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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

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The prophets - Amos, Hosea and Micah, 1954.



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### THREE PROPHETS

Amos, Hosea, and Micah

January 3, 1954

My dear friends, centuries ago there arose among the people of Israel in Palestine a group of men who had a message for their people and for mankind, a message which came to make of Israel in the course of time a separate and distinct people everywhere for nearly 3000 years. These men were not unaware of the novelty of their message and of its revolutionary nature. They spoke of a new revelation which they were bringing to mankind, a new heaven and a new earth, as it were. They foresaw that they were thrusting a unique mission upon their people which was as yet unprepared for it, and they were thrusting upon it also the lowly ordeal of a spiritual leadership which was to set them at war with the rest of the world. These men had no choice in uttering their message and they gave their people no choice in accepting it. The burden, some great spiritual compulsion, as it were, was theirs, and that same burden of a spiritual compulsion came to abide with their people through long centuries and through many strange vicissitudes of fortune. By that message of these men the world came to be profoundly agitated and the spirit of man was quickened to new adventures in faith and in social aspiration.

These men were the prophets, the teachers of Judaism, a challenging and a differing faith. In later times and in other settings, these basic ideas of the prophets gave impulse and substance both to Christianity and to Islam. These men and their successors fashioned a way of life for their people which like some perceptible ocean current has flown steadily and discernibly through the great waters of humanity.

How prophecy came to Israel and how the idea of ethical monotheism first came to Israel is a problem one with the problem of how philosophy and art, for example, came to the Greeks; or how other distinctions and excellencies came to other peoples. Much, of course, can be explained by tracing back through the mists of the unrolling years the lineage, as it were, of ideas and endowments. Much more always remains



unexplained - the true origin of ideas, of new ideas, of new insights at each successive stage in the development of mankind. Some will always remain an unsolved mystery.

There was a pleasant fantasy sometime ago among certain Biblical scholars to trace Hebrew monotheism to the monotony, to the bland monotony of the desert topography where our people lived for countless generations and centuries, from that monotony of the landscape. Somehow the idea of spiritual monotheism came to them. Of course that was a fantastic and somewhat ridiculous notion, but for a time it was very popular with certain scholars of the Bible. More recently, in keeping with the general trend towards interpreting all events on the basis of some historical materialism, it has been maintained by some that this monotheism came to Israel as a by-product of their political and economic imperialism which they sought to establish in the world. But unlike all the other peoples of antiquity - the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans - Israel never built an empire. Its territory at best and in its greatest period of expansion didn't exceed much more than the territory between Damascus in the north and Edom in the south of Israel - a relatively small piece of territory.

Now it is one of the unsolved mysteries of history just as I said these special genius in other fields which other peoples came to evidence in their history. The classic age of these prophets is between the eighth and the sixth centuries before the common era - about 2700 years ago - 2600 years ago, almost at the very dawn of the beginning of the great civilization of mankind, although some of the prophets whose teachings we have not in writing, like Elijah, lived in the ninth century before the common era, or Nathan, in the tenth century before the common era. But the so-called literary prophets, that is those whose preachings and writings we have in written form in the Bible, those 15 prophets - the three major prophets, major because their prophecies are bulkier, not because they are more important: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and the 12 so-called minor prophets, not because they were of lesser



significance, but because their books are smaller. The Hebrew does not know of major and minor prophets; the Hebrew calls the 12 minor prophets "the (Hebrew) twelve"- Hosea, Job, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; these twelve and the three others, the fifteen, are those who left their teachings in our Bible; they are the literary prophets, and they hailed from those two centuries - the eighth through the sixth century before the common era.

They did not speak of themselves as creators of the ideas which they were giving to mankind and to Israel or of innovators. Rather they spoke of their new revelations as renewed revelations. They were re-emphasizing the revelations which had come earlier at the time of the exodus to the great Moses, and even before his time to Abraham, centuries before the exodus. These prophets were aware that at a certain time in the dim past of their peoples' experience a great new insight had come to their spiritual leaders, to Moses, to Abraham, by means of which a sort of a covenant had been established between the people of Israel and their God - a covenant with Abraham, a covenant with Moses at Mount Sinai and that certain commitments were undertaken by the people of Israel in view of this covenant, and they also became convinced that in their day the people, the Jewish people, was faithless to that covenant, was not living up to the terms of that what you might call spiritual agreement which had been reached between them and their God. These prophets lived at a time, most of them, certainly the three of which we will speak this morning, lived at a time of considerable prosperity, enjoyed both by the kingdom of Israel in the north and the kingdom of Judea in the south, because by the time of these prophets, there was no longer a united Israel. In 933 the United Kingdom, as a result of a civil war, broke into two halves, the kingdom of the north, with its capital in Samaria, and its sacred shrine at Bethel, and the kingdom of the south, the kingdom of Judea, with its capital and its temple in Jerusalem. Both both of these countries in the eighth century were enjoying great prosperity as a result of considerable trade and commercial development and also as a result of long, peaceful reigns, in the north under Jeroboam II and in



