

Amos and Obadiah

Ep 179: CFM Amos; Obadiah

Amos

Overview¹

Amos, apparently the first of a series of Israelite and Judahite prophets whose words were committed to writing, prophesied in the Northern Kingdom in the mid eighth century during the reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah.² He was, before his call to be a prophet, "among the herdmen of Tekoa" (Amos 1:1). His hometown of Tekoa lies about six miles southeast of Bethlehem and twelve miles from Jerusalem (see Map 9, LDS Bible). It was one of the easternmost villages in Judah and was on the dividing line between cultivated land and pastureland. It was also on the caravan route which led from Jerusalem/Bethlehem to En Gedi and beyond to Arabia.

Amos gave a first-person description of his call to Amaziah, Jeroboam's priest at the Bethel shrine: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: And the Lord took me as I followed the flock" (Amos 7:14-15). He was called from his pastoral occupations and specifically disclaimed association with professionally trained prophets. He was a *noqed*, or sheep-breeder (Amos 1:1). That may suggest that he supervised the work of other shepherds, being a substantial and respected man in his community.³ Amos also identified himself as a *boqer*, a herdman of sheep and goats (Amos 7:14). As a wool-grower in Judah he may have made journeys to markets all over the land, to the Northern Kingdom, and even possibly to Damascus.⁴

In addition to his work as a sheep breeder, Amos was a cultivator, or dresser, of sycomores (Amos 7:14). The biblical sycamore (*Ficus sycomorus*) is not found in the Near East at elevations higher than one thousand feet above sea level. It does not grow near Tekoa, since Tekoa is much more than twice that elevation. Amos's work with sycamore figs, then, would have taken him into the lowland (the Shephelah) of Judah.⁵

¹ Much of this overview comes from D. Kelly Ogden, "The Book of Amos," [*Studies in Scripture, Vol. 4: 1 Kings to Malachi*](#), Deseret Book, (ed. Kent Jackson), 2004.

² Michael Avi-Yonah and Emil G. Kraeling, *Our Living Bible* (Jerusalem-Ramat Gan: International Publishing Co., 1962), p. 229; Richard S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1929), p. 9. See also Andor Szabo, "Textual Problems in Amos and Hosea," *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (1975): 500-501

³ The only other biblical occurrence of *noqed* is in 2 Kgs. 3:4 with reference to Mesha, king of Moab, who had to deliver annually to the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs and one hundred thousand rams.

⁴ Erling Hammershaimb, [*The Book of Amos: A Commentary*](#), Schocken Books, 1970, p. 12; George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), p. 74.

⁵ *Ficus sycomorus* is a species of fig, or fig-mulberry (the fruit being like a fig and the leaf like the mulberry). The tree is known to grow to great size, sometimes attaining more than fifty feet in circumference, and is evergreen. Its existence, in Israel at least, totally depends on cultivation. The fruit shoots forth on all parts of the stem, several

Geographical Background

Amos's geographical milieu figures prominently in his prophetic message. At least ten lands outside the territories of Israel and Judah are referred to in the book of Amos, and the book includes prophetic pronouncements concerning at least twenty-six cities. Amos's writings are replete with images reflecting the agricultural and pastoral background and the breadth of education and life experience of the prophet. There are in his book some highly picturesque figures of speech from the contemporary world of fauna and flora and from phenomena of nature, climate, rainfall, and other meteorological conditions. Amos, like most of the prophet-writers who succeeded him and like the Savior and his apostles, drew many parallels to the human experience from his natural surroundings. Hebrew writers loved to compare the experience of individuals and nations to what was occurring in nature.

Amos expressed his words of rebuke and warning to the northern Israelites in powerful metaphor, as did his contemporaries and successors in the prophetic office. For example, he did not record the Lord's merely saying to his people, "You are a burden to me," but rather, "I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves" (Amos 2:13). Amos uttered his message with illustrations from nature. He called on locusts, lions, bird-traps, cows of Bashan, fish-hooks, cedars, oaks, wormwood, blight, mildew, kings' mowings, fruit baskets, threshing sledges, siroccos, drought, storms, eclipses, and earthquakes to vividly and poignantly prophesy against and warn the people. We might call this the "over-geography" of Amos's prophesying.

Amos saw what was happening to Israelite society and what God was about to do to it by way of chastisement and punishment, and he found the proper expressions in his nature-environment, collocating human actions and divine actions. His visions of locusts and drought-fire devouring the land (Amos 7:1-6) were symbolic of the destruction of Israel as a nation.⁶ Amos saw upheaval and disruption in nature as a direct result of upheaval and disruption in society. "You cause the poor of the land to fail" (Amos 8:4); "I'll cause the crops of the land to fail" (Amos 4:9). High society had withheld necessary sustenance from the poor, and God withheld necessary sustenance from the Israelites (Amos 4:6-8). Leaders had swallowed up the needy (Amos 8:4), so God would swallow them up with various catastrophes. Merchants had sold the refuse of the wheat (Amos 8:6), so God would sell them as refuse into the hands of the enemy (Amos 6:8).

The Cosmic Covenant

figs on each leafless twig. In the Holy Land it grows in the mild coastal plains and in the Jordan Valley. David considered the sycamore valuable enough that he appointed a special overseer "over the olive trees and the sycamore trees that were in the low plains [Hebrew, Shephelah]" (1 Chron. 27:28). Three times scripture mentions that Solomon made cedars as plentiful as the sycomores of the Shephelah (1 Kgs. 10:27; 2 Chron. 1:15; 9:27). From historical and climatic information it is understood that Amos would have nurtured sycamore trees in the Judean Shephelah or in the Jordan Valley.

⁶ As the JST changes at Amos 7:3 and 7:6 show, though the nation would be destroyed, a remnant would be preserved for a latter-day repentance and restoration.

