

## God's Roaring Voice (Amos 1 and 2)

*What follows are several discussion questions and, where appropriate suggested responses.*

1. After reviewing briefly the background to Amos' prophecy, scan this lengthy reading. Note the sense of repetition that runs through this passage. List the names of the nations who are singled out for condemnation. Try to ferret out what the sins of each nation are.
  - a. The background to Amos prophecy is the long and peaceful reign of Jeroboam II. The military security and economic affluence which characterized this age were taken by many Israelites as signs of the Lord's special favor toward them. Response from Heschel p. 29-30: Two things stand out in the prophet's condemnation: the absence of loyalty and the absence of pity. Tyre had violated a treaty, "the covenant of brotherhood," and Edom had "pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever." Syria, ruled from its capital in Damascus, had tortured and slaughtered the people of Gilead "with threshing sledges of iron." Amos recalled how Philistia, ruled from Gaza, its capital, had carried a whole people into captivity, selling them into slavery. The Ammonites had ripped up women with child in Gilead in order to annex a strip of territory. Moab burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime for no other reason than gratifying hate.
2. Amos is brilliant at taking treasured Jewish traditions and beliefs and showing that the Jews cannot take God's favor for granted. How is this list of the nations and their sins an example of this?
  - a. At the end of the oracles against the nations, Amos adds Judah and Israel as the last two "foreign" nations that will be obliterated by God's punishment<sup>6</sup>. The Israelite audience has been cheering the destruction of their enemies as the oracles sweep them along. At the climactic moment, when it's too late to stop the juggernaut of enthusiastic assent, Judah and Israel themselves are indicted. This is brilliant entrapment. Now the ambiguity of "I will not turn it back" becomes devastating.
3. Amos describes God's voice as a roaring one. The prophet, Elijah, experienced God's voice as a still small

voice. Why do you think God has to roar in this situation?

- a. It might be that the people are sufficiently comfortable under Jeroboam's prosperity that they feel their well-being is due to their faithfulness. Amos must cut through this complacency.
4. What do you think the punishment, usually described as some sort of fire, really will be?
5. One reliable way for Christians to interpret and adapt Old Testament lessons is to see God's relationship with Israel as equivalent to God's relationship with the Church. If a harsh prophetic minister like Amos arose in the context of a Christian Church, how might he (or she) speak to Christian believers?
6. Where do we take comfort in Christian traditions and beliefs that may ironically be the very places where God passes judgment on us and is urging us not to take God's favor for granted?
7. How do you think the people of Israel received Amos' ideas? To which of the "contemporary prophets" whose film or reading we are studying does Amos most closely compare?