the south under King Uzziah. But this prosperity, rather unprecedented in the history of Israel because they were always more or less a relatively poor farming folk, this prosperity had brought to the country also certain grave evils; classes had developed in Israel, the rich, the powerful at the top; the poor, the landless, the exploited at the bottom. Grave injustice, vice, sin, corruption, and the pure monotheistic faith of the people had become adulterated, were being blended with, syncretistically blended with the religions of the peoples about them - the Canaanites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, their many religious superstitions, their Baalim, their licentious ritual practices connected with their religion, so that there was religious faithlessness, social injustice, moral corruption rampant in their day, and these prophets rose in indignation warning the people of the evil consequences of what is taking place and summoning them to repentance, to restoration, to the pure faith and to the pure code of ethics.

This basically was the message and the mission of these prophets. There was a covenant which was being violated. The covenant said, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." They were having other Gods, along with Jehovah, or Yahveh. They were accepting and adopting all the superstitions of the people about them - magic and astrology and necromancy and all the indecent practices connected with the worship of the Baalim and the Astartes of the near east. Even in the Temple of Solomon itself there had been set up images to the sun god and vessels to bow. The people had forgotten that inherent in this covenant was a pledge to serve God not through sacrifices but through a moral life. All the ancient peoples never connected their religion with morality; their religion consisted in offering gifts and sacrifices to the deities in order to appease them and they will do them no harm. Religion was a matter of cult, of ritual, of sacrifices, not of doing justice and of loving mercy and of walking humbly with God. Judaism preached that the essence of religion is ethics and that the people in the days of Amos, Hosea, and Micah were quickly forgetting, they were thronging the courts of the Temple, bringing offerings and sacrifices,



rivers of oil which God did not demand of them. They were oppressing the poor, they were "grinding" the faces of the poor, as one of the prophets put it. They were selling the poor for a pair of shoes because of their inability to pay their debts; selling them into slavery. Against these evils and this massive faithlessness of the people the prophets rose in their indignation.

Amos was perhaps the first of these prophets. He was himself by profession a shepherd, a herdsman, a dresser of sycamore trees. It is interesting to know that the greatest religious leaders of our people from Moses down were not professional religionists. There was a school of professional religionists - they were the priests; their duty was to attend to the sanctuary, the sacrifices, and all its apparatus. But these prophets of Israel, and later on the rabbis of Israel, were laymen, and some of them of the most humble pursuits. Moses was a shepherd, Amos was a shepherd. Among the great rabbis - Hillel and Akiba and Hananiah and Joshua and many, many others - were artisans, cobblers, blacksmiths, tailors, bakers, charcoal burners. Judaism is a religion produced by laymen of great vision and deep insight, not by professional priesthood.

Amos was born not far from Jerusalem in the south in the city of Tekoa. His prophetic ministry, the best judgment today is, falls in the years between 765 and 750 during the reign of King Jeroboam II in the north. At one moment in his life Amos received what is called technically a "call"; he was "called." We cannot explain what this experience in the spiritual life of a human being is due to. Here is a man who was pursuing his trade as shepherd, at home, with his family, integrated in the life of his community and suddenly he receives a "call," seemingly from nowhere, actually from everywhere, from the depths of his being which tears him loose, as it were, from his profession, from his environment, from his community, and sends him out into the world to preach an idea, a message, a thought which had come to him, how he himself did not know; but it was absolutely irresistible as far as he was concerned. As one of the prophets put it, "the word of God was like a burning fire within my bosom."



I tried to hold it in and I couldn't." "The hand of God," as another prophet put it, "was heavy upon me." And so Amos leaves his home, leaves the kingdom of Judea, goes north to Samaria, the capital, to Bethel, the place of the great Shrine of the kingdom of the north, and he begins to preach the truth which had come to him, with inspiration, reflection, through revelation - what are these words to us; we can't define them accurately; we can only            them as a tremendous fact, as a reality, in the life of great men throughout history. And in the north Amos finds pagan worship rampant, social injustice and moral corruption as a result of the great prosperity and the increase of wealth which had come to the people, the rich exploiting, the poor in the depths of misery. And he preaches, anywhere, everywhere, whenever he can get a group of people around him, near the shrine, in the streets, in the market place; he attracts people to him, talks to them, with passion, with fervor; he denounces all the evils which he sees, spares nobody, from king through noblemen, to priest, to the false prophets, to the common people, they spare nobody, these prophets; they are afraid of nobody. And of course they come to be terribly hated and persecuted by those whom he attacks. The prophet is always a man of strife and a man of contention. Amos was bitterly attacked by Amaziah, the high priest of Bethel, the man who represented privilege, hierarchy, authority, turned with hatred against Amos, and Amos is finally killed. It was the fate of quite a number of the prophets.

