

JUNE 2014

MARKING CRITERIA

Examine the relationship between religious practice and morality in the teaching of Amos.

1. *The two are inextricably intertwined because both stem from the covenant relationship.*
2. *God's deliverance and election of Israel lead to the requirement on Israel's part of*
 - *Monotheism.*
 - *Treating other members of the covenant as covenant brothers.*
3. *Amos denounced the legal corruption that enabled the rich to increase their wealth at the expense of the poor and to enjoy the fruits of their power in cultic celebration (2:6-8).*
4. *The destruction of the royal shrine in Bethel is God's judgement on the hypocrisy of Israel's religious practice and the failure of the nation to see the link between cult and morality.*
5. *Israel's corrupt practices and oppression of the poor mean that the countless sacrifices offered, prayers made and hymns sung are an insult to God.*
 - *The sheer quantity of them is offensive.*
6. *Israel's attitude is summed up in that of the grain merchants who observe New Moon and Sabbath, but who all the while are longing for them to be over so that they can get back to making money by dishonest practices.*
7. *Israel's only hope of survival lies not in the cult but in applying justice to every aspect of life.*
8. *Although the war crimes denounced in Amos 1, 2 relate to those committed by other nations, they may represent how Amos would have regarded Israel's attitude to neighbouring nations: belief in a God who had in the past rescued not only Israel but also the Philistines and the Aramaeans should mean that international relationships should exclude abuses of the kind referred to in those opening chapters.*

Maximum Level 4 for mere rewriting of Amos' oracles. [30 marks]

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Examine the relationship between religious practice and morality in the teaching of Amos.

Although he never uses the word, Amos was a prophet of the covenant. In terms of the Mosaic Covenant, religious practice and morality are inextricable. The Decalogue, (Ex. 20) for example, has a dual dimension of divine-human relationships on the one hand, and societal relationships on the other. Therefore, to mistreat other people is to dishonour Yahweh. This is because God had chosen and delivered Israel (from Egypt) to live as a covenant community whose way of being revealed Yahweh's identity. As Stewart claims, "the crimes Amos identifies are those the Sinai Covenant defines as crimes (e.g., oppression of the poor, denial of inheritance rights, failure to observe sabbatical or jubilee.)" *Amos thus taught that the crimes of Israel and Judah (Am 2:6-5:17) are greater than the crimes of other nations (Am 1:1-2:5).*

Many of Amos' contemporaries had separated religious practice and morality, leading to "diluted Yahwism" (Hayes). The prosperity enjoyed by Israel's elite led them to assume that Yahweh was pleased with them. It left them complacent about the social requirements of the law, even while they continued their religious practices. **It was a small step from the legitimate belief that Israel's covenant obedience led to being wealthy and comfortable, to believing the exact opposite: that being wealthy and comfortable proved Israel's covenant obedience.** *Amos taught that the elite broke the covenant because they separated religious and moral practices.*

Yahweh's anger burned at the widespread social injustice that included economic injustice (2:6-7), judicial corruption (5:10-15) and immorality (5:21) to one's covenant partners. Not only did the elite ignore the poor, but they mistreated the poor to get wealthier. Worse still, the wealthy used their ill-gotten gains in their worship of Yahweh (2:8). For this reason, Yahweh hates and despises festivals and solemn assemblies (5:21ff) This is hardly surprising, since grain merchants, for example, wanted to hurry through cultic requirements such as New Moon festivals and Sabbath observance, so they can return to their dishonest practices (Am 8:5). *Amos thus taught that immorality poisoned religious practices.*

In sum, Amos was a prophet of the covenant, but as Bright concludes, he taught that "the obligations of the covenant could not be discharged by cultic activity alone."

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MARKING CRITERIA

To what extent may Amos be viewed as a typical prophet?

Typical prophet

1. *Denunciation of Israel's social, religious and political life typical of classical prophecy and also to be found in Elijah.*
2. *Amos' accusation that the people have rejected God found also in Samuel's denunciation of the people's request for a king.*
3. *Conflict with the political and religious leadership typical of other 8th century prophets and seen also in the Elijah cycle of stories.*
4. *Expulsion from Israel follows the same pattern of persecution seen with Elijah and some of the classical prophets.*
5. *Structure of his oracles follows a typical pattern found in other prophets, e.g. 'Thus says the Lord'.*

Not typical

1. *Amos explicitly states that he is not a prophet, i.e. not a professional court or cultic prophet. (Amos 7:14) 'I am not a prophet, nor a prophet's son'.*
2. *Amos' prophetic ministry was not to his own countrymen – he came from Judah.*
3. *His rejection of the cult seems more total / absolute than that of other prophets.*
4. *The negativity of his prophecy and the unmitigated gloom he predicts for the future is very different from the oracles of many other prophets.*

More able students will probably point out that it all depends on those with whom Amos is compared. [15 marks]

It depends who he is being compared with. Court prophets, or other literary prophets...

