

# THE PERIOD OF JEROBOAM II WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AMOS

Ivor Poobalan

## INTRODUCTION

The past two centuries of archaeology in the Ancient Near East has been fortuitous for biblical studies because of the wealth of information that it has provided pertaining directly to events and personages of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> In view of the numerous artifacts and texts related to the neo-Assyrian period, *and* due to Assyria's involvement in the West from the ninth century B.C. onward, we are now privy to some remarkable extra-biblical references to Israel in the period of the later Divided Monarchy that have significantly illuminated the narrative of the OT.<sup>2</sup> The present study focuses on the period of the Israelite king Jeroboam II who ruled during the first half of the eighth century BC.

### *Biblical Historiography*

The biblical record of the Divided Monarchy, when read in the light of the extra-biblical material that has transpired, provides a case in point of the shape of biblical historiography.

The authors of the OT texts were not mere journalists recording the succession of national events, but rather Yahwistic historians keen to discern and demonstrate Yahweh's sovereign control and perspective over the history of his covenant people.

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<sup>1</sup>W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger eds., *The Context of Scripture(COS)*, Vols. 1-3, (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Eric Meyers ed., *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Ancient Near East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ephraim Stern ed., *Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> For the archaeology of Samaria in the eighth century see, Ron Tappy, *The Archaeology of Israelite Samaria: Vol. II: The Eighth Century BCE*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001); Philip King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah – An Archaeological Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988); William G. Dever, *What Did The Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001).

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Consequently this theological agenda, though not influencing the factuality of the record, did significantly control the selection and arrangement of the material, as well as the editorial evaluation of the individuals and events presented.<sup>3</sup>

In view of their understanding that it was the kingdom of Judah that was the rightful heir of Yahweh's covenant with David, the biblical narrators lean towards showing their northern neighbor as the rogue nation in which each king's reign is evaluated negatively using the formula, 'He did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh'. This *spiritual* assessment could mistakenly be taken to imply the *political* insignificance of every monarch of the Northern Kingdom. Nowhere is the error of such a conclusion more obvious than when one compares the biblical portrayal of the Omrides with that of other ANE material. In First Kings the entire reign of King Omri is described in 14 verses (1 Kgs 16:15-28), whereas internationally he was of such significance that other nations would routinely speak of the land of Israel as the 'land of Omri' or 'the house of Omri' even long after his death.<sup>4</sup>

Again, whereas the major emphasis in Scripture regarding Ahab is his *spiritual* failure – due to his marriage to Jezebel; the introduction of Baal worship in Israel; and rejection of the prophets of Yahweh – nothing prepares us for the way he is spoken of in the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III. When the latter describes the famous Battle of Qarqar in his sixth year in 853 BC, Ahab is listed as a senior partner in an anti-Assyrian coalition of about 12 kings led by Hadadezer the king of Aram Damascus. Most noteworthy is the fact that Hadadezer's contribution of 1,200 chariots was surpassed by Ahab's 2,000. Even in his sixteenth and twentieth years, Shalmaneser III could only muster 2,002 and 2,001 chariots respectively!<sup>5</sup>

These illustrations have helped biblical scholars agree that there is no automatic correspondence between the biblical assessment of a monarch and his *political significance*.

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<sup>3</sup>For a definitive discussion, see V. P. Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, ed. Moises Silva, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

<sup>4</sup>Shalmaneser III, *mār humrî*; Adad-Nirari III, *māt humrî*; Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon, *māt bīt humrî*. See, T. C. Mitchell, "Israel and Judah Until the Revolt of Jehu (931-841 B.C.);" in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 3/1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 189.

<sup>5</sup>M. Elat, "The Campaigns of Shalmaneser III Against Aram and Israel" *Israel Exploration Journal* 25 (1975)35.

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### The Significance of the Period of Jeroboam II and the Objectives of the Present Study

The above criterion of biblical historiography clearly applies to the later reign of Jeroboam II in the first half of the eighth century BC. The biblical writer's reluctance to devote more than seven verses to his entire period (2 Kgs 14:23-29) is both disproportionate to his historical significance, and limiting to our reconstruction of the history of the period. However in this brief text there is enough said to tantalize the historian, and fuel his curiosity. A summary of the historical information provided by 2 Kgs 14:23-29:

1. Jeroboam II (the son of Joash) reigns forty one years in Samaria. This is the longest reign of a monarch in the Northern Kingdom on record.
2. He is credited with the political expansion of Israel's borders that is second to none in Israel's history.
3. The ministry of the prophet Jonah Ben Amittai (the main character of the biblical book named after him) is *positively* associated with King Jeroboam II.
4. Jeroboam's successes are attributed to divine intervention by Yahweh, who is said to have "saved" Israel "by the hand of Jeroboam".

Of the two prophetic books that are set during the reign of Jeroboam, Hosea and Amos, the latter more directly converses with the socio-cultural realities of the time. The oracles of Amos are pregnant with rich, historical allusions to the political, cultural and religious life setting of Israel, and provide a suitable foil for the text of 2 Kings.<sup>6</sup>

In the present study we intend to investigate the historical developments in Samaria in the period of Jeroboam II using both 2 Kgs 14:23-29, and Amos, as a point of departure. It is expected that the results of our historical research will in turn shed more light on these very texts, and thus contribute to enhancing and, even at times correcting, our present interpretation of the biblical data.

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<sup>6</sup>Michael D. Coogan ed., *The Oxford History of the Bible World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 301, "The literary portrayal of the [eighth century] period is enriched by three collections of material belonging to the genre of books named for prophets – Amos, Hosea and Isaiah of Jerusalem."

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### *Methodology*

1. We shall essentially limit ourselves to questions in three basic areas:
  - a) What were the *political developments* of Israel at that period of time, and how do these correspond to the political fortunes of Israel's immediate neighbors, and indeed the greater powers of the time?
  - b) What *economic conditions* prevailed in Israel during the period under review?
  - c) What was the *religious mood*, and how does it affect our reading of the setting?
2. Our research will depend largely on an attempt to listen carefully to a conversation between three complementary sources: the Bible; archaeological data (both texts and artifacts); and, analyses and studies by critical scholars.

### EXEGETICAL NOTES ON 2 KINGS 14:23-29

Jeroboam II, the fourth in the dynasty of Jehu, reigned in Samaria from 793 – 752 B.C. It is thought that in his first eleven years he was a co-regent with his father Joash. There are two issues reflected in 2 Kgs 14 that are worth pursuing further:

#### **1. The Extent of Jeroboam's Kingdom**

*“He re-established<sup>7</sup> the territory<sup>8</sup> of Israel from Lebo Hamath<sup>9</sup> as far as the Sea of the Arabah” (2 Kgs 14:25a)*

The original readers, familiar with well-worn geographical idioms would not have failed to grasp the significance of this description. In Num 34:8 and Josh 13:2-5 “Lebo Hamath” and “Sea of the Arabah” mark the

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<sup>7</sup>הָשִׁיב, Hiphil pf. 3 m.s. שׁוּב, “caused to turn”; NIV/NRSV, “restored”.

