Gaza (Am. 1: 6; 9). During the post-exile period, under Persian rule (Achaemenid), Petra, for example, remained under Edom’s dominion, which makes us think they were still in their place of origin, southeast of the Dead Sea.

In relation to their allies who betrayed them, one can think of the Arab tribes of the Negev, who expelled them from their land in the fifth century BC, or the Nabataeans (one of the Arab tribes), who in 312 BC forced the Edomites to move to the south of Palestine, a region that came to be called Idumea, name derived from Edomites or Idumeans. By the time of the Maccabees, they had already lost their territory.

• v. 8-9: “On that day, says the Lord, I will destroy the wise out of Edom, and understanding out of Mount Esau. Your warriors shall be shattered [NIV: will be terrified], O Teman, so that everyone from Mount Esau will be cut off [NIV: everyone in Esau’s mountains will be cut down in the slaughter].”

Teman (têmān) was the son of Eliphaz and the grandson of Esau (Gen. 36: 9-11; 1 Chr. 1: 36), and may have given his name to the district to the north of Edom (cf. Jer. 49: 20; Ezek. 25: 13; Am. 1: 12, Obad. 8-9). Its inhabitants were famous because of their wisdom (cf. Jer. 49: 7). Eliphaz the Temanite was one of the comforters of Job (Job 2: 11). A prince of Teman is named among the chiefs of Edom (Gen. 36: 15; 42; 1 Chr. 1: 53), and Husham was one of its first rulers (Gen. 36: 34). In his vision, Habakkuk saw God the Holy One coming from Teman (Hab. 3: 3). Although the exact location of Teman remains unknown, there is strong evidence in favor of the Jordanian city of Ma’an. There were many water springs in the area, and this made it attractive to the caravans between the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant.

What the prophet says here is that on the day that the Lord decrees for his destruction, the wisdom of his wise men will be worthless. Here, Teman is used as a synonym for Edom (Jer. 49: 7; Am. 1: 12). Teman not only has wisdom but also

bravery. But the skill of his warriors would not free the Edomites from destruction. The sentence of his extermination had already been given.

- Obad. 10-14 (The joy of Edom with the pain and sorrow of Israel): “For the slaughter and violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. On the day that you stood aside, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you too were like one of them. But you should not have gloated over your brother on the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah on the day of their ruin; you should not have boasted on the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of my people on the day of their calamity; you should not have joined in the gloating over Judah’s disaster on the day of his calamity; you should not have looted his goods on the day of his calamity [NIV uses the word ‘disaster’ in the place of ‘calamity’]. You should not have stood at the crossings to cut off his fugitives; you should not have handed over his survivors on the day of distress.”

The Edomites rejoiced when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and Jerusalem (586 BC) and gave him their brothers and helped him to plunder their wealth. He was with the foreigners when they cast lots for Jerusalem and their prisoners and their belongings. Edom laughed at the misfortune of Judah, took pleasure in it, and took advantage of that opportunity to steal him and to affront him. He not only robbed his brothers, but he helped to kill those who fled from the Babylonians. Because of the violence he used against the Jews, Edom will be ashamed and exterminated.

‘On the day of his calamity’ – The invasion of Nebuchadnezzar.

- Obad. 15-16 (The announcement of the Day of the Lord over all): “For the day of the Lord is near against all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head. For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, all the nations around you shall drink; they shall drink and gulp down, and shall be as though they had never been [NIV: Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been.]”

Obadiah now speaks of the Day of the Lord, that is, the day of His judgment, which shall come upon all nations, and shall come also upon Edom. And what Edom has planted, he will reap. His deeds shall return on his own head. The Day of the Lord is a term much used by the prophets to indicate the day of God’s judgment (Am. 5: 18; 20).

‘They shall drink’ – It refers to the cup of God’s wrath which the nations will have to drink of (Jer. 25: 15-28) because of their wickedness and also because of the evil they did to Jerusalem.