Amos saw a cause-and-effect relationship in operation: catastrophe in nature was a direct result of catastrophe in society. He saw evidence of an ethically or morally destroyed society: luxurious living, music-making, reveling while some in society were suffering (Amos 5:23; 6:4-7); prostitution committed in holy sanctuaries (Amos 2:7); shallow, hypocritical festivities and ritual performances (Amos 5:21-22); anticipating the conclusion of holy days so that deceitful business practices and falsifying balances could be resumed (Amos 8:5-6); the wealthy enjoying winter houses and summer "cabins," ivory-decorated houses, cut-stone houses, and palaces, while the poor lived in hovels (Amos 3:15; 5:11; 6:8, 11); treading on the poor, making merchandise of human beings, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes (Amos 5:11; 2:6, 7; 8:6); corrupted court and legal processes, perverted judgment, despising the righteous and afflicting the just (Amos 2:8; 5:7, 10, 12; 6:12). All these practices wrecked or spoiled society. As a result, Amos saw evidence of a destroyed ecosystem and therefore a physically destroyed society: rains were withheld, causing famine (Amos 4:6-8); blight and mildew consumed crops (Amos 4:9); earthquakes devastated pasture lands, garden lands, and cities (Amos 1:2; 4:11); locusts devoured the grains (Amos 7:1-2); and drought devoured the land generally (Amos 7:4-5).

Several of the characteristics Amos identified in society he compared with objects in his environment: on the positive side, height and strength were related to the majestic cedar and the mighty oak (Amos 2:9); constancy and consistency in justice and righteousness were related to an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).⁷ On the negative side, injustice and unrighteousness were compared to poison and wormwood (Amos 6:12); and pride and vanity were represented in Bashan's full-fed, contented cows (Amos 4:1).

Even the cities and lands cited in the book of Amos were used because of their didactic potential. The corruption capitals of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Bozrah, Rabbah, Kerioth, Jerusalem, and Samaria were condemned because of their offensive behavior in the sight of God and man.⁸ Further, Amos called on specific cities and lands from history and current events because of their value as examples in moral instruction. Lo-debar and Karnaim typified arrogance and

⁷ Amos 5:24 was quoted by Dr. Martin Luther King when he said, "We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Dr. Martin Luther King, "I Have A Dream" March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom August 28, 1963. Marshall.edu Accessed 10.20.22.

⁸ Damascus (Amos 1:3-5), Gaza (Amos 1:6-7), Tyre (Amos 1:9-10), Bozrah (Amos 1:11-12), Rabbah (Amos 1:13-15), Kerioth (Amos 2:1-3), Jerusalem (Amos 2:4-5; 6:1), and Samaria (Amos 2:6-16). Samaria's (Israel's) crimes continue to be identified throughout the book: violence and robbery (Amos 3:10; 6:3), oppression of the needy, greed, and drunkenness (Amos 4:1; 8:4), hypocrisy in ordinances (Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-23), disdain of honest judges (Amos 5:10), cheating the poor (Amos 5:11), bribery (Amos 5:12), idolatry (Amos 5:26; 8:14), gluttony and revelry (Amos 6:4-7), pride, vainglory, and false sense of security (Amos 6:8, 13), deceitful business practices, and desecration of the spirit of the Sabbath (Amos 8:5-6).

boasting of strength.⁹ Calneh, Hamath, and Gath served as moral comparisons for Samaria (Amos 6:2). Sodom and Gomorrah (Amos 4:11) and the Valley of Aven¹⁰ were selected as examples of sin centers. Bethel, Dan, Gilgal, and Beersheba represented the perversion of true religion.¹¹ Cush and Caphtor were used to illustrate parental care of all God's children, a strike against the assumed superiority of Israelite society.¹²

The Warnings of Captivity

Prophecy approximately a generation before the destruction of the kingdom of Israel, Amos's mission was to warn Israel of its present disastrous state and forewarn it of impending captivity. He pointedly delivered the latter message with such curt exclamations as "I will take you into exile beyond Damascus" (Amos 5:27); "they shall now be the first of those to go into exile" (Amos 6:7); "Israel must go into exile away from his land" (Amos 7:11); and "Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land" (Amos 7:17). But the prophet was not always satisfied with direct statements. He reinforced his message with metaphorical illustrations, which are often more memorable and vivid than literal words. That Israel would be captured or caught is expressed through the images of a lion devouring an animal and leaving only pieces (Amos 3:12), either the lion, bear, or serpent finally catching up with a fleeing man (Amos 5:19), a bird trapped in a snare (Amos 3:5), sinners carried away hooked as a fish (Amos 4:2), or caught in a sieve (Amos 9:9). There would be no escape from the judgment of God, just as vegetation has no chance of escape before the ravages of the locust-swarm, the sirocco's blasting, or the scorching of drought. The man (Israel) could not escape from the lion, bear, or serpent (enemy nations). The sheep or goat (Israel) could not escape from the lion (God). No one would escape but a righteous few, a remnant (Amos 6:10; 9:1-3, 10).

In due time Amos's prophecies were fulfilled, soon by the Assyrians and then later by other conquerors. The kingdom of Israel was destroyed and taken captive within a few years after

⁹ The Hebrew toponyms *Lo-debar* and *Karnaim* can be read as common nouns, as the King James Version's "a thing of nought" and "horns" (Amos 6:13). But *Lo-debar* and *Karnaim* are also names of cities taken in military victories during Israel's recovering control of Transjordan from Syria shortly before the time of Amos (2 Kgs. 14:25).

¹⁰ The Valley of Aven is rendered in KJV Amos 1:5 as "the plain of Aven," meaning the valley of sin, apparently a reference to the Lebanese Beqa'. Compare also Amos 5:5, in which Bethel becomes Beth-aven: the "house of God" had become "the house of sin."

¹¹ Bethel (Amos 3:14; 4:4; 5:5), Dan (Amos 8:14), Gilgal (Amos 4:4; 5:5), Beersheba (Amos 5:5; 8:14).

¹² Cushites, Nubians, and Ethiopians are the same people, from a biblical point of view. Caphtor is the ancient equivalent of modern Crete. Amos perceived that Israel's pride and self-esteem had become distorted or exaggerated. He humbled them with the cold fact that they were not intrinsically more valuable or more important to Jehovah than were the Arameans, or the Philistines, or even the far-off Cushites, and he put the Israelite exodus on the same footing as the migrations of other peoples of antiquity (Amos 9:7). There is no denying that God had entrusted to Israel the precious blessing of laws, statutes, and ordinances under which he wanted all people to live. Jehovah had, in a sense, cared for Israel above all the families of the earth (Amos 3:2), but Israel did not have a privileged position or preferential status before God because of especially deserving behavior. Amos seemed to be pointing out in response to an assertion of spiritual superiority on the part of Israel that Jehovah is God of all peoples, from "beyond Damascus" to the land of Cush, and he warned Israel in unmistakably plain language that "the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom" (Amos 9:8).