<sup>8</sup>גְּבוּלָהּ. The word could mean “boundary” or “territory”. The latter may fit the context better.

<sup>9</sup>If מִלְּבוֹאֵי חַמַּת is treated as an adjectival phrase rather than a proper name, the whole will be rendered, “from the entrance of Hamath”.

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northern and southern limits respectively of the ideal Promised Land.<sup>10</sup> 1 Chron 13:5 speaks of how David's suzerainty extended over such a territory, "from the River Shihor in Egypt to Lebo Hamath". In 1 Kgs 8:65 "all Israel" that celebrated the festival with Solomon gathered from "Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt". Jeroboam is said to have "re-established" (הִשְׁיִב) the territory. By implication then, his achievement is connected to the period of the United Monarchy, and hints that Jeroboam was politically as significant as David and Solomon. In fact other than for David and Solomon, Jeroboam is the only other king to have exercised suzerainty over such a vast territory that one might call a mini empire.<sup>11</sup>

The text does not inform us *when* he gained this position, nor does it clarify for *how long* these circumstances prevailed. It will be in the interest of our study to consider these questions below.

### 2. The Problem of Damascus and Hamath

The text claims that, "[Jeroboam] waged war and recovered Damascus and Hamath for Judah in Israel". This ("for Judah") is an unusual statement to be made of a king of the Northern Kingdom. In addition Damascus and Hamath were two of the greatest Aramean kingdoms of the time.<sup>12</sup> For these reasons many biblical scholars have expressed skepticism. Wayne Pitard sums up this view: "It has been considered doubtful that Israel could have gained ascendancy over Hamath at this time, nor are all convinced that Damascus became part of Israelite territory again, as it had been in the time of David and Solomon".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>For a modern illustration, "From Point Pedro to Dondra Head" is an idiom for the entire country of Sri Lanka.

<sup>11</sup>That Jeroboam did in fact achieve this is confirmed by the only other occurrence of the identical phrase in Amos 6:14. Amos was probably mocking a prevalent boast in Israel. So, Samuel Cohen, "The Political Background of the Words of Amos", *HUCA*, 36 (1965) 154. On the subject of Israel as a 'mini-empire' during the period of the United Monarchy, see K. A. Kitchen, "The Controlling Role of External Evidence in Assessing the Historical Status of the Israelite United Monarchy," in V. P. Long, G. J. Wenham and D. W. Baker (eds.), *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>12</sup>"Early in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium however, Hamath is found as the main central Syrian state, attested in the O.T., and in Akkadian, Aramaic and Hieroglyphic Hittite sources.", J. D. Hawkins, "Hamath", *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, 4 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975), 67.

<sup>13</sup>*Ancient Damascus*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 176.

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Before we react to the mention of, “for Judah”, “Damascus” and “Hamath” in the text it is necessary to note several salient points provided by the context. The text reads, “The other acts of Jeroboam, and all which he did, his might, that he waged war, and that he restored Damascus and Hamath to Judah in Israel” (14:28). The verse could be analyzed as follows:

1. It is a summary statement about Jeroboam’s *greatness*.
2. The emphasis in his career is on *his might* (גִּבּוֹרָתוֹ) and its *militaristic nature* (אֲשֶׁר-נִלְחָם).
3. The “restoration” (הַשְׁיֵב) of Damascus and Hamath to Judah is, from the writer’s point of view, the *best illustration* of Jeroboam’s *might*.<sup>14</sup>

Many modern scholars have been troubled by the phrase, “to Judah in Israel,” and have proposed, not emendations but entire rewritings of the text.<sup>15</sup> We might ask if the expression doesn’t make good sense as it stands in the context? The writer has likened Jeroboam to David and Solomon. In the period of the latter kings, Damascus and Hamath had been subservient to the rule they had administered *from Judah* (see 2 Sam 8:9-10; 2 Chr 8:3). Here Jeroboam is shown to be “restoring”(v.25) the kingdom of Israel to its former glory, and hence can be spoken of as having “restored Damascus and Hamath to Judah in Israel”. We also know that during this period there is no mention of hostilities between Israel and Judah, and it could imply that the two kingdoms cooperated in political and military activity in the region. Furthermore Judah was ruled, at the time, by another powerful monarch Uzziah, who, after the death of Jeroboam, took the mantle of leadership in the region.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> ליהודה בִּישְׂרָאֵל (MT)!, “to Judah in Israel” – The syriac makes the only early suggestion for emendation; לִישְׂרָאֵל instead of בִּישְׂרָאֵל.

<sup>15</sup> See the succinct summary of various views in, M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, 2 *Kings (Anchor Bible)*, (USA: Doubleday,) 161-2.

<sup>16</sup> M. Haran, “The Rise and Decline of the Empire of Jeroboam Ben Joash”, *Vetus Testamentum*, 17 (1967) argues, “What seems conceivable is that in Jeroboam’s reign . . . a covenantal relationship was already in full force between Judah and Israel”, 296. However, for a contrary view – that Azariah (Uzziah) attained independence by defeating Jeroboam in battle – see Nadav Na’aman, “Azariah and Jeroboam II of Israel”, *Vetus Testamentum*, XLIII, 2 (1993), 227-34.

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### A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE DYNASTY OF JEHU AS BACKGROUND TO THE KINGDOM JEROBOAM INHERITED

#### *The Rise and Reign of Jehu*

The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III is one of the most significant Assyrian artifacts yet discovered for biblical studies, because it portrays King Jehu of Israel kneeling in subservience to Shalmaneser in 841 B.C. The corresponding inscription states, "Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri; silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, pitchers of gold, lead, staves for the hand of the king, javelin". This incident could not have been longer than one year after Jehu's bloody uprising against the ruling families of Israel and Judah: "In quick order, Jehoram of Israel, Ahaziah of Judah, Queen Jezebel, and finally seventy sons of Ahab in Samaria were wiped out". In addition Jehu wiped out the entire establishment of Baal worship in Israel, turning the Baal temple in Israel into a latrine, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Elisha.<sup>17</sup>

Jehu reigned from 842-814 B.C. His accession to the throne may have protected Israel from facing the wrath of Shalmaneser III, but it certainly placed the kingdom at great variance with her immediate neighbors, and created considerable internal economic and political instability.<sup>18</sup>

1. Israel had evidently pulled out of the anti-Assyrian coalition that had been active from 853 B.C., after the accession of Hazael, who usurped the throne in Damascus.<sup>19</sup> This fact alone would have irked Hazael, and one can only guess how much his antipathy must have been fuelled by Jehu's willing submission to the Assyrian monarch.

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<sup>17</sup> Coogan ed., *Oxford History*, 301-2.

<sup>18</sup> See Elat, *Campaigns*, 31-34; T. C. Mitchell, "Israel and Judah From Jehu Until the Period of Assyrian Domination (841-c.750 B.C.)" in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. 3/1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 493.