- Obad. 17-18 (The announcement of the preservation of Israel): “But on Mount Zion there shall be those that escape, and it shall be holy (cf. Zech. 8: 3); and the house of Jacob shall take possession of those who dispossessed them [NIV: But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance]. The house of Jacob shall be a fire, the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble; they shall burn them and consume them, and there shall be no survivor of the house of Esau; for the Lord has spoken [NIV: Jacob will be a fire and Joseph a flame; Esau will be stubble, and they will set him on fire and destroy him. There will be no survivors from Esau. The LORD has spoken].”

Obadiah talks about the remnants, those who returned after the captivity. Judah was punished for his sin and saw Mount Zion being destroyed. But as God’s wrath does not last forever, they will see His deliverance; they will return and possess their inheritance.

In OT, ‘holiness’ means ‘to be separated for God’ (Deut. 7: 6; Jer. 1: 5); to be set apart from everything that is unclean (Lev. 20: 7; Lev. 21: 6; Lev. 22: 9). Those who were delivered by the Lord would be God’s people and would have to be cleansed from the idolatry that caused the destruction of the nation. For us, it is no different. We have separated ourselves from the world to serve Jesus, who has placed His seal of Lord and Savior on us. In the same way, we should no longer touch what is impure, that is, in the worldly sin we committed before converting to Christ.

‘The house of Jacob’ – those Jews who were exiled and would return from captivity to possess again the land of their ancestors.

‘The house of Jacob shall be a fire, the house of Joseph a flame’ – It refers to the children of Judah and to the children of Israel (the north and south nation), who ‘on the Day of the Lord’ would be masters over the house of Edom (Esau); therefore it is written that ‘the house of Esau shall be stubble.’ The former ones would be instruments of God for the execution of the divine judgment over Edom. From the physical point of view, we can say that this was fulfilled in the time of Judas Maccabeus and John Hyrcanus. Judas Maccabeus subjugated them to take possession of the territory of Idumea (2nd century BC), and John Hyrcanus I (2nd – 1st century BC) forced them to be circumcised in order to be incorporated by the Jewish people.

Thinking from the spiritual point of view, where Edom refers to God’s enemies, then, on the Day of Judgment, His people, His church, will judge their enemies.

- Obad. 19-21 (Israel will possess the land again): “Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau, and those of the Shephelah the land of the Philistines [NIV: People from the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau, and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines]; they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria, and Benjamin shall possess Gilead [NIV: They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead]. The exiles of the Israelites who are in Halah shall possess Phoenicia as far as Zarephath (Heb. צִרְפָּת); and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad shall possess the towns of the Negeb [NIV: This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess the land as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev]. Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s [NIV: Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD’s].”

This means that Israel’s borders in the time of David would be restored. Negeb (in Hebrew, Negev, ‘dry’) is a desert to the south of Israel, near the Sinai Peninsula and the Mediterranean Sea and that only experiences life when the rains fill the beds of its dry rivers. The rivers are filled with the waters, and plants are watered and animals quench their thirst. Negev had its border with Edom on the east.

The land of the Philistines on the coastal plain (‘Shephelah’) would also be occupied again, including the cities of Gath, Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza (All these regions are part of present-day territory of Israel except Gaza). Judah and Philistia have always fought hard for this region since the beginning of Israel’s history. But in the end, Judah will prevail against the disputed lands with Philistia (Zeph. 2: 4-7).



Negev



Going northward, Obadiah speaks of the fields of Ephraim and Samaria. The northern boundary would extend to Phoenicia (land of the Canaanites), in Zarephath (1

Kin. 17: 8-24 – in Hebrew: צַרְפָּת *sārēfāt*, *tsarfāt*; in Greek: Σάρεπτα, *Sárepta*), known today as Sarafand (French). It is located between Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean coast. It was initially a colony of Sidon. Later, in 8th century BC, it became to be possession of Tyre. Obadiah prophesied that on the Day of the Lord, those of the children of Israel who were deported by Sargon after the fall of Samaria would possess Phoenicia until Zarephath. The tribe of Benjamin would cross the Jordan and took back the land of Gilead.



