I. BACKGROUND.

A. The prophet Joel prophesied during the minority of Joash.
   1. The prophet Jonah prophesied at the beginning of Jeroboam's reign.
   2. Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah of Jerusalem and Jeroboam in Samaria.
   3. According to 2 Kgs 12:22 and 15:1 Jeroboam and Uzziah's reigns overlapped by 14 yrs.

B. Political situation.
   1. Jeroboam was the most successful and colorful king to ever reign in Israel.
      a. He reigned longer than any king in Israel.
      b. His reign was characterized by pomp and prosperity.
      c. On becoming king, he not only repelled the Syrian invaders, but also took their capital city of Damascus.
      d. He also recovered the whole of the ancient dominion from Hamath to the Dead Sea, *2 Kgs 14:23-29*.
      e. This was only partial restoration.
         (1) The sanctuary at Bethel was kept in royal estate (7:13).
         (2) Drunkenness, licentiousness and oppression prevailed (2:6-8; 4:1; 6:6).
   2. Uzziah reigned in Judah for 52 yrs.
      a. He subdued the restless Edomites and Philistines.
      b. He reduced the Ammonites to subjection.
      c. He raised a powerful army.
      d. He built fortified towers in Jerusalem and the wilderness.
      e. He built cisterns in the wilderness.
      f. He raised much cattle in the lowland and the plain.
      g. He encouraged agriculture by maintaining husbandmen.
h. He had a powerful army with all sorts of military hardware, 2 Chr 26:1-15.

3. "Assyria's power had waned under a succession of inept rulers who had all they could manage in defending themselves against the kingdom of Urartu. Until the accession of Tiglath-Pileser III (745), Syria-Palestine was free of danger from that quarter. The kingdom of Damascus had not yet fully recovered from her earlier defeats by Assyria and was locked in a crippling struggle with Hamath on the north. And at long last there was peace with Judah" (Mays, 2).

4. Thus both nations were at peace and enjoyed a period of prosperity.

a. Excavations at Tell el-Farah (ancient Tirzah) reveal that "While the city's houses in the tenth century had been of uniform size, in the eighth century by contrast there was a quarter of large expensive houses, and one of small huddled structures" (Mays, 2; cf. de Vaux, Ancient Israel).

b. This illustrates the contrast between rich and poor about which Amos is concerned (Mays, 3).

c. It also bore its all too common fruits--pride, luxury, and selfishness.

II. DATE.

A. Uzziah died 742. Jotham co-reigned beginning in 750 when his father became a leper. If 1:1 figured this co-regency as the end of Uzziah's reign, then Amos appeared before then (Mays, 1-2).

B. Phrase "two years before the earthquake" suggests a precise year. If the earthquake occurred 760 then Amos is to be dated 758 (Mays, 2).

1. Stratum VI at Hazor (dated ca. 760) shows archaeological evidence of a destruction caused by a great earthquake. Centuries later this quake is mentioned in Zech 14:5 (Wolff, 124).

2. Thus Amos can be precisely dated.

III. THE PROPHET AMOS.
A. What little we do know about Amos comes from the few incidental references in the book (7:1-9, 10-17; 8:1-3; 9:1-4).

1. Was sent from Tekoah, a small town in Judah.
   a. Not the first person from Judah to prophecy against Israel.
   b. The young prophet of 1 Kgs 13 had been sent earlier.

2. A herdsman, cattle breeder, and dresser of sycamore trees.
   a. Some commentators using these traits pictured Amos as uncouth (cf Huffmon).
   b. Other commentators run counter to this interpretation:
      (1) "...he is not to be thought a simple uncultured rustic. ‘Sheepbreeder’ probably means an owner in charge of other shepherds, a substantial and respected man of community” (Mays, 3; Wolff, 90-91).
      (2) “...Amos’ familiarity with the world-picture of the time...and his precise knowledge of the constitutions and political conditions in all the surrounding nations, presupposes that he had studied the wisdom of the time. This would have required and education which would certainly not have been available to a poor shepherd farmer” (Koch, 49).

