AMOS STUDY
Notes for Week Four

There are three separate units in this Chapter.

1-17: The form used by Amos is a funeral lament but utilizes it for the death of a people, not an individual. Note that for him the destruction is total—a message that will evoke considerable reflection and response for centuries—even within the Book of Amos itself.

When you read the portions that are original Amos, who is "talking"? In some cases, it is Yahweh; and in others, it is Amos himself. What significance is there in the distinction?

In addition to the above distinction, the passage has several layers of interpretation. What impact do these interpretations, with vastly different points of view (e.g. can you imagine verse 13 coming from Amos?), have on the overall impact of the unit?

Note the subtle but devastating conclusion this lament—"I will pass <u>through the midst</u> of you."-- not "pass <u>by</u>", with its notion of sparing. What is happening is deeply "personal" as far a Yahweh is concerned.

Finally, verses 8 and 9 introduce a phenomenon that will appear occasionally throughout the book—a hymn-like liturgical insertion. What purpose might this have served later generations? What does it tell us of how the Book was used by the worshipping community?

18-20: Quintessential Amos: Turning a well-known shared (and comforting) idea on its head!

21-27: One scholar imagines that the context of this unit has Amos interrupting a cult official conducting a service. Pretty dramatic if true!

Consider the notion of Yahweh withdrawing in very graphic terms: first he stops smelling, then stops looking, then stops listening. But what a stirring conclusion to this withdrawal—what is left is a rather different sound that should be heard from the cult—the thundering waters of a cascading stream—justice! How do you take this conclusion? A call to radical redirection? Amos doesn't seem to see this as a possibility. What then is the "thrust" of this grand rhetorical effort?

Translation Notes

1. Verse 10: The gate is where elders/judges met and resolved disputes-thus the place where justice was to be administered, but… "The one who speaks the truth" misses the nuance of "speaking the truth fully", a rather different notion.

2. Verse 21: rather than "delight in" a better translation would be "savor" (to be consistent with the notion of Yahweh withdrawing his senses from Israel (see above)).

3. Verse 24: “roll down” is too tame: Amos is thinking of a cascading tumultuous river “cascading” down with a huge roar (again, to maintain the sensory imagery of the unit (see above)).