

ESSAY
BA course year 2 no. 3
"Prophets"

"Come to Bethel and transgress". What was the attitude of the written prophets Amos and Hosea to the sacrifices offered on the shrines of the Northern Kingdom? What political and religious situation did they address? What hope did they propose to God's errant people?

INDEX

1. Preface		3
2. Short introductions to Amos and Hosea		3
a. Amos	3	
b. Hosea	3	
3. The attitude to the sacrifices, which were offered on the shrines of the Northern Kingdom		4
a. Amos's attitude	4	
b. Hosea's attitude	5	
4. The political and religious situation		6
a. Amos' view	6	
b. Hosea's view	8	
5. Hope for God's errant people		9
a. Amos' view	9	
b. Hosea's view	10	
6. Bibliography		10

1. Preface

Please notice that the whole essay is based on German literature (mainly on books and notes from the universities of Freiburg, Heidelberg and Mannheim). So it might happen that I had problems with the translation into English, then I used the German original word in brackets “()”. In most cases I've tried to translate it into English.

2. Short introductions to Amos and Hosea

a. Amos

Amos (meaning in Hebrew "a burden") was (Am 1,1) a shepherd of Tekoa, a small town of Judah, six miles southeast from Bethlehem, and twelve from Jerusalem, on the borders of the great desert (2 Ch 20,20). The region being sandy was more fit for pastoral than for agricultural purposes. Amos therefore owned and tended flocks, and collected sycamore figs. Though belonging to Judah, he was commissioned by God to exercise his prophetic function in Israel; as the latter kingdom abounded in impostors, and the prophets of God generally fled to Judah through fear of the kings of Israel, a true prophet from Judah was the more needed in it. His name is not to be confounded with that of Isaiah's father, Amoz.

The time of his prophesying was in the reigns of Uzziah king of Judea, and Jeroboam II, son of Joash, king of Israel (Am 1,1), that is, in part of the time in which the two kings were contemporary; probably in Jeroboam's latter years, after that monarch had recovered from Syria "the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath to the sea of the plain" (2Ki 14,25-27); for Amos foretells that these same coasts, "from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of the wilderness," should be the scene of Israel's being afflicted (Am 6,14); also his references to the state of luxurious security then existing (Am 6,1 & 4 & 13), and to the speedy termination of it by the Assyrian foe (Am 1,5; 3,12 + 15; 5,27; 8,2), point to the latter part of Jeroboam's reign, which terminated in 784 BC, the twenty-seventh year of Uzziah's reign, which continued down to 759 BC.

He was contemporary with Hosea, only that the latter continued to prophesy in reigns subsequent to Uzziah (Ho 1:1); whereas Amos ceased to prophesy in the reign of that monarch.

b. Hosea

Hosea, the contemporary of Isaiah, Micah, and Amos, seems to have entered on his prophetic office in the last years of Jeroboam (contemporary in part with Uzziah), and to

have ended it in the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, 722 BC, that is, about sixty years in all, from 784 BC to 722 BC.

His style is abrupt, sententious, and unrounded; the connecting particles are few; there are changes of person, and anomalies of gender, number, and construction. His name means *Salvation*. He was son of Beerī, of the tribe of Issachar, born in Beth-shemesh. His mention, in the inscription, of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, is no proof that he belonged to Judah: for the prophets in Israel regarded its separation from Judah, civil as well as religious, as an apostasy from God, who promised the dominion of the theocracy to the line of David. Hence Hosea dates from Judah's kings, as well as from Jeroboam of Israel, though he belonged to Israel, with whose sins and fate his book is chiefly occupied. He, however, makes incidental references to Judah. His first prophecy foretells the overthrow of Jehu's house, fulfilled on the death of Jeroboam, Jehu's great-grandson (2Ki 15,12), in Zachariah, Jeroboam's son, the fourth and last from Jehu, conspired against by Shallum.