B. The visions (7-9) reveal that “another person comes to light, an introspective one, with another side to his character” (Koch, 39).

...all his assurance falls away from Amos. “O Almighty Lord Yahweh, forgive!”, he interpolates at the beginning when scenes of horror are shown to him. Later, his awe of the One who sends the visions grows. He no longer dares to interrupt. In the editing process the dramatic outward events accompanying Amos’ appearance in Bethel have been coupled with the visionary accounts about dramatic “inward” events in chs. 7ff., so that as we read them, the two contrasting sides of the man Amos appear vividly before our eyes. (Koch, 39).

IV. THE MISSION OF AMOS.
A. Amos' mission lasted several months and at several places:

2. Samaria, to the women in the street, 4:1-3.
4. Market, 8:4-8.

B. Such a movement suggests that Amos' mission lasted several months.

V. THE MESSAGE OF AMOS.

A. Generally:

1. There are two basic messages which express a relationship:
   a. Yhwh is God of the world.
   b. Israel's relation to Yhwh was solely to illustrate her guilt.

2. "Israel" has 2 meanings:
   a. Northern kingdom (7:9,10).
   b. Old sacral league--"my people Israel" (7:8,15; 8:2; 3:1; 4:12; 9:7).
   c. This had the effect of producing a tension: "Amos addressed the subjects of Jeroboam in their identity as the people of Yahweh, making them stand pars pro toto, putting their national life alongside the history and traditions of the Israel of faith" (Mays, 7).

3. He never speaks directly of covenant — God is the God of nations (9:7) — the Exodus is not the basis of an exclusive bond (Mays, 7).
   a. The one text which does (3:2) indicates that such an election made Israel liable to Yhwh's punishment (Mays, 7).
   b. Thus covenant is used only on the threatening side (Mays, 7).

4. Amos's messages means the end of "Heilsgeschichte" (salvation history).
   a. Where these appear he re-interprets (5:25; 2:9; 5:18-20; 5:14)
b. Thus salvation history becomes judgment history.

c. The only reason these are mentioned, even in the new form is to confirm Israel's guilt (Wolff, 101-2).

d. God also deals similarly with other nations (Wolff, 101).

e. The result is, because of his encounter with God, "The irreducible force, which inspirationally overwhelmed Amos, enabled him to reshape received forms with a view toward his directly threatened audience" (Wolff, 100).

5. Israel's end is seen in the context of world wide political upheavals which are typical of the church (Wolff, 106).

a. Israel fails because it does not match God's concern for the weak—so does the church.

b. Israel lived in the world — so does the church.

c. Negative print of Pentecost — barriers between God's people and the nation are broken down.

B. **Specifically:**

1. Amos criticizes the nation **socially:** (Koch, 44ff.)

a. *2:6-16*, they were abusing slavery laws, which ultimately destroyed the lives of individuals, for it took away their right to exist on their own land, which was bound up in the promise to the patriarchs.

b. *4:1-3*, may refer to the Baal cult (cf. Hos 8:5ff.), in which these ladies were considered consorts, but who trample on the poor for their own material gain, cf. 5:11ff.

2. Amos criticizes the **Cult:** (Koch, 50ff.)


b. Remodels the command to seek the cult to seek God, 5:4ff
c. Condemns sacrificial feasts and acts rather than theology

3. Invokes the concepts of “Righteousness” and “Justice” (Koch, 56ff.)

a. Three passages:
   
   (1) 5:4-7: turned to poison and wormwood
   (2) 5:23-27: create justice and righteousness
   (3) 6:12-14: the campaign against r/j destroyed

b. Paired together they represent:
   
   (1) The link between social injustice and religious error which Amos criticized (Koch, 56)
   (2) “. . . the highest values of human behaviour and the human condition” (Koch, 57).

c. Characteristics of righteousness and judgment in Amos’ day (Koch, 58ff)

   (1) Used in context of cult, linking with social mores.
   