Amos warned clearly that such would happen. The Israelites were exiled "beyond Damascus," as he had said (Amos 5:27).¹³

Although God had raised up Israel to perform a special service in the world, its people had fallen from their high commission and appointed purpose. The virgin Israel had fallen (Amos 5:2), and the tabernacle of David had fallen (Amos 9:11). Amos warned that sons and daughters would fall (Amos 7:17), worshipers of false gods would fall (Amos 8:14), the altar-horns (symbolic of holiness) and the sanctuary itself would fall (Amos 3:14; 9:1).

Nature and Human Society

Amos perceived that God controlled both nature and society and that there must be system and order in both. This sense of order, system, and completeness is evident in Amos's use of metaphor from the cycle of agricultural production: as with agriculture and the produce of the field, so with society and the produce of humankind. The land must be plowed or prepared; God had created or prepared a land for his covenant people. The land would then be planted with the choicest vines, fig trees, and olive trees; God had planted Israel in the good land (Ex. 15:17; 2 Sam. 7:10; Amos 9:14, 15). The husbandman/farmer would water and care for his plants; God had nourished and cared for the people of Israel in their promised land (Deut. 7:6-15; 11:12-17; Amos 3:2). Following a time of careful cultivation, the farmer would expect to reap a bounteous harvest; God expected fruit from Israel (Gen. 35:11; 48:4; Lev. 26:9; Isa. 27:6; Amos 6:12). Upon harvesting his crops, the farmer transported his yield from the fields for storage or consumption; God would transport Israel from their native fields in judgment, where they would be sifted through other lands (Amos 9:9) or to exile in enemies' lands where they would be threshed and trodden down (Amos 7:11, 17). Then the land might be replowed and replanted, so the cycle would begin anew. *What the prophet saw occurring in the fields of Judah and Israel was also occurring in Judahite and Israelite societies — this parallel filtered through into his verbal encounters with the people in Samaria and Bethel.*

The "over-geography" is everywhere present in Amos's oracles and judgments, and only one who had lived with such fauna, flora, agriculture, and natural phenomena could have drawn parallels from them to put flesh on the bare-bones facts of devastation, deportation, and death.

¹³ Damascus (Amos 1:5) was taken by Tiglath-pileser III in 732 B.C. He did exactly what Amos prophesied: he sent military fire upon and destroyed the house of Hazael and the strongholds of Ben-hadad (Amos 1:4), broke the security-bar of Damascus (Amos 1:5), and cut off inhabitants from the Valley of Aven and officials from Beth-eden by exiling the Syrians (2 Kgs. 16:9). The chief Philistine cities (Amos 1:6-8) were also besieged by Tiglath-pileser two years earlier in 734 B.C. **Amos's promise of punishment on Tyre was only gradually fulfilled.** Tiglath-pileser was successfully "bought off," but Tyre was later attacked by Shalmaneser V (a five-year siege), and then by the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar (a thirteen-year siege). Alexander the Great later laid his causeway, forever connecting the island with the mainland, and marched his armies to destroy the island-city, selling thirty thousand of its inhabitants into slavery, which was the very charge for which Amos had condemned the Tyrians (Amos 1:9-10). Jerusalem was miraculously spared destruction by the Assyrians under Sennacherib in 701 B.C. but was burned by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C.—to literally fulfill Amos's prophecy: "I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem" (Amos 2:5).

The Vision of Restoration

Because the last five verses of the book of Amos (the epilogue; Amos 9:11-15) paint a wholly different scene — restoration to the land and prosperity in it, some scholars view those verses as presupposing a different time and situation than that of Amos (mid eighth century B.C.) and consider them the masterpiece of a later disciple or redactor, thus denying their authorship to Amos.¹⁴ They also deny the possibility of prophetic preview and see in the description of prosperous times detail which could have been written only by firsthand experience at a later date. Despite these claims, I maintain that the final verses of the book of Amos are not only acceptable but an essential climax to his writings. The phrase "in that day" (Amos 9:11) in and of itself indicates that a writer living in one time period projects his thoughts into a future time period. Though some would argue that the epilogue is out of harmony with, or even contradictory to, the whole tenor of Amos's pronouncements of ruin, and inconsistent with his condemning voice, it must not be overlooked that ***there is a pattern visible in Hebrew literature of pronouncing curses, judgments, and destruction followed by a message of hope.***

After the catalogue of plagues, desolations, and pestilences recorded in Leviticus 26, hope is held out to Israel (Lev. 26:40-46). Following Isaiah's predicted doom and destruction to Israel and Judah, there is comforting and assuring hope held out for a glorious day of restoration (Isa. 40-66; denied, of course, to Isaiah by the same critics who refuse to credit Amos 9:11-15 to Amos).¹⁵ Following Hosea's recitations of Israel's unfaithfulness and consequent punishment and exile, that prophet records the Lord saying that he will return them to their homeland: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely. . . . I will be as the dew unto Israel. . . . They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive" (Hosea 14:4-5, 7). Following Micah's forthright iteration of the disgraceful ruin of both Samaria and Jerusalem, he follows up with predictions of future restoration to good fortune (Micah 4-5). Following the great devastation caused by the armies of locusts, Joel reveals God's promises: "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten. . . . Ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied. . . . When I shall bring again the captivity [cause the return] of Judah and Jerusalem" (Joel 2:25-26; 3:1).

It may properly be suggested, then, that Amos was perpetuating and cementing a prophetic form as he presented a merciful God who ultimately promises hope and restoration after disciplinary punishment and repentance. *Amos is certainly not alone in foreseeing reinstatement, restoration, and recovery.*

The message of Amos was the same as the message of other prophets. His was a warning voice; he called people to repentance. Unlike the abstract English word repent (which may suggest a

¹⁴ Some scholars view the epilogue as presupposing a different time and situation than that of Amos. See William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1936), p. 199. On the other hand, many scholars give credence to its origin in the days of Amos.

¹⁵ But see also Isa. 4; 11; 12; 27; 30; 32; and 35 — all with promises of restoration and blessing after the discipline of exile.

passive regret or sorrow for sin), the sense of the Hebrew verb *šûb* is to return to God.¹⁶ Just as Moses had raised up a symbolic serpent in the wilderness and promised that as many as would look upon it should live (see Hel. 8:13-15), so now Amos, half a millennium later, actively admonished the nation of Israel to "seek the Lord, and ye shall live" (Amos 5:6).

Amos 1: Oracles against the nations

Two years before the great earthquake (Amos 1.1).