<sup>19</sup> Assyrian sources: "Hadadezer (Adad Idri) passed away. Hazael, *son of a nobody*, took the throne." (Italics added). The expression, "Son of a nobody" was, according Lawson Younger, "Arameans and The Bible" (Unpublished Paper, 2003): "someone whose father was not a legal member of the major branch of the contemporary royal family, and expresses a value judgment with negative connotations i.e. "usurper" or "an upstart."" For more comprehensive comments on Hazael, see Nadav Naaman, "In Search of Reality Behind the Account of David's Wars with Israel's Neighbours," *Israel Exploration Journal* 52 (2002): 200-224; Abraham Malamat, "Arameans" in D. J. Wiseman (ed.) *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973): 134-155.

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2. The killing of Jezebel (a Sidonian princess) and the prophets of Baal would have seriously affected Israel's relations with Phoenicia.<sup>20</sup>
3. The slaying of the descendants of Ahab, and King Ahaziah, Ahab's son-in-law, would have brought the curtain down on what appears to have been a fairly strong cooperative relationship between Israel and Judah.
4. All the above would have had far-reaching economic consequences: "The economic impact of closing the flow of commerce over the Palestinian land bridge from Phoenicia to the Red Sea can only be guessed".<sup>21</sup>
5. Towards the end of Jehu's reign, Israel faced ignominious defeats at the hands of Hazael and lost all of the Trans-Jordan to Aram-Damascus (2 Kgs 10:32-33).

### *Jehoahaz – The Nadir of the Jehu Dynasty*

When Jehoahaz succeeded Jehu in 814 B.C. he inherited both a truncated kingdom, and a militarily impoverished one. First Hazael, and then Ben Hadad III, Hazael's son, continued their policy of aggression against Israel: "For the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel so that he gave them repeatedly into the hand of king Hazael of Aram, and then into the hand of Ben Hadad son of Hazael" (2 Kgs 13:3). Again, "So Jehoahaz was left with an army of no more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand footmen, for the king of Aram had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing" (2 Kgs 13:7). How dismal the situation must have been becomes clearer when we recall the strength of Ahab's military only fifty years earlier when he contributed 10,000 foot soldiers and 2,000 chariots to the Battle of Qarqar.

The story however has an interesting ending. Jehoahaz "entreated" Yahweh and was "heeded, for Yahweh saw the oppression of Israel". Then, "Yahweh gave Israel a savior (מֹשִׁיעַ) so that they escaped from the hand of the Arameans" (13:5). The identity of this 'savior' has been the subject of much speculation. Cogan and Tadmor count five proposals: Joash, Jeroboam II, Elisha, Zakkur of Hamath, and Adad Nirari III.<sup>22</sup> Another

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<sup>20</sup> On this see, H. Jacob Katzenstein, *The History of Tyre – From the Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.E. Until the Fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 538 B.C.E.*, (Jerusalem: Schocken Institute for Jewish Research, 1973), esp. 197.

<sup>21</sup> Coogan, *Oxford History*, 302.

<sup>22</sup> *2 Kings*, 142-144.

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candidate that has been strongly proposed is Shamshi-ilu, the powerful Assyrian *turtanu* based in Bit Adini.<sup>23</sup> Our discussion below on the relative fortunes of Assyria and Aram may strengthen the case that the ‘savior’ was either Shamshi-ilu or Adad-Nirari III, *or both!*

### *Joash – The Beginning of Israel’s Imperial Rise*

With the accession of Joash to the throne in 798 B.C. Samaria’s fortunes began to climb. Adad-Nirari III campaigned against Ben Hadad III of Damascus in 796 B.C. This is recorded in three of Adad-Nirari III’s inscriptions referring to Ben Hadad as *Mari*:

“I marched to the land of Damascus. I confined Mari, the king of Damascus in the city of Damascus, his royal city. The fearful splendor of Assur, my (“his”) lord, overwhelmed him and he submitted to me. He became my vassal...”<sup>24</sup>

The inscription of Zakkur of Hamath also mentions Ben Hadad, and how a powerful alliance led by him was defeated:

I am Zakkur, king of Hamath and Luash . . . Bar-Hadad, son of Hazael, king of Aram, united against me seventeen kings . . . all these kings laid siege to Hazrach . . . Baalshamayn said to me, “Do not be afraid! . . . I will save you from all [these kings who] have besieged you”.<sup>25</sup>

It is clear from the above that Ben Hadad was not able to maintain the grip his father had enjoyed over many of Aram’s neighbors. This provides a plausible context for the three victories (prophesied by Elisha) of Joash against Ben Hadad III in Aphek (see 2 Kgs 13:14-25), which resulted in the recapture of the Cis-Jordan towns lost during the period of Jehoahaz, and began the political reversal of Samaria. King Amaziah of Judah had also provoked Joash into battle, and Joash’s victory and subjugation of Judah (2 Kgs 14:1-16) paved the way for Samaria’s expansion.

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<sup>23</sup> So Abraham Malamat, “Amos 1:5 in the Light of the Til Barsip Inscriptions”, *BASOR*, 129 (1953), 25-6; Yutaka Ikeda, “Looking from Til Barsip on the Euphrates: Assyria and the West in Ninth and Eighth Centuries B. C.” in Kazuo Watanabe ed., *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East*, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1996) 284.

<sup>24</sup> “Calah Orthostat Slab”, Hallo and Younger, *COS, II*, 276.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

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If, as has been proposed, Jeroboam had a period of eleven years co-regency with his father Joash, then he too would have been involved in these military developments. Consequently it is logical to assume that his greatest achievements occurred at the beginning and up to the middle of his sole reign.<sup>26</sup>

### *Summary*

In summary a threefold pattern emerges within the Jehu dynasty up to the reign of Jeroboam:

1. Each king has an experience of divine intervention and help from Yahweh, often with the associated ministry of a prophet.
2. Although they failed to forsake ‘the sin of Jeroboam, son of Nabat, which he caused Israel to commit’, the dynasty appears to have maintained a strong tradition against Baalism. In fact the oracles of Amos never once mentions Baal; what had been a pervasive problem during the Omrides, and would later plague the kingdom of Judah.
3. All the kings up to Jeroboam appear to have conscientiously maintained the alliance Jehu had first entered into with Assyria in 841 B.C.

### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR THE ORACLES OF AMOS AGAINST THE NATIONS (AMOS 1:2 – 2:5)

At the beginning of the book of Amos the prophet inveighs against seven nations before he fixes his attention against Israel. These, except for Judah, are faulted for social injustices perpetrated against God’s covenant people. They all shared the border with the inhabitants of the Promised Land of Canaan.

The judgments of Amos are pungent but terse, because the prophet shared much common knowledge with his audience in Israel. This means that the exegete is compelled to depend on inter-textual and extra-biblical information to help reconstruct the historical contexts assumed for these oracles.