   (2) This link meant that the “judgment” and “righteousness” received in the feasts created the ability to act in faithfulness in the community.
   
   (3) “Spheres of power” existing in advance of human actions, cf 6:12f
   (4) Resemble a “fluid”; thus poured out healingly, 5:24
   (5) Not possessions, but “invisible auras” which accompanied individuals in everyday life
   
   (6) “The efficacious auras of mišpāṭ and šīl āqā not only surround the individual agent but also radiate out to the whole land, creating harmony between society and nature (Ps. 72.1-3; Joel 2.21-23). The reversal which turns mišpāṭ into the bitterness of wormwood destroys the environment, making fields unfruitful (Hos. 10.4)” (Koch, 59).
“Righteousness” and “Justice” are part of the salvation history, meaning that the “gift of the land” included these as well.

“Righteousness and justice” were associated with the monarchy from its inception, 1 Kgs 10:9; Jer 23:5.

“Righteousness and justice” were spheres of activity and not abstract concepts like their English equivalents, justice and righteousness.

Instead of these, the people are producing “transgressions,” right in the place where they worship, 4:4ff; 5:12

4. **The Day of the Lord** (Koch, 62ff)

a. People desired the day of Yhwh, 5:18ff

b. But the day was not a blessing, but punishment, cf. 4:12

c. God’s punishment operates on four levels:

1. God, 1:3ff.
2. The earth (1:1), sword (7:9,11), fire (7:4ff)
3. Humans, 8:2ff
4. Military, 2:3ff; 5:2

d. This is ruin which cannot be dealt with in terms of domestic politics, either through reform or revolution

5. **Neighbouring Nations’ Destruction** as and illustration, 1:2ff.

a. As God punishes them because of sin, so he will punish Israel

b. Amos is thinking of punishment in terms of a great military power who would sweep through the land–Assyria

6. **Concept of God** (Koch, 70ff.)

a. His use of messenger speech (some 15 times) pictures himself as the messenger of God, whose message shapes the future, whose announcement creates historical developments.
b. God is outside the world, but is present “whenever and wherever he wills it.”

c. God operates through active forces, which are illustrated through Amos’ use of the causitive (1:3, 5-8, 14), as well as rain, stars, locusts, etc.

d. God operates through people in their twin activities of “righteousness and justice.”

e. The relationship of God to Israel presupposes metahistory, which “. . . is not timelessness beyond history, but a theory about the cohesion of all reality as a single, all-embracing though complex process, in which Israel and Yahweh form the two essential poles” (Koch, 73).

f. The salvation history (the history of Israel’s past relationship with God) is extended into the future; God is concerned with the punishment of all nations’ sins.

VI. THE AUDIENCE OF AMOS.

A. "Righteousness" and "justice," discussed above, are terms which depict what God requires of his people (Mays, 10).

1. These two words show where Israel was most lacking.

2. Neither righteousness nor justice could be found because of the oppression of the poor and the luxury of the leaders (3:10; 5:11; Mays, 11).

B. Similarly, the religion approved. It prospered because they did. It corroborated the oppression of the poor (Mays, 12; Wolff, 104).

C. "Taken as a whole . . . the crimes of the individual Israelites against their fellows had risen to the level of the nation's rebellion against God" (Mays, 12).

VII. LITERARY FEATURES.

A. Wolff (90) argues for 2 major literary collections: "The words of Amos from Tekoa" (chs. 3-6) and recorded chs. 1-2 and 7-9.
B. These he divides into several different kinds of oracles.