On the timing of Amos's ministry, the mention of "Uzziah king of Judah" and "Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel" clearly places the prophet in the mid eighth century B.C. In the superscription to the book of Amos (Amos 1:1), the prophet's preaching is also dated (beginning) at "two years before the earthquake." Though seismic disturbances are anything but rare in the land of Amos, this very earthquake, the only one explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament, was apparently so severe that it was used for some time to date historical events. It was of such unusual intensity and inflicted such devastation that the memory of it survived for more than two and a half centuries, and in Zechariah 14:5, this earthquake served as a pattern for extremely intense and destructive earthquakes: "And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah." This earthquake caused damage over a wide area; evidence of it has been discovered in archaeological excavations from one end of the country to the other, particularly at Hazor in the north, Deir-Alla in the Jordan Valley, and Beersheba in the south. Yigael Yadin dated the earthquake to approximately 760 B.C.¹⁷

For three transgressions of Damasacus, and for four... (Amos 1.3).¹⁸ This can have a connection to the Divine Council.¹⁹

¹⁶ *šûb* is generally translated as "return," but can also mean "to come back" or "go back." I (Mike Day) also see this as a way of saying that we are to proceed through the flames of difficulty and come home. The *bet* (ב) brings this image to my mind when thinking of this Hebrew verb. The word *bet* literally means house, and the character in Hebrew can be seen as a house, especially in light of its proto-Hebrew depiction. See how Mormon used the idea: "**Turn, all ye Gentiles**, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and your envyings, and your strifes, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel" ([3 Nephi 30.2](#)).

¹⁷ D. Kelly Ogden, "The Book of Amos," *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 4*. See also: Yigael Yadin, *Hazor: The Head of All Those Kingdoms*. London: Oxford University, 1972, pp. 113, 181.

¹⁸ Amos uses the form of the "numerical saying" known from Proverbs (see, e.g., Prov 30:18, 21, 24, 29): "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment." (Amos 1:3; cf. 1:6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). John Barton, *The Theology of the Book of Amos*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 9-10.

¹⁹ The first part of Amos 1.3 reads *לֹא אָשִׁיבֶנּוּ עַל-אַרְבָּעָה וְעַל-שְׁלֹשָׁה פְּשָׁעֵי דַמָּשֶׁק וְעַל-אַרְבָּעָה לֹא אָשִׁיבֶנּוּ* "Thus says Yahweh, for three *peshaim*/atrocities/crimes against humanity of Damascus, and for four I will not turn us back" (my translation). I can see the construction of the Hebrew verb *šûb* here to hint at the idea that the Divine Council of Gods are not turning back from these crimes against humanity.

There are neither three nor four trespasses listed here that a reader can count. Rather, this is a common biblical idiom, occurring several times in Proverbs, with the sense, “a certain few, and even one more.” Because the three and four together add up to a formulaic seven, some have proposed that they indicate a totality. There is no way of knowing whether these dire prophecies about the surrounding nations were actually the beginning of Amos’s message, but they certainly would have provided a means of drawing in the Israelite audience with something they wanted to hear before the prophet launched on a denunciation of that very audience. The formulaic repetition of these lines for one nation after another generates a kind of hypnotic drumbeat.²⁰

Fire Against Syria (Amos 1.3-5).

I will send fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad (Amos 1.4).

Fire against Philistia (6-8), Tyre (9-10), Edom (11-12), Ammon (13-15).

Amos 2: Oracles against the nations

Punishment for Moab (Amos 2.1-3), Judah (2.4-5), Israel (2.6-16).

Amos 3: An Indictment of the Sins of Israel

Amos 3.3-8 construct a series of rhetorical questions.²¹

The Lord reveals his *sôd*/council to his servants the prophets (Amos 3.7).²²

The Divine Council

In the religious world of the ancient Near East, the cosmos was understood to be ruled by the gods who not only existed in great numbers and could be conceived of as a pantheon but frequently acted as an assembly or council to deliberate and make decisions about the world

²⁰ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, Vol. 2, W.W. Norton & Co., 2018, p. 1255.

²¹ Israel's God is 'not going to do anything' (לא יַעֲשֶׂה דָּבָר) without warning his people through his servants, the prophets. However, if this is so, then how can a prophet remain silent once Yahweh has spoken? This is the point made by the rhetorical questions in v. 8, the climax of the whole section. The answers are obvious—if a lion roars, people will be afraid; if Yahweh speaks, one has to prophesy - but the questions force the audience to admit that Amos had no other choice but to proclaim his dire message. This, the focal point of the entire unit. Karl Moller, *A Prophet in Debate: The Rhetoric of Persuasion in the Book of Amos*, Sheffield Academic, 2009, p. 231.

²² When the Hebrew Bible speaks of the divine council it frequently employs the noun *סֹד* (*sôd*), which carries both the sense of “council” as well as “counsel.” One standard Hebrew lexicon defines *sôd* as both a “council, in familiar conversation ... divan or circle of familiar friends ... assembly, company” as well as a “counsel, taken by those in familiar conversation ... secret counsel, which may be revealed.” Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, ed. *The Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, reprint ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1010), s.v. *sôd*. See: Stephen O. Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 27 (2017): 155-180.

and its inhabitants.²³ The character of the heavenly assembly of gods and its function as a deliberating and ruling body has been well described by several scholars²⁴ of the Old Testament.²⁵ Just as a royal court consists of different members with different roles and purposes (e.g., counselor, messenger, jester, warrior, or bodyguard), so too God's heavenly court was composed of a variety of heavenly beings.²⁶ The Hebrew Bible itself offers varied terminology for this council, including:

The Assembly of God (עדת-אל; 'ădat 'ēl)²⁷

The Congregation of the Holy Ones (קהל קדשים; qəḥal qəḏôshîm)²⁸

²³ Mark Smith, in his book *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, works to illustrate that the Semitic peoples of the times that the Old Testament books were written believed in a pantheon of gods, a concept which is foreign to modern readers. In this pantheon, El and his consort Asherah occupied the first tier, commanding or governing a multitude of gods in a hierarchy of four tiers of divine beings. The second tier was inhabited by the children of El and his consort and were called the "sons of god." A third tier comprising of craftsmen or artisan deities is found underneath and subservient to the sons of god (but poorly represented in Ugaritic texts and not well attested in the Hebrew Bible). Smith cites Kothar wa-Hasis as an example of a third level deity in the Ugaritic pantheon. Kothar is a maker of gadgets and weapons for Baal, similar to the role played by the character [Alfred Pennyworth](#) as he relates to Batman in the American comic book and movie series. The fourth tier of divine beings act as messengers for God, servants to the gods who occupy the first three tiers. See: Day, [Deuteronomy 32.8-9 and the Sons of God](#).