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<sup>26</sup> So Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 164; Cohen, *Political*, 153-60. But see Haran, “The Rise”, 279 for a proposal that Jeroboam expanded the kingdom only after 755 A. D.

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It is generally agreed that Amos, a native of Tekoa (eleven miles from Jerusalem)<sup>27</sup> preached in the Northern Kingdom, in the locality of the cult-center of Bethel (and possibly in Samaria) in the period between 765 – 755 B.C. In Amos 1:2-2:3 he catalogs the atrocities of Israel's and Judah's immediate neighbors. *When did these atrocities take place?* Samuel Cohen argues that the specific language used by Amos may offer a clue to the temporal nuance intended.

The usual English translation of these reasons states them in the past tense. This is erroneous. The Hebrew language has quite another way of stating a reason when it is definitely of a past nature: the preposition *lu* and the perfect tense of the verb. But in these passages Amos, with a fine literary sense, has chosen a form that can be either past or present: the preposition *lu* and the infinitive, equivalent to our gerund. Hence the correct translation of each of the eight reasons is not “because they did” so-and-so but, “because of their doing” so-and-so.<sup>28</sup>

### *Aram Damascus*

*“Threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron”*

Gilead was one of the Trans-Jordan towns closest to Israel's border with Aram. The dating of the incident that Amos has referred to has puzzled scholars. We know that Israel and Aram Damascus had a tumultuous relationship for most of their existence as independent nations. Certainly from the time of Hazael to the campaigns of Tiglath Pileser III the enmity was very intense. The oracle of Amos against Damascus could be understood in two ways:

1. *As referring to the oppression experienced under Hazael and Ben Hadad III* – This proposal has many attractions:
  - a) Amos refers to Damascus as the, “house of Hazael” and the, “strongholds of Ben Hadad”. However the practice of referring to a dynasty in terms of its eponymous ancestor was a common practice. Israel was called “Bit Humri” up to one hundred and fifty

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<sup>27</sup> For a thorough historical study of the site see, Martin Heickson, “Tekoa: Historical and Cultural Profile” *JETS* 13 (1970) 81-89.

<sup>28</sup> *Political*, 154-5; It must however be noted that such an explanation of Hebrew grammar is not shared by most commentators.

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- years after the death of Omri. The Assyrians called Damascus “Bit Hazael” even during the time of Tiglath Pileser III.
- b) The specific use of “threshed” (דָּרַשׁ) connects most interestingly with 2 Kgs 13:7 which uses the same term about “king of Aram”, וַיִּשְׁמַם כְּעֶפְרַיִם לְרֹשׁ.
  - c) Extreme forms of cruelty (such as the recent holocaust) can remain fresh in the national consciousness for generations (see 2 Kgs 8:11-12).

*The main weakness in the argument is that this interpretation sees Amos predicting judgment on a nation for a crime committed many decades earlier.*

2. *As referring to oppression Israel was experiencing at the time of Amos’ oracles* – This interesting proposal has been forcefully advanced by Samuel Cohen based on the following reasons:
  - a) 2 Kgs 10:32-33 expressly states that Hazael overran much of the country. If so, why would Amos only mention Gilead?
  - b) Amos, “refers again and again to contemporary events” and “this threshing therefore would seem to refer to a new, recent assault of Syria upon the territories won back by Jeroboam II”.
  - c) Amos 4:10 suggests a situation of *contemporary* warfare. It is mentioned as the climax to a series of misfortunes that have befallen the people of Israel, “The plain inference from these words is that the country was at war”.<sup>29</sup>
  - d) Cohen takes the boasts about Lo-Debar and Karnaim (Trans-Jordan towns, cf. Amos 6:13) to refer to victories Israel had enjoyed in the current war: “Thus although Jeroboam II had restored the boundary of Israel as it had been of old, that line had been breached and the armies of Syria were pressing forward into the territory of Israel”.<sup>30</sup>
  - e) A final argument in support of the suggestion that the oracle against Damascus refers to current concerns is the passage about those who passionately, “desire the Day of Yahweh” (Amos 5:18a). In the OT this eschatological expectation was commonly heightened when the nation experienced a period of foreign

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<sup>29</sup> Cohen, *Political*, 156.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

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oppression; “the essential feature was that Yahweh in person would intervene to save his people from their enemies”.<sup>31</sup>

### *Philistia*

*“Carried into exile entire communities to hand them over to Edom”*

The Philistines were Israel’s traditional enemies, and their condemnation here is not surprising. A few points may be noted from the text:

1. Of the Pentapolis each city-state is mentioned as liable for judgment except for Gath. This probably reflects the situation that prevailed from the period of Hazael, who is said to have captured the city (see 2 Kgs 12:17). Haran thinks that it thereafter became a province of Ashdod.<sup>32</sup> Later, Uzziah, the king of Judah destroys Gath (2 Chr 26:6; also see Amos 6:2).
2. The crime Philistia is charged with (see above) is the exact crime attributed to Tyre (1:9). Since these two oracles are juxtaposed, some scholars assume some sort of scribal error. However Haran argues that the similarity arises not from a “textual error” or later addition”, but because these two nations (being neighbors controlling the Mediterranean seaboard) in fact shared trading interests. “No territorial claims or conflicts of interest existed between the two . . . Rather, it is simply a formal expression of an actual partnership between the two powers, which also cooperated in a particular sinful act”.<sup>33</sup>
3. “Traffic in human chattel and slavery were integral features of the life and culture of the ANE from Babylon to Thebes”.<sup>34</sup> Slaves were obtained by two means: *ranks of the native population* as a “by-product of economic deprivation”; or, *foreign slaves*, “either captives of war or imported slaves from neighboring countries”.<sup>35</sup> Gaza and Tyre were

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>32</sup> “The Rise”, 269 n.1. Also see, King, *Amos*, 51-54; Amos 6:2.

<sup>33</sup> M. Haran, “Observations On the Historical Background of Amos 1:2-2:6”, *Israel Exploration Journal*, 18/4, (1968), 202-3.

<sup>34</sup> K. N. Schoville, “A Note on the Oracles of Amos Against Gaza, Tyre and Edom”, *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, XXVI, (1974), 57.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

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guilty of the latter. We agree with Schoville that what Amos describes is “more than just an isolated border raid” since these incidents were “so dastardly that they stand out in the mind of the prophet”. However, Schoville’s argument that these historical events antedate Amos by about a century, are not convincing.<sup>36</sup> Israel’s remarkable recovery during the latter reign of Joash, and expansion to the level of a mini empire during the early to middle years of the reign of Jeroboam II, would have long taken away the sting of political misfortunes suffered in the ninth century. In addition it appears that the rhetorical thrust of Amos’ oracles are intended to elicit jubilant affirmations from his auditors in Israel, as promises of Yahweh’s vengeance against Israel’s enemies *who were currently hostile*. It is this rapport about *present* concerns from without Israel that acts as the foil for Amos’ scathing attack on Samaria (2:6ff.) for *present* crimes from within Israel.