3. The attitude to the sacrifices, which were offered on the shrines of the Northern Kingdom

a. Amos' attitude

At the royal shrine at Bethel the corrupt court went – especially on festival occasions – to worship God. It was one of two shrines established by Jeroboam I in 922 BC when Israel seceded from Judah. In Bethel as well as in Dan – where the other shrine was established – Jeroboam I erected golden bulls. The two national shrines had come to be regarded as schismatic, and the bulls as idolatrous representations of Baal.

Once a separate kingdom had been established it was vital to provide a national shrine to replace Jerusalem, which was now in Judah, and what better place than Bethel for the central tribes and Dan for those in the north. The bulls at Bethel and Dan were doubtless meant to be seen as the throne of Yahweh – as well as the Ark was seen as His throne. The bulls were not originally seen as representations of anyone; they were simply thrones for the invisible Yahweh. Maybe it was an unwise choice as it did have associations with Baal.

Comparing with Hosea (Hos 8,5; 10,5) Amos never mentioned the bull in his criticism of worship at Bethel.

In verse 4 he starts with an invitation to worship there which probably echoed the priestly invitation. But we are not told what the occasion was. It may have been the Feast of

Tabernacles or one of the other festivals. The shocking thing is that no sooner does he announce the invitation than he denounces the worship there as an infringement of Yahweh's law. Not only the social injustices but the worship at the royal sanctuary was a crime, an act of rebellion against God. The second half of verse 4 and verse 6 show that there was nothing wrong with the performance. They were offering the "sacrifices for the morning"¹; they were fulfilling Jacob's vow at Bethel to give "tithes" to Yahweh²; they were offering cakes "without leaven" as a "thankoffering"³ and "free-will offerings"⁴. They were certainly fulfilling all their religious duties there, and it is even possible to interpret these verses in such a way that they were exceeding their duties.

There are numerous suggestions why this could have been a crime in the eyes of Amos. It may have been because Amos believed the proper place for all these things was in the temple in Jerusalem. Or it may have been because the worship at the sanctuary was at odds with their lives in society, where they practised all kinds of injustice. Later on in verse 5,21 ("I hate, I scorn your festivals, I take no pleasure in your solemn assemblies.") Amos condemned worship which was not accompanied by proper ethical behaviour in everyday life. Actually the reason given in verse 6 is only that Israelites "love to do it". Amos might condemn with these words the worship at Gilgal and Bethel because people who came loved the worship – they loved the practices of worship, the processions and the crowds, like they enjoyed the luxury of life at the court. In this way he means that worship is not a matter of performing correct actions or exaggeratedly elaborate ones, no, it's more a free and grateful response to God. We can even say that when liturgy replaces God as the object of love, then worship becomes crime. Amos didn't want a religion without any forms of worship, but they should be only a help for the people to express their love to God.

b. Hosea's attitude

In Hosea 4,15 – 19 we find an explicit example of Hosea's attitude to the sacrifices, which are offered on the shrines of Bethel; "Israel" stands here for the Northern Kingdom.

The warning to the Israelites not to visit the shrines at Beth-aven and Gilgal echoes equal passages in Amos (4,4: "Go to Bethel, and sin, to Gilgal, and sin even harder!..."; 5,4ff.), but the reason for this warning is different between Hosea and Amos.

Here Hosea connects it with adultery. "Beth-aven" (= house of "wickedness" and "idolatry") seems to be a nickname for Bethel (= house of God). He attacks in this passage all practices

¹ See: I Sam 1,19

² See: Gen. 28,22

³ See: Lev 6,16; 7,12

⁴ See: Ex 35,29

of Baal worship. The Israelites were worshipping Baal as a kind of insurance in case Yahweh could not cope with the provision of fertility. They intended to worship Yahweh but were doing so as though he were Baal.

For Hosea there could be no other God for Israel than Yahweh and anything associated with Baal was anathema. Faith, loyalty and knowledge of God were lacking there and in this way their sacrifices would be a delusion. As Hosea writes in verse 19 "...the wind with its wings will carry them off and their sacrifices will bring them nothing but disgrace...", which means that all their sacrifices won't save them at all.

So, Hosea calls the people to undivided loyalty to Yahweh. (Hos 6,6 "for faithful love is what pleases me, not sacrifice; knowledge of God, not burnt offerings.")