²⁴ The plurals used to describe God in many places in the Old Testament reflect the idea of a Divine Council. These plurals (see for example Genesis 1.26-27, 3.22 and 11.5-7; Isaiah 40.1-2) are read as reflecting the presence of the divine council, a plausible alternative explanation for these verses, especially in light of the historical context of the Old Testament. Biblical scholar David Carr explains, "The plural us, our ... probably refers to the divine beings who compose God's heavenly court." Carr's explanation here is a concise representation of the view of many modern biblical scholars. See, for example, (David M. Carr, "Genesis," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, 4th ed. Oxford University Press, 2010, 12.) Ronald Hendel (Ronald Hendel, "Genesis," in *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, 6. "The plural seems to refer to the lesser deities of the divine assembly described in other biblical texts.") John Levenson (Jon D. Levenson, "Genesis," in [The Jewish Study Bible](#), ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12. "The plural construction (Let us ...) most likely reflects a setting in the divine council ... God the King announces the proposed course of action to His cabinet of subordinate deities, though he alone retains the power of decision."), Gerald Cooke (Cooke, "The Sons of (The) God(s)," *ZAW* 35/1, 1964, p. 22-23. "[I]t must be acknowledged as at least a strong possibility that [Genesis 1:26-27] represent[s] a conception of a plurality of divine beings."), Marc Zvi Brettler (Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2007, 42-43. "[T]he text is implicitly portraying God in terms of a human king: God is talking to his royal counselors or cabinet ... The creation of people is so significant that this creative act alone demands God consult his cabinet, comprised of angels or other divine figures."), among many Biblical scholars. See also Simon B. Parker, "Council," *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 395; and Mark Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, Eerdmans, 2002.

²⁵ Patrick D. Miller, "Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol." *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*. Vol. 267. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000. Pages 422-444. The Assyriologist Thorkild Jacobsen has made an argument for the Divine Council in his study of Mesopotamian religion, *The Treasures of Darkness*.

²⁶ Taylor Halvorsen, "The Path of Angels: A Biblical Pattern for the Role of Angels in Physical Salvation," in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, (ed. D. Kelly Ogden, Jared W. Ludlow, and Kerry Muhlestein), Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009, p. 154.

²⁷ Psalm 82.1.

²⁸ Psalm 89.5.

1 Nephi 1.8-13 – God is on his throne, “surrounded by numberless concourses of angels” ... also twelve others, and “One descending out of the midst... with “luster above that of the sun at noon-day”

Psalms 89.5-7 – (Verse 5) “The congregation of the Saints” = קהל קדשים (congregation/assembly of the Holy Ones). (Verse 7) “The assembly of Saints” = סוד קדושים (Sod/Council of the Holy Ones).

Psalms 25.14 – “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant” = לְהוֹדִיעֵם וּבְרִיתוֹ לִירְאָיו יְהוָה; סוּד (The sod of Yahweh is to them that revere/fear him and his covenant he will show/instruct/tell them).

Deuteronomy 32.-89 – ***This is a text with many things happening.*** There are **three versions of this text**, and, in my opinion, the Dead Sea Scrolls version depicts the most accurate meaning of this verse, and that is that the high god Elyon gave the nations their inheritance according to the numbers of the sons of God. This essentially reflects early Israelite conceptions of multiple divine beings in an ordered council, very similar to some of the things reflected in Abraham 3.³⁵

The early Israelite depictions of God reflected ideas that are very similar to the things seen in 1 Nephi 1, Abraham 3, and Revelation 4. As Israelite theology experienced change during the reign of Josiah (640-609 BCE), a more monotheistic approach became centralized and hardened through scribal editing of older material. Many of the divine council texts, in my opinion, were removed through the editing process.³⁶ By the time of Jesus, the idea of a divine Father and a Son were essentially removed from mainstream discourse among the elites in Jerusalem. Many of these elites rejected Jesus’ claim to be the divine Son of God, and many early Christians had varying ideas of what this term even meant. Over time, with the strict adherence to monotheistic ideas, Christians of the fourth century settled on ways to resolve the apparent conflict of three gods in a monotheistic worldview. Creedal statements became solidified over time that worked to fix these problems, creating more issues along the way. The echoes of a Divine Council were brought back into religious discourse among the Latter-day Saints with the publication of the Book of Abraham and the teachings of Joseph Smith in Nauvoo prior to his assassination. Hopefully this brief overview of these ideas has added light to the conversation.

They know not to do right (Amos 3.10).

The two legs out of the mouth of a lion (Amos 3.12).

I shall visit the transgressions of Israel ... the altars of Bethel... the horns shall fall to the ground (Amos 3.14).

The winter house with the summer house... the houses of ivory shall perish (Amos 3.15).

³⁵ For more on this, see Day, [Deuteronomy 32.8-9 and the Sons of God](#).

³⁶ Day, [Conflicting Views of God in the Bible](#).

Amos 4: Pestilence to come upon Israel

Ye kine of Bashan (Amos 4.1).

Come to Bethel... at Gilgal multiply transgression... (Amos 4.4).³⁷

Cleanness of teeth in all your cities (Amos 4.6).³⁸

I have sent pestilence among you (Amos 4.10).

Amos 5: Seek the Lord

The virgin is fallen! (Amos 5.1)

Seek the Lord, and ye shall live (Amos 5.6).

Treading upon the poor... ye have houses build of hewn stone (Amos 5.11).

They take the bribe and turn aside the poor (Amos 5.12).

Establish judgment in the gate (Amos 5.15).

Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light (Amos 5.18).³⁹

I despise your feast days, and I will not smell your solemn assemblies (Amos 5.21).

Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream (Amos 5.24).⁴⁰

“But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves” (Amos 5.25).⁴¹ This verse emphasizes the Lord’s view that we

³⁷ The sarcasm in Amos 4.4-5 is striking. Gilgal was a main center of worship in the Northern Kingdom of Israel between 1000 BCE and 721. (see Josh. 4.20-22; Hos. 4.15; 9.15; 12.2).

³⁸ Cleanness of teeth, a euphemism for famine. Since there will be nothing to eat, the teeth will be very clean. [The Jewish Study Bible](#), Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 1183-1184.