### Tyre

*“Delivered entire communities to Edom and did not remember the covenant of kinship”*

In addition to forcing Israelites into slavery, Tyre is charged with not remembering the “covenant of kinship”. What exactly does this refer to, and what does the phrase “did not remember” mean in the context?

The peculiar phrase **בְּרִית אֶחָיִים**, “covenant of brothers” is a direct allusion to the covenant first established between David and King Hiram of Tyre (2 Sam 5:11; cf. 1 Kgs 5:1, 12). This remarkable relationship, mutually of great benefit to both countries, continued for a considerable length of time:

The ties between Israel and Tyre, which had already begun in the days of David, reached their peak during the reign of Solomon . . . were renewed by the dynasty of Omri, and endured so long that Amos was able to call this the covenant of brothers. This could mean that the relations between Tyre and Israel remained firm, in

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<sup>36</sup> See Haran, “Observations”, 210, “We doubt either one of these theories, that which postdates the section to Exilic times or that which antedates it to some hundred years before Amos, is based upon an accurate understanding of the historical circumstances at the beginning of Jeroboam’s reign, or is entangled in unnecessary difficulties.”

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some way or the other, for more than 200 years, only to be “broken” when an opportunity presented itself for “big business”.<sup>37</sup>

But, the purge of Jehu, as we saw, was an indirect blow to Israel-Tyre relations. He had killed Jezebel the Sidonian princess, and massacred the prophets of the Tyrian Baal, “some of whom were surely Tyrian citizens”.<sup>38</sup> This souring of relations would have inclined Tyre to exploit Israel’s moment of weakness for commercial gain. Amos’ point then is that they chose, selfishly, only to *remember* the act of Jehu, and *not remember* the far more enduring בְּרִייתֵינוּ אֶת־הַיָּם the two countries had enjoyed.

### *Edom*<sup>39</sup>

*“Pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity; maintained his anger perpetually and kept his wrath forever”*

Located south of Judah, Edom was not a border neighbor with Israel. As the descendents of Esau, the Edomites were viewed as “brothers” by the Israelites. They had been captured and subjugated by David (2 Sam 8:13-14) and this state of affairs continued for 150 years, although there might have been sporadic violations by Edom (especially by Hadad, during the time of Solomon, 1 Kgs 11: 14-22). Edom’s independence came during the reign of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat (853-842). After this there is no evidence that Edom ever returned to be a vassal to Judah. In Adad Nirari III’s campaign of 802 B.C. Edom is said to have paid tribute.<sup>40</sup> Although early in the eighth century Amaziah defeated Judah and annexed Sela, and later his son Uzziah built Elath, this does not mean that all Edom was subjugated as a province of Judah. What was Edom’s crime? The text speaks of anger; unmitigated, and ferocious. Their crime was acts of vengeance and retaliation beyond the limits of acceptable behavior in war, and more seriously, done against their own kin.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Katzenstein, *History of Tyre*, 196.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>39</sup> For a comprehensive survey integrating archaeological data (particularly Horvat Qitmit) with the Biblical record up to 1988 see, Itzhaq Beit Arie, “New Light on the Edomites”, *BAR*, (March/April 1988), 29-41.

<sup>40</sup> Haran, “Observations”, 207-8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 211, “At the same time, hatred and retained vengeance on the part of Edom toward Judah could continue to seethe long after Jehoram, precisely once Edom had attained

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### *Excursus: Whom was Amos addressing?*

By virtue of the fact that Amos preached against Philistia, Edom and Moab – border neighbors of Judah not Israel – there is support for the proposal that although Amos operated in the north, he was in fact addressing the covenant people of God as a whole. We have already pointed out that Judah appears to be in a relationship of cooperation with Israel, with the latter as the obvious senior partner. Amos 6:1 provides the best illustration of Amos' own perception of who his audience was. In the words of McCullough:

Over against the prevailing opinion, our contention is that, while Amos undoubtedly preached at Bethel (7:13) and possibly at Samaria (4:1), most of his words were in fact directed to the whole of Israel, North and South, and it is a fair presumption that part of his ministry was spent in Judah.<sup>42</sup>

### *Ammon*

*“They ripped open pregnant women in Gilead in order to enlarge their territory”*

*For most of its history, Ammon was probably little more than a city-state – that is, the capital ruled a small territory on the central Trans-Jordan plateau with satellite and villages in a relatively small hinterland.<sup>43</sup>*

This description fits neatly with the crime attributed to Ammon (1:13). Their limited land area would have made the need for more territory quite acute. However, the fact that Ammon was no bigger than a city-state meant that she could not independently engage in a border war with the might of Israel. How then was Ammon able to carry out the aggression Amos mentions?

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independence.”

<sup>42</sup> W. S. McCullough, “Some Suggestions About Amos”, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 72 (1953), 249.

<sup>43</sup> Larry Herr, “Ammon”, in Meyers ed., *Oxford Encyclopaedia*, vol. 1, 104.

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In Amos 1 we read of Gilead also in connection to Damascus. In our discussion we favored the argument that the “threshing” of Gilead referred to a *recent* assault by the Arameans. Opportunism is not uncommon in the aftermath of any social catastrophe, and certainly during war. We can surmise therefore that although the Ammonites were not the primary aggressors against Gilead, they capitalized on a situation when their neighbor was most vulnerable. So, whereas Damascus may have decimated the male population in Gilead, the Ammonites acted to ensure that no future generation would exist to claim a right to the territory, by “ripping open the pregnant women”.<sup>44</sup>

### *Moab*

*“He burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom”*

Moab’s atrocity was not done directly against Israel or Judah but, because Edom shared a filial relationship with the Judahites and Israelites unlike any of the other neighbors, Amos cites the crime. In any case this reprehensible act seems to have been fresh in the minds of Amos’ listeners.

The memory of Moab’s hostility toward Israel is well preserved in the Bible, especially in the narrative of 2 Kgs 3:4-24 concerning Israel’s war with Mesha, king of Moab. In this context the discovery of the Mesha stele, dated to about 840 B.C., is of inestimable worth. The texts correspond at several points although they are not describing the same event. Equivalence may be seen in: the name of Mesha; that Moab is a vassal of Israel; that the historical context is the period of the Omrides, and that Moab rebelled against Israel. The following is an excerpt from Mesha’s stele:

“Omri was king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab for many days, because Kemos was angry with the land. And his son followed him, and he also said, “I will oppress Moab”. In my days he said [

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<sup>44</sup> This practice finds mention also in 2 Kings 8:11-12, 15:16; Hosea 14:1. Despite the transparency of Assyrian rulers in parading their atrocities against their enemies, the “ripping open of pregnant women” is not mentioned in a single historical account. We only have this preserved in a heroic poem describing Tiglath Pileser I (1114-1076). See, M. Cogan, ““Ripping Open Pregnant Women” in Light of an Assyrian Analogue”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 103.4 (1983), 755-57.