4. The political and religious situation they address

a. Amos' view

In Bethel Amos declaimed against the enemies of Israel. His introduction was based upon a keen insight into mass psychology that enabled him to secure an audience. Only when his hearers were enthusiastic about the fate he foretold for their enemies, did he turn his attack upon Israel. Carefully, point by point, he made his charges:

*"For the three crimes, the four crimes of Israel,
I have made my decree and will not relent:
Because they have sold the upright for silver
And the poor for a pair of sandals,
Because they have crushed the heads of the weak into the dust
And thrust the rights of the oppressed to one side,
Father and son sleeping with the same girl
(a profanation of my sacred shrine!)
and thus profaning my holy name,
lying down beside every altar
on clothes acquired as pledges,
and drinking the wine of the people they have fined
in the house of their God." (Amos 2,6-8)*

Because of these evils he saw only destruction for the nation, and he foretold the destruction despite the prosperity of the times. The destruction would come from an external foe, Assyria

or Egypt, because the internal life had rotted the foundations of society: "The Foe shall overrun the land, laying your forts level, plundering your palaces." The prophecy was not popular with the priests nor with the people and Amos had reason to believe that the chief priest, Amaziah, was an informant to the king and it was Amaziah who turned his wrath upon the lone prophet: "Go away, seer, take yourself off to Judah, earn your living there, and there you can prophesy! But never again will you prophesy at Bethel, for this is a royal sanctuary, a national temple."(Amos 7,12) Here, for Amos was the final irony of the official religion, accusing him of "playing a prophet" while it used religion for its income, and referred to the religious sanctuary in nationalistic terms as "the royal shrine, the national temple."

Amos insisted that the basic issue which confronts individual and society is the religious issue of ultimate loyalty. Through his relation to Yahweh, the God of righteousness, Amos was convinced that all of human history rested upon moral choice. Not the impersonal working of a moral law but a personal moral will confronts human beings. That will, since it is the will of the One God, was inescapable, and no society, least of all a religious institution, could escape the judgment of that righteous will. The qualities ascribed to Yahweh had never been so pointedly presented. He is the one, universal God. He is inescapable. He is absolutely righteous.

Living with such a God Amos was sensitive to the corruption of his time and brought a specific bill of indictment against the community. Those evils were mainly economic, social, and religious. He had a bitter scorn of the prevalent commercial practices and an indignation at the way the poor had become more impoverished:

*"Listen to this, you who crush the needy
and reduce the oppressed to nothing,
you who say, 'When will New Moon be over
so that we can sell our corn,
and Sabbath, so that we can market our wheat?'...
We can buy up the weak for silver
And the poor for a pair of sandals,
And even get a price for the sweepings of the wheat." (Amos 8,4-5)*

He had a scorn of the social life of the aristocratic families of Israel:

*"Disaster for those so comfortable in Zion
and for those so confident on the hill of Samaria,
the notables of this first of nations,
those to whom the House of Israel has recourse"... (Amos 6,1)*

*Lying on ivory beds
And sprawling on their divans,
They dine on lambs from the flock,
And stall-fattened veal;
They bawl to the sound of the lyre
And, like David, they invent musical instruments;
They drink wine by the bowlful,
And lard themselves with the finest oils,...” (Amos 6,4-6)*

But with the most bitter invective of all he lashed out at the accepted religion:

he proclaimed
*“I hate, I scorn your festivals,
I take no pleasure in your solemn assemblies.
When you bring me burnt offerings...
Your oblations, I do not accept them
And I do not look at your communion sacrifices of fat cattle.
Spare me the din of your chanting,
Let me hear none of your strumming on lyres,...” (Amos 5,21-23)*

b. Hosea’s view

In Hosea’s denunciation of the sin of Israel the list of social evils was much the same as that stated by Amos, though expanded:

*“No loyalty, no faithful love, no knowledge of God in the country, (Hos 4,1)
only perjury and lying, murder, theft, adultery and violence, bloodshed after bloodshed...
(Hos 4,2)
Your daughters play the whore and your daughters-in-law commit adultery (Hos 4,14)
The men themselves are wandering off with whores and offering sacrifice with sacred
prostitutes...” (Hos 4,14)*

The condemnation of a religion concerned with ritualistic practices and unconcerned for the common welfare of the people is present in Hosea’s view. But while Amos was particularly shocked by the economic oppression of the poor, Hosea was troubled by the intrigues of international politics. There was little in the former about politics. There was almost nothing in the latter about economic injustice. This change of perspective indicated the different personalities and occupations of the two men as well as the development of a more critical

international situation. Here he speaks of Ephraim, the most important of the northern tribes, and for him they represent the chosen people.