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To what extent may Amos be viewed as a typical prophet?

For Amos to conform to a 'type' one must be specific about who he is compared with. The most obvious hallmark of his prophecy is that of relentless denunciation, and as such he may be compared with Elijah who denounced Ahab for syncretism (I Kgs 21-22) or Samuel who denounced all Israelites for demanding a king (I Sam 8). Amos too denounced both his king and his people (7:11). His denunciations led to conflict with political leaders (typical of 8th Century prophets) and to his being banished and persecuted (the fate of many prophets from Elijah to Jeremiah). All of this his religious and social critique, was driven by the resounding claim, typical of classical prophets, "Thus says Yahweh." Hence, *viewed* with the benefit of hindsight, Amos is a typical prophet to a great extent.

On the other hand, Amos did not regard himself as a typical prophet by the standards of the day (7:14), distancing himself from professional court prophets. Furthermore, Amos' denunciation is almost absolute, seeing no hope for Israel. Even the glimmer of hope expressed in the final section of his book (9:11-15) is, according to Hayes, a later addition. Typical prophets usually hold out at least some hope for Israel.

In sum, Amos was untypical in his own day. He was not like the ecstatic prophets of earlier Israel and ANE, nor a court prophet like Nathan, nor a miracle worker like Elijah and Elisha. He was untypical in his day, but his enormous influence on the prophetic tradition justifies viewing him as typical to later generations.

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MARKING CRITERIA

Examine Amos' teaching on the future of Israel.

1. *Day of the Lord not one of vindication and triumph but of unmitigated disaster*
 - *Graphic imagery used to describe it.*
 - *Inescapable and inevitable.*
 - *Nobody spared.*
2. *Reference to war, invasion and deportation 'beyond Damascus'.*
3. *Wholesale death and destruction.*
 - *Fire.*
 - *Plague.*
 - *Warfare.*
4. *Collapse of the monarchy and humiliation of royal family.*
5. *Destruction of sanctuaries.*
6. *Loss of contact with God and a spiritual famine.*

7. *Possible slight glimmer of hope.*
 - *If Israel turns back to God, perhaps some might survive.*
 - *But is the oracle in Amos 3:12 to be understood positively or negatively?*
8. *Final oracles speak of restoration but are they an exilic addition?*

(30 marks)
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Examine Amos' teaching on the future of Israel.

Amos predicted: doom not only for foreign nations (Amos 1:1-2:5) but for Judah and Israel (Amos 2:6-5:17); that the Day of the Lord would bring doom rather than blessing (Amos 5:18-25); and five visions of the doom that God would inflict (Amos 7:1 - 9:10). Even the hopeful conclusion to the book is restoration only after the experience of doom (Amos 9:11-15) and may well be a post-exilic addition (cf Hayes).

In Amos' day, Many of Israel's elite assumed their prosperity was proof that Yahweh was pleased with them. **It was a small step from the legitimate belief that Israel's covenant obedience led to being wealthy and comfortable, to believing the exact opposite: that being wealthy and comfortable proved Israel's covenant obedience.** Hence, Amos' teaching directly contradicted widespread expectation of Israel's wealthiest citizens.

Secondly, Bright points out that Amos' teaching on Israel's future coincides with the curses of the covenant (Lev 26, Dt 28). Amos 4:8 talks of famine similarly to Lev 26:26, Amos 4:9 talks of pestilence similarly to Dt 28:22 and Amos 4:10 talks of the sword similarly to Lev 26:25. Hence, Amos' teaching about the future is in line with mainstream covenant teaching.

Thirdly, the future Amos predicts is violent and implies an invader (Am 3:11). He describes some women as "cows of Bashan" (Am 4:1-3). According to Hayes, cow was a complementary term for a wealthy woman. As these cows were used for meat, Amos implies that these people will be butchered or sold for their flesh. Hence, Amos teaches a future of military defeat, slaughter and captivity.

Fourthly, Amos envisions utter devastation: Locusts, fire, destruction. His fourth vision is a bowl of fruit is so ripe that it is about to rot, just as Israel had (8:1-3). Israel is thus seen to be ripe, i.e., very close to becoming mouldy, symbolising they are morally rotting and will soon disintegrate as a people. Hence, Amos teaches a future in which not even Israel's wealthiest will escape destruction.