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. .] But I saw my desire over him and his house, and Israel has utterly perished forever”.<sup>45</sup>

Amos' charges become more plausible when we note that in 2 Kgs 3 Edom too is involved in war against Moab. The actions of Moab have to do with vengeance. Although there is too little data to suggest a more specific time frame, the atrocity mentioned in Amos 2:1 matches the desperate lengths to which king Mesha went in order to defeat Israel (see 2 Kgs 3:27).

### THE SHADOW AND OVERSHADOWING OF ASSYRIA

#### *Amos' Threats of (Assyrian?) Invasion and Exile*

*“I am raising up against you a nation, O house of Israel, says Yahweh of hosts, and they shall oppress you from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi Arabah” (Amos 6:14)*

*“Therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus says Yahweh” (Amos 5:27)*

These threats, when considered together suggest that Israel was to expect an invasion, not by Syria but by a kingdom further north. Later history would show that this unnamed aggressor would be none other than Assyria following its resurgence under Tiglath Pileser III (745-727 B.C.). However at the time Amos preached, such a prediction would have seemed no more than mere mischief (see Amos 7:10-13) for at least three reasons:

1. Between 782, the death of Adad-Nirari III, and 745, the accession of Tiglath Pileser III, Assyria reached one of its lowest points politically (see below). Ravaged by Urartu in the north<sup>46</sup> and Babylonia in the south, and torn by a series of internal dissensions, the once mighty empire reached its nadir for the neo-Assyrian period:

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<sup>45</sup> Translation K. Lawson Younger, “History of Israel (Course Notes)”, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, January-May, 2004, 72.

<sup>46</sup>A. K. Grayson, “Assyria: Ashur-Dan II to Ashur-Nirari V (934-745 B.C.)”, in *Cambridge Ancient History, Vol.3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 276: “Assyria’s chief foe was Urartu, a relative new comer on the scene and a kingdom which was now entering its most successful and ambitious period.” On this also see, R. D. Barnett, “Urartu”, in *Cambridge Ancient History, 3/1*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) esp. 314-371.

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In sum, this was one of the dimmer periods in Assyria's history. The empire's frontiers rapidly dwindled and its rulers were as concerned about boundary agreements and disputes as they were about military expeditions.<sup>47</sup>

2. In any case, from the time of Jehu, Israel had conscientiously cultivated the favor of Assyria. Scholars suggest that Jehu had gone beyond most vassals of Assyria in willingly handing over the kingdom of Israel for the protection of Shalmaneser III, as suggested by the Assyrian inscription listing his tribute, "the staff of the king's hand".<sup>48</sup> None of the scions of the dynasty were known to have rebelled against Assyria, and the general impression is that the Assyrians did look out for the well being of Israel.
3. Notwithstanding the points above, Amos' words would have appeared incongruous to a society that for nearly a hundred years had enjoyed the ministry of significant prophets such as Elijah, Elisha and Jonah, who in turn had seemingly approved their monarchs (see 1 Kings 19:16; 2 Kings 9:1-10, 13:14-19, 14:25); a society that had repeatedly experienced acts of divine intervention that *proved* Yahweh's favorable disposition towards the nation (see 2 Kgs 13:5, 23, 14:26-27).

Cohen asserts that when Jehu in 842 [*sic*] put Israel under the protection of Assyria he "definitely linked the fortunes of Israel to those of Assyria".<sup>49</sup> Philip King concurs with this basic premise, although his implied understanding of Assyrian-Israelite relations may not be sufficiently comprehensive:

The fortunes of Judah and Israel depended almost exclusively on their neighbors, especially Syria (Aram) and Assyria. When the neighbors were weak, Israel and Judah prospered. In the first half of the eighth century B.C.E. owing to Syria's decline of power and Assyria's turmoil at home, Judah and Israel prospered.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Grayson, "Assyria", 279.

<sup>48</sup> See Elat, "Campaigns", 31-34.

<sup>49</sup> "Political", 157.

<sup>50</sup> *Amos*, 30.

## **The Period of Jeroboam II with Special Reference to Amos**

These years may be divided into three contrasting periods:

### ***842 –806 B.C.: Assyria Occupied in the East***

The latter end of Shalmaneser III's illustrious reign (858 – 824 B.C.) was marked by weak governance, most clearly expressed by the outbreak of an insurrection in 827 B.C. that outlasted Shalmaneser and occupied his successor Shamshi Adad V for quite a number of years. This was on top of the fact that after 839 B.C. Assyria was engaged exclusively in the East and was in no position to put any pressure on Damascus. Consequently Israel endured some thirty years of humiliation under Hazael as discussed above.

### ***806 – 782 B.C.: The Period of Adad-Nirari III***

Adad-Nirari campaigned several times in the West. As a result Israel appears to have enjoyed Assyrian protection once again, while Damascus was severely affected.

From the period of Adad-Nirari III to at least 752 B.C. a powerful Assyrian official, Shamshi-ilu governed the western end of the empire where he had the virtual authority of a king.<sup>51</sup> The Antakya Stela is interesting because it records, "The boundary which Adad-Nirari, king of Assyria, and Samsi-ilu, the commander –in-chief (*Turtanu*), established between Zakkur the Hamathite and Atarsumki . . ."<sup>52</sup> In this light, since scholars have debated whether it was Adad-Nirari or Shamshi-ilu that was the 'savior' of 2 Kgs 13:5, *we wonder why it could not have been both since there is clear evidence that some actions were credited to them together*. In any case this period corresponds with Israel's reversals, and coincides with the early years of the reign of Jeroboam II.

### ***782 – 745 B.C.: The 'Dark' Period***

These were by far the most disastrous thirty-seven years of the Neo-Assyrian Period.<sup>53</sup> We lack inscriptional evidence, but the Eponym

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<sup>51</sup> See Ikeda, "Looking on", 281.

<sup>52</sup> Hallo and Younger, *COS*, Vol.2, 272.

<sup>53</sup> "It is a fact that the reign of Adad Nirari III was followed by a period of drastic decline in Assyrian might, a decline which persisted for almost half a century", Grayson,

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Chronicle provides us information on what the Assyrian monarchs focussed on annually. These entries show that for an empire that was sustained by annual campaigns for pillage and plunder, Assyria was doing increasingly poorly.

During the reign of Shalmaneser IV (782 –773) the Eponym Chronicle records six campaigns against Urartu (781-778, 776, 774). These were led by Shamshi-ilu. Limited success was also had in the West. The last significant campaign against Damascus was in 773 B.C. when Shamshi-ilu received tribute from Hadianu. On this basis we could expect Damascus to be quiescent for a short period after 773.