1. **Commission--messenger speech:** Wolff (91) sees several kinds.
   a. Those using the messenger formula. 11 oracles contain the message formula "thus says Yhwh" (1:1, 6, 13; 2:1, 6; 3:11, 12; 5:3, 4, 16; 7:17). 5 of these have the concluding "Yhwh has said" (1:5, 8, 15; 2:3; 5:17).
   b. "Oracle of Yhwh" occurs in 2:16; 3:15; 4:3, 5; (6:14?; 9:7a. Wolff (92) doubts these were original to Amos or the oldest transmitters of his work.
   c. "Yhwh has sworn by": An intensification of the messenger formula (4:2; 8:7; 6:8).
   d. Proclamation formula": "Hear!" Commands attentiveness (4:1; 8:4).
   e. Wolff (92) argues: "With respect to the divine oracle formulas . . . it is no longer possible to distinguish with certainty between what derives from Amos and what belongs to the literary tradition."

2. **Free Witness Speech:** Yhwh is not the speaker, but the prophet.
   a. **Prophetic prologue** (3:1; 4:1; 5:1), "Hear this word!". The prophet commands attention. This form corresponds to wisdom teaching. It prepares the way for the message to follow. In 5:1-2 it anticipates the calamity announced in the messenger speech. In 3:9-10, 12b, 13a; 4:1; 6:13 "the prophet, as witness to the injustice, leads up to the announcement of punishment in the messenger speech (Wolff, 93).
   b. **Didactic questions:** A series of rhetorical questions which unfold so that the connection between cause and effect cannot be denied (3:3-6 [7], 8). Such a style is used in instruction and debate. In 5:20a and 6 2, 12 the questions encourage self-judgment (Wolff, 93).
   c. **Woe cries:** are counterparts to exclamations of happiness. Usually occur in series (6:1, 3-6; 5:18-20; 5:7, 10). Often followed by a
participle (Wolff, 94).

3. **Vision Reports:** 7:1-3, 4-6, 7-8; 8:1-2. Probably literary compositions from the outset. Are characterized by the prophetic "I". Israel is not the recipient of the message. The conversation is between God and Amos about Israel's fate (Wolff, 94).

4. **Peculiar language elements:**
   a. "**Graduated numerical saying**": 1:3, 6, 13; 2:1, 6. Used by clan for instruction. Amos uses to announce irrevocable judgment. Thus "Amos . . . exchanged the cloak of the clan teacher for that of the prophetic messenger of judgment" (Wolff, 95).
   b. **Participial forms:** Appear frequently and surprisingly. Occur in Wo-cries (5:18; 6:1, 3-6; 4:1; 2:7; 3:10b (Wolff, 96).
   c. **Antitheses (5:4-5):** "Seek me . . . do not seek Bethel"
   d. **Word plays** such as qayits-qets (summer fruit-end).
   e. Rhetorically quotes audience to establish their guilt (4:1; 6:13; 9:10; 5:14b (Wolff, 97).

**VIII. FORMATION OF THE BOOK.**

A. Wolff (107ff) argues for several redactions of the book. While he is the most convincing of "liberal" scholars, he is still far from conclusive in his results.

1. **"The Old School of Amos"--"A circle of disciples concerned with the transmission of the master's words"** (108). Supposedly inserted 7:10-17, a 3rd person report into the 1st person report of the visions. This old school "had at its disposal remembered deeds and sayings of the prophet" (108). Supposedly this school recorded the oracles of Amos, as well as inserting their own language which can be recognized (109). Also this school was supposedly active about 730 BC and shows more of an interest in the cult than did Amos (110).

2. **Bethel--exposition of a Josianic Age (111).** 3:14b connects with 2 Kgs 23:16 (Josiah's destruction of the Altar at Bethel) and argues for an insertion from Josianic Age. Also 9:5-6.
3. **Deuteronomistic Redaction**--Judah and Jerusalem condemned (2:4-5; 1:9-12 (112)).

4. **Post Exilic eschatology of salvation**--When Salvation prophecy became popular in Post Exilic age (:11-15 was added to adapt Amos to a new situation.

B. These refined redactions which Wolff supposes are not as clear cut as they at first seem.

1. When each is investigated, Wolff's proposals appear to be only one of many options at our disposal.

2. The others are often less radical and supply better answers to the formation of the book.

3. One of the most intriguing is that the "sermons of Amos."