Finally, Amos predicts that the monarchy will collapse, that sanctuaries will be destroyed, and that there will be a spiritual famine throughout the land. Hence, Amos ultimately holds little or even no hope that Israel even has a future.

[30 Marks]

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MARKING CRITERIA

'Amos was right in his predictions of Israel's future.' How far do you agree?

Correct:

1. *Right as the broad principles are valid for all time.*
 - *The Belief that God punishes sin.*
 - *The belief that corruption and injustice end in disaster for perpetrators and victims.*
2. *The dynasty ended when Jeroboam II's son was assassinated soon after his accession.*
3. *From 746 BCE Israel in continual turmoil.*
4. *Fall of Samaria and end of Northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 BCE.*
5. *Assyrian deportation policy meant that the Northern Kingdom 'disappeared'.*
6. *If the glimmers of hope and the final oracles come from Amos, then they too are correct.*
 - *Some may have escaped to Judah.*
 - *Descendants of some of those deported to Babylon may have joined those deported later from Judah to Babylon.*

Not correct:

1. *Too negative as it is based on a limited view of God.*
2. *The troubles did not begin until long after the likely date for Amos' prophetic ministry.*
3. *Jeroboam II's reign was a 'golden age' from an economic and international relations viewpoint.*
4. *Jeroboam II and probably his wife also died peacefully.*
5. *The optimistic oracles were not spoken by Amos but come from a later age so are irrelevant to this debate.*

(15 marks)

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'Amos was right in his predictions of Israel's future.' How far do you agree?

Amos predicted that the next generation would die by the sword, the land be parcelled out, and the survivors exiled (7:17). He prophesied in 746 B.C.E and the Assyrian invasion culminates in 722 when they killed many Israelites and exiled the survivors. *Hence, in historical terms Amos was right in predicting the end of Israel by the sword (9:1).*

Bright implied that Amos was right in a timeless sense, that God will judge sin and that evildoers face the consequences of their own actions. This view is echoed throughout later Judeo-Christian scriptures. *Hence Amos appears to be right in predicting the future in very general covenantal terms.*

Amos may also have predicted Israel's future wrongly. Firstly, the nation enjoyed relative peace and prosperity until many years after Amos' time, not the impending doom Amos relentlessly predicted. King Jeroboam II died peacefully in his sleep (2 Kings 14:29) and not by the sword as Amos had predicted (Amos 7:11). *Hence Amos' predictions were wrong.*

Secondly, the change of tone after prophecies of complete destruction (see 9:8f) is sudden and suspicious and may well be the work of later editors keen to make the book seem more accurate. *Hence, his predictions of the future may have been partially fabricated.*

In sum, we can indeed agree with the claim that Amos was right but only tentatively and with caution.

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MARKING CRITERIA

Examine the criticisms made by Amos of the social and religious practices of the Israelites.

Social

1. *Oppression of the poor by the rich – enslavement, eviction, essential clothing taken in pledge.*
2. *The self-indulgent lifestyle of men and women – the number of houses, ivory-inlaid furniture, drinking, eating the best meat, etc.*
3. *Perversion of justice.*
4. *Dishonesty of merchants.*

Religious

1. *Criticism of Israel's beliefs about the covenant relationship.*
 - *It is unconditional – God will always protect Israel, irrespective of behaviour.*
 - *Israel's continuing prosperity is a sign of God's approval and will be guaranteed by regular sacrifice and observance of festivals.*
 - *The Day of the Lord will be one of triumph and glory for the Israelites- God will overthrow their enemies.*
2. *Criticisms of the abuses carried out at Bethel and Gilgal.*
 - *Cultic prostitution (depending on the interpretation of 2:7).*
 - *Sleeping on cloaks taken in pledge and drinking wine taken as fines.*
3. *Criticism of hypocrisy seen in longing for the Sabbath and New Moon to be over in order to return to dishonest practices.*
4. *Idolatry and syncretism.*

*Maximum of Level 5 if only social or religious practices examined.
(30 marks)*

JAN 2013

Examine the criticisms made by Amos of the social and religious practices of the Israelites.