³⁹ The Day of the Lord can be seen as the coming of Yahweh to destroy the wicked and save the righteous. Robert Alter explains: The background to this idea must be inferred. It appears to be **a popular eschatological belief that a grand era is coming when God will elevate Israel and make it triumphant among the nations**. Some of the later prophecies of national restoration—as, for example, in Second Isaiah—may have drawn on such traditions of folk belief. In any case, Amos makes emphatically clear that such expectations are a delusion and that the day of the LORD will be a day of dire retribution for Israel’s sins. Alter, p. 1268.

⁴⁰ Amos 5.24 was quoted by Dr. Martin Luther King when he said, “We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.” Dr. Martin Luther King, “I Have A Dream” March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom August 28, 1963. [Marshalle.edu](#) Accessed 10.20.22.

⁴¹ וְנִשְׂאתֶם אֶת סִכּוֹת מִלְּקָבְכֶם וְאֶת כִּיּוֹן צִלְמֵיכֶם כּוֹכַב אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם לָכֶם “And you all (you men!) have borne the *sikût*/tent of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the *kôkâb*/star of your Elohim which you all have made for yourselves!” (My translation). Here we are introduced to the idea of [Molech](#) in the book of Amos. The meaning of the term *molek* has been subject to debate since 1935, when Otto Eissfeldt connected it to the Punic *mlk*, which he saw as a sacrificial term. For the last century scholars have debated whether the biblical references to a cult of

should protect the innocent members of our society, particularly children. Boyd K. Packer had this to say about children:

Like my Brethren, I have traveled all over the world. Like my Brethren, I have held positions of trust in education, in business, in government, and in the Church. I have written books, and, like them, have received honors, degrees, certificates, plaques. Such honors come with the territory and are undeserved. Assessing the value of those things, the one thing I treasure more than any of them—more than all of them put together—***the thing of most value to me is how our sons and daughters and their husbands and wives treat their children and how, in turn, our grandchildren treat their little ones.***⁴²

Amos 6: Woe unto those that are at ease in Zion⁴³

molek pertain to human sacrifice to [a deity named Molech](#) or the practice of child sacrifice and was essentially a general term for this abominable practice in Israelite society. Some scholars have also theorized that perhaps an animal was used as a sacrifice for the human victim. In John Day's book [Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament](#), Cambridge University Press, 1989, Day asserts that Molech was a god of the underworld in the area at this time. He also sees connections between Molech and the text of [Isaiah 28.15](#) "ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement..." Day sees this not as a veiled allusion to necromancy or to a political alliance with Egypt at the time of Hezekiah, but to an apotropaic Molech ritual conducted in the time of Ahaz (see 2 Kgs 16.3) to stave off national catastrophe (Day, p. 58-64). Paul Mosca, in his dissertation (Harvard 1975), relates when Molech worship was phased out anciently: "We have some indication of when the rite (sacrifice to Molech) was abandoned in Israel, Phoenicia, and the Punic West. For Phoenicia, we know only that, by 332 BC, the practice had been discontinued for many years, and that perhaps it died out about 500 BC under Persian pressure. In the West, the rite lingered on even after the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC, retreating only gradually in the face of Roman hostility until it finally disappeared. Thus Israel, or at least Judah, may have been not the only first state to abolish sacrificing to Molech, but also the only one to do so completely of its own initiative." Paul Mosca, [Child Sacrifice in Canaanite and Israelite Religion: A Study in *Mulk* and מלך](#), dissertation, [Harvard University, 1975](#), p. 272.

⁴² Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, May 2002, p. 10, emphasis added.

⁴³ Bryce shared the following quote by President Thomas S. Monson in relation to this concept taught in Amos 6: "May I share with you an example of one who determined early in life what his goals would be. I speak of Brother Clayton M. Christensen, a member of the Church who is a professor of business administration in the business school at Harvard University. When he was 16 years old, Brother Christensen decided, among other things, that he would not play sports on Sunday. Years later, when he attended Oxford University in England, he played center on the basketball team. That year they had an undefeated season and went through to the British equivalent of what in the United States would be the NCAA basketball tournament. They won their games fairly easily in the tournament, making it to the final four. It was then that Brother Christensen looked at the schedule and, to his absolute horror, saw that the final basketball game was scheduled to be played on a Sunday. He and the team had worked so hard to get where they were, and he was the starting center. He went to his coach with his dilemma. His coach was unsympathetic and told Brother Christensen he expected him to play in the game...The backup center [had] dislocated his shoulder, which increased the pressure on Brother Christensen to play in the final game. He went to his hotel room. He knelt down. He asked his Heavenly Father if it would be all right, just this once, if he played that game on Sunday. He said that before he had finished praying, he received the answer: "Clayton, what are you even asking me for? You know the answer." He went to his coach, telling him how sorry he was that he would not be playing in the final game. Then he went to the Sunday meetings in the local ward while his team played without him. He prayed mightily for their success. They did win. That fateful, difficult decision was made more than 30 years ago. Brother Christensen has said that as time has passed, he considers it one of the most important decisions he ever made. It would have been very easy to have said, "You know, in general, keeping the Sabbath day holy is the right commandment, but in my particular extenuating circumstance, it's okay, just this

They lie upon beds of ivory (Amos 6.4).

Shall horses run upon the rock? ... Ye have turned judgment into gall, the fruit of righteousness into hemlock (Amos 6.12).⁴⁴

Ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength? (Amos 6.13)⁴⁵

The entering of Hemath unto the river of the wilderness (Amos 6.14).

Amos 7: The Captivity of Israel

“The Lord repented for this” (Amos 7.3, 6).⁴⁶

Amos sees a plumbline in the midst of Israel (Amos 7.8).⁴⁷

The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries laid waste (Amos 7.9).

Amaziah the priest of Bethel contends with Amos (Amos 7.10-17). Amos insists that he is not part of the guild of professional prophets (Amos 7.14).⁴⁸

Amos 8: The Basket of Summer Fruit

once, if I don't do it." *However, he says his entire life has turned out to be an unending stream of extenuating circumstances, and had he crossed the line just that once, then the next time something came up that was so demanding and critical, it would have been so much easier to cross the line again.* The lesson he learned is that it is easier to keep the commandments 100 percent of the time than it is 98 percent of the time." President Thomas S. Monson, [Ensign, Nov. 2010, The Three Rs of Choice](#), emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Robert Alter translates this as follows: “Can horses race on rock, can one plow with an ox in the sea? For you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.” *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, Vol. 2, p. 1272.