“Ephraim mixes with the nations; (Hos 7,8)

Foreigners have eaten his strength away but he is unconscious of it; (Hos 7,9)

Ephraim is like a silly, witless pigeon, calling on Egypt, turning to Assyria ... (Hos 7,11)

They have set up kings, but without my consent, and appointed princes, but without my knowledge ... (Hos 8,4)

Ephraim feeds himself on wind, all day he chases the wind from the East, he heaps up cheating and violence; they make a treaty with Assyria, at the same time sending oil to Egypt. “(Hos 12,2)

The people have committed spiritual adultery as well as prostituted themselves literally. Will justice not judge material and sexual excesses, idolatry, and abuses of power? Hosea says, *“Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us”* (Hos 6,1). Israel's continues to sacrifice to the Baals: *“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 the idols”* (Hos 11,1-2).

5. Hope for God’s errant people

a. Amos’ view

Despite all Amos seems to see hope for the errant people. At the end of the book, but even in the fifth chapter we can find a gleam of hope.

Amos opens a view on the salvation for the house of Jacob (Amos 9,8 *“Look, Lord Yahweh’s eyes are on the sinful kingdom, I shall wipe it off the face of the earth, although I shall not destroy the House of Jacob completely – declares Yahweh.”*) and for the “rest” of Joseph (Amos 5,15), so to say that parts of the people, who will survive the judgement. It’s important to notice that Amos is the first to use the wording “rest” of Israel. The image of a „holy rest“, which will survive the judgement of Yahweh and for whom the promise of the covenant will count for them further on, does appear from now on again and again in prophetic literature.

The end of chapter 9 in Amos shows hope in the future with a new rebuilt Jerusalem. This time will be a time of peace and prosperity when harvest would follow immediately on the sowing of seed (compare with the new Davidic age in Isaiah 11,1-9). In verse 9,14 Amos recalls the threat of himself in verse 5,11 but reverses it, and in verse 9,15 *“And I shall plant*

them in their own soil and they will never be uprooted again from the country which I have given them, declares Yahweh, your God.”) Israel is seen permanently resettled in its God-given land.

Its worth noticing that the hopes for the future are not made dependent on the repentance of Israel. The restoration comes from Yahweh alone as a result of his enduring love and grace.

b. Hosea’s view

As Israel does offend against the first commandment again and again, as it commits adultery with Yahweh, the punishment for Israel is unavoidable.

Hosea goes beyond Amos pictures of God’s punishment:

“Because of this, I shall be like ringworm for Ephraim and like gangrene for the House of Judah.” (Hos 5,12)

he says in the name of Yahweh (compare with: Hos 5,14; 7,12; 13,7-8).

But God does only punish to save his errant people. When Israel got robbed and humiliated, it will remember the time, when it was faithful to God. And Yahweh will put his repentant folk up again, and it will rejoice anew in the luck and the peace of God.

6. Bibliography

- *Einleitung in das Alte Testament (Teil I)*, Lothar Ruppert - autorisierte Vorlesungsmitschrift (Winter-Semester 1984/85)
- *Einführung in das Alte Testament*, Werner H. Schmidt, Berlin 1982
- *The New Jerusalem Bible – Standard Edition*, Darton, Logman & Todd, 1985
- *Die Bibel – Die Heilige Schrift des Alten und Neuen Bundes*, Herder-Bücherei, Verlag Herder Freiburg, 1979
- *The Books of AMOS & HOSEA*, Harry Mowvley, Epworth Commentaries, Epworth Press, London, 1991
- *Various internet-sources*

counted words: 3208