Amos identified a dichotomy between the social and religious practices in mid 8th Century BCE Israel. This was at odds with the covenant requirements of loyalty both to Yahweh and to one's neighbour. Peace and prosperity led many of Israel's elite to assume their prosperity was proof that Yahweh was pleased with them. **It was a small step from the legitimate belief that Israel's covenant obedience led to being wealthy and comfortable, to believing the exact opposite: that being wealthy and comfortable proved Israel's covenant obedience.** It enabled the elites to indulge in excessive luxury (ivory furniture, fine dining, multiple properties) whilst neglecting the needs of the poor. *Hence Amos criticised the assumption of privilege as a breach of covenant which invited the covenantal punishment (cf. Dt 27-28).*

For Amos, Yahweh's anger burned at the widespread social injustice that included economic injustice (2:6-7), judicial corruption (5:10-15) and immorality (5:21) to one's covenant partners. Not only did the elite ignore the poor, but they mistreated the poor to get wealthier. As Stewart claims, "the crimes Amos identifies are those the Sinai Covenant defines as crimes (e.g., oppression of the poor, denial of inheritance rights, failure to observe sabbatical or jubilee.)" *Hence Amos criticised social practices as religious crimes.*

Worse still, the wealthy used their ill-gotten gains in their worship of Yahweh (2:8). For this reason, Yahweh hates and despises festivals and solemn assemblies (5:21ff) This is hardly surprising, since grain merchants, for example, wanted to hurry through cultic requirements such as New Moon festivals and Sabbath observance, so they can return to their dishonest practices (Am 8:5). *Amos thus taught that immorality poisoned religious practices.*

In sum, since the covenant embraces all life, and ethical monotheism is based upon worship of one God over one creation, social and religious practices cannot be mutually separate. Amos taught that "the obligations of the covenant could be discharged by cultic activity alone" (Bright). When religious practice is built upon human cruelty rather than covenant morality, that religion is no longer Yahwism.

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MARKING CRITERIA

'Amos' teaching about social justice was the most important part of his message.'
Assess this view.

Agree:

1. *Social justice at the heart of the Mosaic covenant.*
2. *Six of the Ten Commandments and the vast majority of laws in the Book of the Covenant were concerned with right relationships with other people.*
3. *Without social justice, sacrifice and other rituals were hypocritical and meaningless.*
4. *'I hate, I despise your feasts... But let justice roll down like waters...'* (Amos 5:21, 24.)

Other views:

1. *The first three of the Ten Commandments were the foundation of the covenant and all the rest of Israel's laws.*
2. *Without meaningful worship of God alone, everything else would fall apart.*
3. *Other aspects of his message were equally important, e.g., his warnings of imminent disaster and his teaching on what the Day of the Lord would actually be like.*
4. *Amos' teaching on the nature of God was more important.*

(15 marks)

JAN 2013

'Amos' teaching about social justice was the most important part of his message.'
Assess this view.

Amos was above all, a prophet of the covenant. This covenant integrated relationship with God and relationship with neighbour, to such an extent it is difficult to separate the two.

Whilst six out of the ten commandments (Ex 20:1-17) refer explicitly to inter-personal relationships and justice, even the other 4 (Sabbath, blasphemy, idolatry and exclusive monotheism) entail social justice. This is demonstrated by looking at blasphemy (seemingly a religious rather than social command) but which refers to claiming divine sanction for endorsing human injustice (Barth). This is precisely what angers Amos – since his contemporaries' religious practices insulted God because it based on social injustice. Without social justice, worshipping this God is pointless (5:21, 24).

Against this view, the first three commandments (Ex 20: 3-7) relate exclusively to Yahweh and form the basis of all that follows. Devotion to Yahweh thus becomes the underlying motive for social justice. Worshipping this God properly (in accordance with the covenant) exposes Israelites to his true nature. Amos' teaching about the nature of God, as Lord of creation, of nations and of relationship, provide a more enduring message than his particular message about social justice in 8th century Palestine.

Ultimately, however, social justice may be seen as the thermometer of genuine worship and the means of building hope for the future. It underlies everything Amos has to say. Bright rightly summarises Amos' message as "a devastating attack on the social evils of the day, particularly on the heartlessness and dishonesty with which the rich had ground down the poor."

Examine Amos' teaching on the nature of God.

Note, this must be the Hebrew view of God.

God of Nature

1. *Lord of creation – natural disasters sent by God; the short poems.*

God of Nations

1. *Significance of title 'God of hosts'.*
2. *behind the migrations of the Philistines and Syrians as well as the Israelites; responsible for invasion about to engulf Israel.*
3. *Judge of all the nations – will punish wrongdoing.*
4. *Initiated special and personal relationship with Israelites – delivered them from Egypt.*

God is Relationship

1. *Covenant is a key theme throughout Amos*
2. *Demands loyalty.*
3. *Holiness and transcendence of God.*
4. *Will also punish Israel, though reluctantly – 'warnings' had been given. This is part of a covenant God, who maintains concern for justice.*
5. *Merciful nature – possible hints of remnant, attempts to make Israel repent, restoration of Israel (if genuinely Amos).*
6. *Concerns for social justice and religious sincerity.*

(30 marks)

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Examine Amos' teaching on the nature of God.