⁴⁵ This verse can be read at least two ways. The King James is a good rendition, but so is “You who rejoice over Lo-Dabar, who say, Why, with our strength we have captured Karnaim” (Alter, p. 1272). “Thing of nought” comes from the Hebrew לֹא דָבָר “lo-dabar,” and is actually a place. This is a town in the northern part of Gilead, but the name could also be understood to mean “nothing,” and a pun is clearly intended. קַרְנַיִם, translated as “horns” in the King James Bible, is also Karnaim, a town in the region of Bashan in northern Israel. Both Gilead and Bashan were part of the northern kingdom of Israel but were at times hotly contested between Israel and her neighbors of the ancient world. See: Alter, p. 1272.

⁴⁶ The Hebrew reads: גָּחַם יְהוָה עַל־זֹאת. Alter translates this as “The Lord relented concerning this.” Alter, p. 1273.

⁴⁷ This is the traditional understanding of *’anakh*, which appears only here. Some have disputed its meaning, claiming it might be a term for “axe” because it becomes here an instrument of destruction. “Plumb line,” however, makes perfectly good sense. The wall is a plumb-line wall (“built” is merely implied) because it is properly constructed as a perfect vertical. God will use a plumb line to measure out inexorable judgment against Israel. Compare 2 Kings 21:13: “I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the weight [the “plumb” of the plumb line] of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe out Jerusalem.” Alter, p. 1273.

⁴⁸ Amos responds directly to the remark about eating bread. He says that he is no professional prophet of the sort that expects payment for prophesying. **The expression “son of a prophet” refers to the disciples who constituted the following of such a prophet. What he is invoking is the phenomenon registered in Samuel and Kings of career prophets surrounded by their disciples** (who are called “sons of the prophet”) and who cultivate ecstatic states, often with the aid of musical instruments. Amos, by contrast, is a simple herdsman and farmer driven to prophesy by a call from God. Alter, p. 1274, emphasis added.

I command the serpent (Amos 9.3).⁵⁵

It is he that buildeth his stories in the heaven ... The Lord is his name (Amos 9.6).⁵⁶

I will sift the house of Israel (Amos 9.9).

I will raise up the tabernacle of David (דָּוִד וְיִשְׂרָאֵל) that is fallen⁵⁷... that he may possess the remnant of Edom... I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities... and I will plant them upon their land (Amos 9.11-15).

Obadiah

Overview⁵⁸

The book of Obadiah is the shortest book of the Old Testament. It consists of one chapter of only twenty-one verses. The greater part of the book is a warning to Edom that the wrath of God will come upon its people for their participation in destroying Jerusalem. Much about the book remains uncertain. We do not possess any biographical information about the prophet Obadiah, and there is no clear historical information on exactly when to date the book. And because the name Obadiah itself means "servant of the Lord," some have suggested that it is a

even there thy hand shall lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139.8-10)

Quoting Othmar Keel, Morales states "As in Amos 9.2-3, which cites in the same order *heaven* and *Sheol*, the *top of Carmel* and the *bottom of the sea*, we have here two cosmographical concepts (heaven and the world of the dead) followed by two predominantly geographical concepts (the locus of the dawn and the remotest part of the sea). The conceptual pairs in Psalm 139.8-10 and Amos 9.2-3 may be taken as designations of "above" (heaven, dawn, top of Carmel) and "below" (bottom of the sea, uttermost part of the sea, Sheol) (cf. Psalm 68.22). The same is true in Psalm 107.3, where we find the conceptual pairs, rising-*Sapon* and setting sea. Without any text-critical justification, the more recent commentators emend *yam* (sea) to *yamin* (south). But if *Sapon* is understood as "mountaintop" and *yam* as a paraphrase of "below," then we have in Psalm 107.3 a statement parallel to Amos 9.2-3 and Psalm 139.8-10.... (heaven, *sapon* - Sheol, *yam*). Michael Morales, "[The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus](#)," Dissertation, 2011, p. 34-35. See also Othmar Keel, [The Symbolism of the Biblical World](#), p. 23.

⁵⁵ This is a mythological entity, not the serpent of the Garden story but the monstrous Leviathan of Canaanite tradition. Here the once menacing sea god answers the LORD's bidding. Alter, p. 4308.

⁵⁶ Brettler translates this as "Who built his chambers in heaven and founded his vault on the earth" (Amos 9.6). *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1191. He explains, "Theophanic and creation imagery is used to emphasize God's power. Such descriptions, called doxologies (praises of God) are interspersed throughout Amos, and characterize this prophetic book."

⁵⁷ The Hebrew noun *sukkah* used for "booth of David" (דָּוִד וְיִשְׂרָאֵל) is intentionally chosen. This word denotes a shelter or hut erected in a field for someone watching over the crops. Thus, unlike a fortress or a palace, it is easily knocked down. This invocation of the Davidic dynasty appears to suggest a hope on the part of the prophet that in future times the united kingdom will be restored. Amos is hoping Israel will be restored to her land and possess the gate of her enemies ("they may possess the remnant of Edom" Amos 9.12. See also Genesis 22.17).

⁵⁸ Much of this overview is from Darrell Matthews, "Obadiah," [Studies in Scripture, Vol. 4: 1 Kings to Malachi](#), Deseret Book, (ed. Kent Jackson), 2004.

title instead of a name. Since other individuals with this name are attested in the Bible, however, there is no reason to reject it as the prophet's actual name.

The date of the book has also been debated, with proposals ranging from 850 B.C. to about 200 B.C. The main criteria for dating this book are the mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and the similarity of several verses to passages in Jeremiah.⁵⁹ Undoubtedly the destruction mentioned is the 587 B.C. fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians during the time of King Zedekiah and the prophet Jeremiah. There is no mention of the Exile in Babylonia.

A few verses in this book have close parallels in the book of Jeremiah. If this book was written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, Obadiah and Jeremiah would have been contemporary prophets and likely would have known each other. We know from the Book of Mormon that there were many prophets during the time immediately preceding the fall of Jerusalem (1 Ne. 1:4), one of whom was Lehi.⁶⁰

As already mentioned, Obadiah's vision consists mainly of a warning to the Edomites on account of their participation in the destruction of Jerusalem. The Edomites were neighbors to Judah and lived in the area south of the Dead Sea. We are told that they were the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob (Gen. 36:1; 1 Chron. 1:35-43) and were therefore blood relatives of the Israelites. During the early part of Israel's existence, it appears that there were peaceful relations between the two nations, but with time hostilities developed, especially after David and his army attacked Edom (2 Sam. 8:13-14).