However the periods of Ashur-Dan III (772-755) and Ashur-Nirari V (754-745) are better described by the frequency of “in the land” entries in the Chronicle; *four* for the former, and *five* for the latter. This clearly indicates a defensive posture, and a preoccupation with domestic problems.<sup>54</sup>

### LIFE IN SAMARIA UNDER JEROBOAM II

It is the Book of Amos that provides us the best insight into the social conditions, cultural features, and religious life in Israel in the time of Jeroboam II. A closer reading of Amos evinces *two* antithetic characteristics of the time; on the one hand, economic prosperity and heightened religiosity, and on the other, social injustice and oppression.

#### *Economic Prosperity and Heightened Religiosity*

A number of indicators in the book show that the prophet is confronting a wealthy and powerful elite in Samaria. The most noteworthy indicators are luxurious dwellings (3:15, 5:11); extravagant lifestyles - “ivory”, “fine oils”, “wine”; the practice of the *jzrm*, *marzēah* (6:4-6); ease and complacency (6:1, 8:10).

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“Assyria”, 273.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 276-278.

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Luxurious Dwellings (Amos 3:15, 5:11)

Architecture is a useful indicator of the economic conditions that prevailed in ancient times. In Samaria the period of the Omrides, and the later period of Jeroboam II show evidence of impressive architecture. The main constructions; the palace, inner wall, gates and casemate wall were completed by Omri and Ahab.<sup>55</sup> In the eighth century the inflow of wealth and the long period of relative independence<sup>56</sup> enabled the nobility to continue the tradition of building:

1. Jeroboam II repaired the casemate wall, altered existing buildings in the Royal Quarter, and added new constructions like the royal storehouse.<sup>57</sup>
2. Amos gives us no less than *five* descriptions of Israelite dwellings: the winter house, summer house, ivory houses, great houses (3:15); houses of hewn stone (5:11). As for “the winter house as well as the summer house” we have interesting parallels elsewhere. One comes from the inscription of king Barrakab of Samal: “My fathers the kings of Samal had no good house. They had the house of Kilamu [*sic*], which was their winter house and also their summer house. But I have built this house.”<sup>58</sup> Shalom Paul argues, “In sum, the wealthy residents of Samaria followed the example of royalty and built for themselves separate pleasure estates in accordance with the climatic conditions of the country”.<sup>59</sup>
3. Archaeologists have been repeatedly impressed by the ‘outstanding quality’, ‘outstanding precision’ and ‘outstanding masonry’ of Israelite buildings.<sup>60</sup> Such constructions would have been primarily done in and around Samaria,<sup>61</sup> and the various cult-centers patronized by the king and the nobility, i.e. Bethel, Beer Sheba, and Gilgal. The

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<sup>55</sup> “Together with Ahab, his son and successor, Omri subsequently transformed this one-time family estate of Shemer into a cosmopolitan royal city complete with impressive fortification walls, a palace, large courtyards with rectangular pools, public buildings and storerooms”, Ron Tappy, “Samaria”, in Meyers ed., *Oxford Encyclopaedia, Vol.4*, 465.

<sup>56</sup> “Though occasional lenses of blackish or sooty soil appear, the relatively meager quantities of this type of matrix do not point to destruction levels associated with large scale military activity against the city”, Tappy, R. *The Archaeology of Israelite Samaria: (Volume II: The Eighth Century BCE)*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 114.

<sup>57</sup> N. Avigad, “Samaria”, in Stern ed., *Encyclopaedia*, 1041.

<sup>58</sup> King, *Amos*, 61.

<sup>59</sup> Shalom Paul, “Amos III 15 Winter and Summer Mansions”, *VT* 28 (1978), 359.

<sup>60</sup> Avigad, “Samaria”, 1041.

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mention of ivory-inlaid houses (3:15) further confirms that the elite enjoyed a remarkable level of luxury.

Extravagant Lifestyles – “Ivory”, “Fine Oils” and “Wine”

These were the OT equivalent of expensive cars, exotic vacations and fine dining! Oil and wine are used elsewhere in the Bible to symbolize great prosperity, and they are here associated with the elite in Samaria.<sup>62</sup>

Lawrence Stager discusses the production of “virgin oil” in ancient Samaria, and distinguishes it from the “inferior oil of the second separation”. Virgin oil was the finest that could be purchased, and commanded the highest price. In Amos 6:6 the mynmv tyvr “the finest oils”, Stager thinks was, “used by the fine ladies of Samaria to anoint themselves while eating and drinking at Semitic symposia”.<sup>63</sup>

We find the double mention of ivory in Amos (3:15, 6:4) most interesting because it hints at the abundance of wealth they enjoyed. Such times had been seen in Israel previously during the days of Solomon (see 1Kgs 10:18,22) and Ahab (1 Kgs 22:39). Amos’ hints become clearer to the modern reader on account of the recent archaeology of Samaria.<sup>64</sup> Between 1931-35 the Harvard Expedition to Samaria found the first collection of Samarian ivories. Today we have over 500 fragments of ivory inlays, many of which may be dated to the period of Jeroboam II. A number show exquisite Phoenician style carvings.

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<sup>61</sup> “By the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE Samaria lay in the center of a tight constellation of towns and family-owned estates . . . [which] served the capital city at Samaria, and participated in inter-regional trade . . . not all represented mere caravan stops; rather many of these villages bolstered their own local economies by producing and trading commodities such as wine and oil”, Tappy, *Archaeology*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> “Apart from religious and moral considerations, the ivories imported from Phoenicia bearing Egyptianizing motifs, attest to the cosmopolitan culture of eighth century Israel. No longer were the people of Samaria living in isolation; they had become more open to the culture of their neighbors . . .”, King, *Amos*, 149.

<sup>63</sup> Lawrence Stager, “The Finest Oil in Samaria”, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, XXVIII/1 (1983), 241-45.

<sup>64</sup> For a most recent study providing detailed archaeological data see, Tappy, *The Archaeology of Israelite Samaria*.

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The Practice of the *jzrm*, *marzēah* (Amos 6:7)

The term is used in Amos 6:7, and only once more in the OT; Jer 16:5, “For thus says Yahweh, “Do not enter **בְּיָהוּבָה** and do not go to lament”. We are now fortunate to have far more information on the *marzēah* from Elephantine, Piraeus, Nabatea, Palmyra and Ugarit.<sup>65</sup> They show that this was a widespread practice. Amos 6:4-6 is now regarded a clearly alluding to the *marzēah* in ancient Israel. Some salient features are listed below:

1. It was a religious, social phenomenon that had considerable importance.
2. It involved the wealthier class of society: “Both [*sic*] the Old Testament, the Nabatean and the Ugaritic evidence demonstrates beyond doubt that the *marzēah* members belonged to the upper classes of society.”
3. The main feature of the *marzēah* was the banquet.
4. The feasting could last for several days, and was accompanied by excessive drinking.
5. The occasion could be joyful or sorrowful (cf. The context of Amos 6:4-7)  
Ease and Complacency

In 6:1 Amos speaks of those who are “at ease in Zion” and those who “feel secure in Samaria”. This is a clear indication of the sense of security and complacency that marked the nobility. Since we have argued that at the time Israel was already experiencing many threats and even some losses in war, how can this apparent upbeat mood be explained?