The most obvious trait of Amos' God is that he executes judgement. He pronounced judgement for foreign nations (Amos 1:1-2:5), judgement upon Judah and Israel (Amos 2:6-5:17), that the Day of the Lord would be a day of judgement rather than blessing (Amos 5:18-25), and five visions of the judgement that God would inflict (Amos 7:1 - 9:10). Even the hopeful conclusion to the book is restoration only after the experience of judgement (Amos 9:11-15) and may well be a post-exilic addition (cf Hayes). However, divine judgement also expresses three other character traits.

Firstly, Amos teaches that Yahweh is faithful in covenant relationship. Judgment is executed reluctantly, and after multiple warning, as part of the covenant. Yahweh expects Israel to show covenant loyalty to him, to fellow Israelites and to foreign nations (1:1-2:4). Further, Yahweh has a concern not simply for correct If genuinely written by Amos, the message of hope (9:11-15) reveals divine mercy.

Secondly, for Amos Yahweh is not only God of Israel (4:12; 9:15) but sovereign of nations (1:3-2:3), executing judgement over them, especially for war crimes. He is 'LORD of hosts' (3:13), a title suggesting that he is Lord not only of Israel's army, but of all armies. He can thus judge Israel with a foreign sword (9:1). Most nations defeated by a powerful enemy, would believe their deity – unable to save them – had also been defeated. According to Perry, later generations schooled in Amos' teaching would "see the catastrophe of 722 as Yahweh's justice rather than Yahweh's defeat".

Thirdly, Amos teaches that Yahweh is Lord of creation. The hymn fragments (4:13; 5:8; 9:5-6) reveal he is creator and sustainer of the world. He thus has control over all territories as well as their populations. 'His very voice withers vegetation' and 'deposes kings' (Stewart). This is a holy and transcendent God, the same God who made the covenant centuries earlier. Amos' God is the same God whose Lordship over creation enabled him to deliver Israel from the hands of the Egyptian army.

In Sum, Amos teaches Yahweh is a God of justice and faithfulness, and lord of nations and of all creation.

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MARKING CRITERIA

'Amos was completely right in his views on the nature of God.'
How far do you agree?

Agree

1. *Transcendence/holiness of God and belief in him as ultimate source of existence key belief of many religions.*
2. *Ethical demands of God resonate with 21St century concerns.*
3. *Idea of God as merciful attractive to many religious believers.*

Disagree

1. *Idea of sending disasters on people, directing course of history etc. outdated.*
2. *Picture of vengeful, retributive God repellent.*
3. *Apparent hints of mercy an unjustified modern interpretation of Amos*
4. *5 and restoration oracles exilic.*

(15 marks)

JUN 2012
MARKING CRITERIA

'Amos was completely right in his views on the nature of God.'
How far do you agree?

It is impossible to decide if Amos was objectively right, since no one can claim a complete understanding of the nature of God.

Millions through history have belonged to Abrahamic faiths, for whom the ethical monotheism of Amos' prophecies ring true. These faiths were so influential that the centrality of justice and mercy, key to Amos, have largely shaped the ethical and legal systems of western societies and thus seem 'right'. Even in a post-Christendom age, Liberation Theologians find Amos' demand for social justice consistent with a modern progressive drive for global justice, and therefore, 'right'.

On the other hand, the idea that God would inflict disaster and suffering on such a massive scale (e.g. 9:1) may be seen as repulsive. This God of judgement who commits genocide (of all Israel, cf 3:2a) is consistent with what Richard Dawkins described as a jealous, ethnic cleansing, divine bully on a cosmic scale. Any hint of mercy (9:11-15), regardless of whether it was expressed by Amos himself, looks like a modern gloss, an attempt to sweeten the bitterness of an angry God. It hardly seems 'right'.

However, Amos never intended to offer a complete picture of God. (Only the canon as a whole could claim this). His view of God was perspectival, shaped by circumstance and frustration. His experience of the nature of God (though incomplete) was completely right. Judgement was the primary feature to surface in a context of assumed privilege, exploitation of the poor, and legal corruption. We may thus fully agree with the statement, if we accept Amos' portrait of God as context-specific rather than timeless.

(15 marks)