In Obadiah's revelation, the Edomites were told that they were "greatly despised" (Obad. 1:2). In their pride they believed that they were secure and that no one would harm them. This false security was about to end. In verse 5 we learn that their destruction would be complete. They were told that if a robber were to come he would only take until he had enough. If the grapegatherers came, they would always leave a few grapes for the poor. But when the judgment of the Lord comes it will be complete, and nothing of the Edomites would remain to be salvaged. By the second century B.C. there was no longer an Edomite state.

Beginning in verse 10 we are told why this judgment would come upon Edom. They had betrayed their brothers of the house of Israel and thus would "be cut off for ever." Apparently they had assisted the Babylonians in carrying away the captives of Jerusalem and destroying the city. The authors of Psalm 137 and Lamentations both wrote about the involvement of the Edomites in the downfall of Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7; Lam. 4:21-22). Verses 12 through 14 of Obadiah contain the Lord's witness against the Edomites. We are told that they had rejoiced over their brother Judah's destruction and took great pride in their participation. Even worse, they attacked those who tried to escape. As the Lord stated: "Neither shouldst thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldst thou have

⁵⁹ Compare Obad. 1:1-4 with Jer. 49:14-16, and Obad. 1:5-6 with Jer. 49:9-10.

⁶⁰ It is likely that Jeremiah, Lehi, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Huldah (2 Kgs. 22:11-20) were all contemporary prophets.

delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress" (Obad. 1:14). God's judgment would be decisive. The Edomites would be treated as they treated Judah. They would be destroyed and carried captive. The Lord said, "Thy reward shall return upon thine own head" (Obad. 1:15).

The last five verses of Obadiah prophesy that the house of Israel will once again prevail and gain possession of the land of its inheritance. It will be as if the house of Jacob were a fire and Esau were stubble. Esau would be burned, and Jacob would be restored to its possession (Obad. 1:18-20). Deliverance will be in Zion (Obad. 1:17), where a righteous remnant⁶¹ "shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau." And "the kingdom shall be the Lord's" (Obad. 1:21).

From this book we learn important lessons. Among the most significant is that pride is a destructive element that should be eliminated from our lives. President Ezra Taft Benson emphasized that truth.⁶² Pride leads to the destruction and downfall of nations, as both the Bible and the Book of Mormon testify. The Edomites were an example of this.

By the end of Obadiah it becomes clear that Edom also stands for all the nations other than Israel.⁶³ The theme of the judgment of the nations, and of Edom as a paradigm for the nations, is intertwined with that of Zion's glorious future in verses 15-18. The book concludes (verses 19-21) with an image of an ideal future in which Israel is restored and the dominion is the Lord's (v. 21).⁶⁴

God watches over his people and will avenge them of their wrongs. That does not mean that his people will not have trials and problems; in fact, it often seems to mean the opposite. But in the Lord's justice — and in his due time — all will receive what they deserve, whether good or bad, and God's plan will prevail.

Saviors on Mount Zion (Obadiah 1.21)

⁶¹ The intention of the difficult Hebrew word here, translated "saviours" in the KJV, is not clear. Some translations follow the ancient Greek Septuagint (3d century B.C.) and read it as a passive participle, "saved ones," i.e., *musaim*, which seems to make good sense in this context. But "saviors" (or "deliverers") also works well, since those who are saved out of the world then have the calling to stand as deliverers for others. Joseph Smith used the term "saviors on Mount Zion," though not in the context of Obadiah, to refer to "the remnant which was left" — "the 'ministers of our God'" — who would in turn bless the lives of others; Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), pp. 73-74. Later he used the term consistently with specific reference to proxy work for the dead; *ibid.*, pp. 77, 318, and 368; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith, Deseret Book, 1938, p. 223.

⁶² Ezra Taft Benson, "Beware of Pride," *Ensign*, May 1989, pp. 4-6.

⁶³ An interesting connection here is contained in D&C 1.36, where it reads, "The Lord shall have power over his Saints, and shall reign in their midst, and shall come down in judgment upon Idumea, or the world." We see this idea expressed in other places as well, such as Isaiah 34.5-6, and in Ezekiel. Ezekiel states, "As thou didst rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto thee: thou shalt be desolate, O mount Seir, and all Idumea (םִדְּוִם-לְכָל = "all Edom"), even all of it: and they shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezk. 35.15).

⁶⁴ Ehud Ben Zvi, *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1194.

Elder Widstoe proclaimed, “In our pre-existent state, in the day of the great council, we made a certain agreement with the Almighty. The Lord proposed a plan. We accepted it. Since the plan is intended for all men, we became parties to the salvation of every person under that plan. We agreed, right then and there, to be not only saviors for ourselves, but measurably, saviors for the whole human family. We went into partnership with the Lord. The working out of the plan became then not merely the Father's work, and the Savior's work, but also our work. The least of us, the humblest, is in partnership with the Almighty in achieving the purpose of the eternal plan of salvation.”⁶⁵

The *Moshaim*

וְעָלוּ מוֹשְׁעִים בְּהַר צִיּוֹן “And Saviors/*Moshaim* will come up upon Mount Zion...” (Obadiah 1.21).

John Welch⁶⁶ explains that a “Mosiah” was:

1. A victorious hero chosen by God.
2. One who liberated God’s chosen people from oppression, controversy, or an injustice when they cried out to God for help.
3. This deliverance was usually brought about by means of nonviolent escape or negotiation.
4. The result of the coming מוֹשְׁעִים – *moshaim* was an escape from injustice and a return to a state where every person had access to their property.
5. On a larger scale, the coming of the מוֹשְׁעִים – *moshaim* was that they were to rule like Judges over Israel.

To my knowledge, Joseph Smith had no access to this Hebrew word at the time of the publication of the Book of Mormon text. I find it provocative that this word is used to describe the deliverers in the Book of Mosiah, a book that shows the *moshaim* in the exact way that they should be portrayed from an ancient perspective.

⁶⁵ John A. Widstoe, Church Service on Genealogical Committees, 28.

⁶⁶ John Welch, “[What was a Mosiah?](#)” Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research, 1992.