Based upon an original created by International Mapping

Palestine in the times of Jesus

The three regions (Ephraim, Samaria and Gilead), who suffered a considerable influx of foreigners because of the dominion of Assyrians and Babylonians, would return to the hands of the Israelites. In the Roman period, the territories of Samaria and Ephraim (this one was located in the territory of Samaria) constituted the province of Judea. Gilead (east of the Jordan), at the time of Jesus also was part of the province of Judea, covering the territory of Perea, Trachonitis and Ituraea (Lk 3: 1), which was

ruled by Philip the tetrarch. Then these territories were again lost by Israel. Today the region east of the Jordan River is occupied by Jordan and, to the northeast, by the Golan Heights, which although under Israelite occupation since 1967, is considered internationally as Syrian territory (The Western 2/3 is controlled by Israel; and 1/3 to the East is controlled by Syria). In the times of Jesus this area was called Gaulanitis, and was part of the Tetrarchy of Philip. In 16th century it was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. In 1918 it was possession of France and in 1946 it became domain of Syria. After 1973, 5% of the territory remained with Syria, and the rest with Israel.



Landscape of Golan Heights – photo by Beivushtang – wikipedia.org



Sepharad – unidentified location. It may be the land of Saparda (a country of the East allied with Media), which the Persians called Sparda (or Saparda). It was south of Urmia (which today is the largest city in the province of Iran in western Azerbaijan) and adjacent to Media. It may refer to Spain, which explains why the Spanish Jews are called Sephardi. The word comes from the Hebrew denomination to designate the Iberian Peninsula or Spain (Sefarad, סְפָרַד). Another suggestion given by scholars is because of the Latin Vulgate, which writes Bosphoro (Bosforo), a location in Anatolia, now Turkey. It is also suggested the possibility of having been the city of Sardis, whose name in Lydian is Sfard.

‘Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau [NIV: Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau] – ‘Deliverers’ is

a word translated by Septuagint as ‘Those who have been saved.’ In original Hebrew it is written ‘the saviors’ (yasha’ – Strong #3467). In the Bible of Jerusalem it is written ‘victorious’, that is, the returning exiles who will again rule in Jerusalem over the land of Edom: “And they shall come out victorious from Mount Zion, to judge the mountain of Esau. And the kingship shall be of Yahweh!” (Translation from Spanish).

“The kingdom shall be the Lord’s” – the returning exiles would be under the rule of God Himself. This vision of Obadiah, where God would be the total King of Israel and that from Mount Zion He would rule the world, was shared by other prophets, as Zech. 14: 9-11. Although it did not occur physically in the post-exilic period, it occurred at the first coming of Christ, for with His spiritual kingdom brought to Israel, all the other gods worshiped in the past by them and the idolatrous peoples ceased to exist. Jesus’ ministry and the event of the cross made His government very clear in the soul of all who believed and still believe and would come to believe in Him, regardless of the regime of human government.

Conclusion:

Observing the prophetic profile of Obadiah, we can draw the conclusion that he proclaimed the wickedness of his people and once again urged them to the covenant and commitment to the Lord, reinforcing in them the idea of the inevitable divine judgment over all kind of sin. Even having lived long after other brethren who brought the same message of YHWH to Israel, and which was rejected and disobeyed, this prophet obeyed the voice of the Most High to exhort His people again; he didn’t give up to cry out, he continued to prophesy the word of justice, judgment, mercy and restoration, as a way of saying that the Creator always gives us a new chance to reassess our lives, to rethink about our attitudes and to exercise our free will, choosing between salvation and punishment. Hence, the prophet of God should not give up of exhorting, despite having proclaimed the same message previously, until He carries out what He promised. He should also call his brethren to the covenant and communion with their Creator, assuming the perfect commitment to be His instrument on earth. It is often the life example of the Prophet the best way to witness that what he preaches is true and thus be able to reveal his God to the world.

We’ll give sequence to our study with the volumes 2 e 3:

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/theminorprophets2.pdf>

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/theminorprophets3.pdf>