1. The royal city of Samaria was built on a hill and was thought quite difficult to capture.
2. Samaria had extremely well built fortifications.
3. Samaria had not experienced any serious threats for nearly fifty years from the end of the reign of Jehoahaz.
4. The social distance of the city-elite from the rural-peasantry was so great that the experiences of war, border violations, and economic deprivation of the latter did not evoke any alarm or empathy from the former (cf. 6:6, “they are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph”).

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<sup>65</sup> For a useful discussion on this institution in the ancient world see, Hans M. Barstad, “The Religious Polemics of Amos”, *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, XXXIV (1984), 127-42; King, *Amos*, 139-51.

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5. As we shall see below, to a large measure their false sense of security was bound up ironically in their Yahwistic ideology.

### Heightened Religiosity

Although the dynasty of Jehu may be commended for maintaining a strong antipathy towards Baalism, they failed to abandon the “sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat”. What was this? It is now recognized that what Jeroboam I instituted in Israel was *deviant Yahwism*. The calves in Dan and Bethel had no figure astride them. This is in contrast with other ANE religious iconography, where the bull figure, the vehicle, is shown mounted by the deity. The cult in Samaria was showing deference to the aniconic nature of Yahwism. However by establishing the golden calves in the cult centers, Jeroboam I moved the nation irrevocably away from orthodox Yahwism.

With increasing prosperity the cult in Israel flourished. Amaziah the priest called Bethel, “the king’s sanctuary . . . and the center of the land”. Since, unlike secularized modern cultures, ancient people directly linked prosperity, military success, and fertility of the nation to the favor of the resident deity, when economic conditions burgeoned, religious fervor soared. Jonah’s predictions had been fulfilled in the early reign of Jeroboam II. The continued well being of the land had given weight to the false notion that Yahweh’s favor *unconditionally* rested on Samaria. Not unlike the pagan notion of deity, it was thought that Yahweh could be coerced into acting on behalf of individuals or the nation on the basis of effective rituals and elaborate worship (4:4-5, 5:21-24, 8:1-3). There was seen no direct correlation between moral and ethical behavior and divine favor.

With the recent aggressive behavior of Israel’s neighbors, the incipient religiosity of the Israelites became accentuated along the lines of Deut 32:36, which had worked for Israel before (cf. 2 Kgs 14:26-27). Thus the ruling establishment and the nobility began to *long* for the “Day of Yahweh” (5:18) whereby God would once more intervene to save the land from the hands of the enemy. That there was scriptural warrant to expect God to act decisively to deliver and exalt his people was undoubtedly true. What sadly escaped the notice of the leaders of Samaria was, the fact that commitment and obedience to *Torah* was the only basis on which such covenant obligations could be *expected* from God.

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### *Social Injustice and Oppression*

Amos has become synonymous with social justice because that is one of his clearest themes. In fact arguably the best-known verse in Amos is 5:24, “Let *justice* roll down like waters, and *righteousness* like an ever flowing stream”. His condemnation of the establishment of Samaria is based on three grounds:

1. They oppressed the “poor” and “weak” (2:6-8,<sup>66</sup> 3:9-11, 4:1, 5:10-12, 8:4-6).
2. They corrupted all systems of justice (5:7, 10-12, 15, 24).
3. They suppressed those individuals and institutions of society (nazirites and prophets) that functioned to model and exhort righteous social behavior (2:12, 5:10-12, 7:10-13).

The fact that these charges ring throughout the book demonstrates that the problem was quite entrenched. Masses in Israel were “poor” and “needy”. In the book of Amos these terms are synonymous with the “righteous” (see 2:6 and 5:12) precisely because the causes of economic deprivation and disadvantage were *not* natural disasters or fluctuating fortunes in international trade, but the wanton exercise of greed and the abuse of power. Under the patronage of the king “the notables of the first of the nations” (6:1) became the *untouchables* of ancient Israel. The many that chose to remain faithful to Yahweh’s law, the *righteous*, became the poor, the needy, the powerless and the voiceless. Voiceless, that is, until Yahweh roared from Zion in the dramatic words of a shepherd-farmer from the environs of Jerusalem.

### CONCLUSION

The author, or the final editor, of Kings writes from a Judahite perspective with his interest focused on the Davidic dynasty. We suggest that the reason he then interweaves the history of the kings of the northern kingdom is because the latter acts as a foil to highlight comparisons and contrasts between the two nations following the fateful divide in the days of Rehoboam. As a result of this *theological agenda* certain events and

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<sup>66</sup> A piece of archaeological correspondence to Amos’ “garments taken in pledge” has now surfaced from inside the guardroom of a small fortress at Mesad Hashavyahu. It is a fourteen line Hebrew ostracum dating from about 625 B.C. The letter was from a reaper complaining that his garment had been impounded, and asking that the military governor intervene for the return of the garment. See, King, *Amos*, 24.

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persons in the north, though of great historical import, receive scant attention by the deuteronomist.

The advent of archaeological research in the region of the ANE provided an unexpected boon to the biblical student, in that it presented a whole new repository of artifactual information of a world, which, previously, could only be textually appropriated.

In this paper we have attempted to reconstruct a plausible historical scenario for the period of Jeroboam II, who, though very briefly mentioned in 2 Kgs 14, was the reigning monarch in the time of the prophet Amos. This exercise, it is hoped, would elucidate the text of Kings and, more significantly, that of Amos.

We have argued that the common assumption – that the reference to Jeroboam’s military exploits and political expansion 2 Kgs 14, together with the reference to Samaria’s wealth and opulence in Amos, *describes the status quo of the northern kingdom for the entire period of his reign (793-752 B.C.)* – is too simplistic, and sits uneasily with the evidence both in the text, and now, in the archaeological data. Amos prophesied towards the end of the period of Jeroboam II. At this time it appears that the country was experiencing a resurgence of hostility from her traditional enemies on the border. As a result of this political climate, the rural peasantry was exposed to severe economic hardships and physical danger. The cosmopolitan elite however, living within the security of the capital Samaria, or other centralized towns, was not directly affected by the realities that impinged on the lives of the marginalized. Furthermore, any concerns for the future posed by these new developments were quickly laid to rest on account of the prevalent worldview. The latter, constructed on the fact of the military successes of Jeroboam, the increase of wealth among the elite, and the intensification of religious fervor in Samaria and the other cultic centers, served to buttress the belief that Yahweh was once again on the side of Israel, and with the expected in-breaking of the Day of Yahweh, will restore the nation to her Solomonic glory.

Amos saw a different vision. The collapse of biblical justice and righteousness in *contemporary Israel* became the acid test of the welfare of *future Israel*. The present experience of the ‘ruin of Joseph,’ if unheeded by the king, the priest and the powerful, could only be a solemn foreboding of the future Day of Yahweh they so longed for: “Is not the day of Yahweh darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?” (Amos 5:20)

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