Amos warned the people not to misinterpret their prosperity. There are gathering storms. That prosperity was not based upon a sound and just social life. It was based on exploitation and wickedness. He warned the people that doom would overtake them, called upon them to repent; if they will repent, he promises a great golden day of happiness for the people.

The whole book of Amos is made up just of nine short chapters, possibly the most revolutionary nine chapters ever penned by any religious leader of mankind. Let me have Amos speak for himself, for nothing we can say about him, about his prophecies are as powerful, can be as powerful as the prophecies themselves. This is from the



second chapter of Amos (2. 4-16) ... (6. 1-8)

And of course this threat of destruction to the country in the name of God is treason, and Amaziah, the high Priest, quickly siezes upon this fact to get rid of this disturber, this agitator, and so we read in chapter 7 of Amos (7.10-17)...

This same Amos, this stern preacher of justice, this man who warned the people of the doom that was coming, prayerfully hoped that the people would repent in their ways, to restore to the favor of God, to be healed, and he paints a picture in the closing chapter of his book what will happen when the good day comes, and all the prophets hoped for the good day. (Amos 9.11-15).

I wish I had more time to read from Amos, but we must pass on to Hosea. I hope I am giving you a taste of these prophets so that you will go home and read them yourselves; read them, perhaps, with a good commentary, because a good commentary will illumine some of the rather obscure passages in these prophets, remembering that this literature is 2700 years old.

Hosea addressed himself to the same themes that Amos did, but with a greater tenderness and a greater love. Hosea was a - lived a little later than Amos, in fact he lived during the time when the kingdom of Israel was finally destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 before the common era. He saw that magnificent country with all its wealth go down into ruin and destruction, even as Amos prophesied, and he hoped to avert the same fate for the kingdom of Judah in the south.

Hosea had a tragic experience in his life which colored his preaching. One's experiences in life, to a sensitive man at least, inevitably determined the quality of one's utterances, of one's general attitudes towards life. Hosea had married the woman whom he loved, Gomer, and Gomer proved faithless to him, and she left him. Some years thereafter Hosea found that Gomer had been sold into slavery after a life of degradation, and out of his great love for Gomer, he went and redeemed her from slavery, brought her back to his home. And out of that personal tragedy, out of that experience came to Hosea a profound insight. He was aware of another faithlessness



to another pledged covenant: the faithlessness of Israel to God. God had loved Israel, God had taken Israel out of Egypt, God had brought Israel into the land of Canaan, and Israel had proven faithless. God will punish Israel, but will that punishment be forever? Will not God's great love forgive as Hosea's great love was great enough to forgive?

And so the prophecies of Hosea are steeped in a profound sympathy, in a great compassion. He is aware of the sins of the people. I read from chapter 7 in Hosea (4.1-3, 7)...And yet the great of Hosea makes itself heard in his message. I read from chapter 11 (11.1-4 and 7-9)...With Hosea, too, there comes the great vision of the end of days, of the great good day that would come, the day of reconciliation between God and Israel. And I read from the second chapter of Hosea: (2.18-25).

But I must pass on to Micah, who in a way combines the sternness of Amos with the love and compassion of Hosea. Micah was a younger contemporary of Hosea, but he too addressed himself to the same situation which they all saw with clear vision. He denounced bitterly the evils of the day. From chapter 3 (3.1-8)...To the prophet Micah we owe the greatest definition of religion that was ever given to mankind. It sums up, in a way, what the prophets conceived to be true religion. I read from the sixth chapter: (6.6-8)...That is religion. And I conclude by reading Micah's great hope for the future. He too had the vision of (Hebrew)..., "the end of days." And there will be universal peace and justice established for Israel, for mankind, and Jerusalem will become the center of the world's spiritual life, and Israel the instrument of bringing it about, for even though they castigated their people and denounced them, violently, they loved their people, and saw in their people the covenanted people of God, the instrument of bringing to mankind the great truths of religion and morality. And so chapter 4 of Micah:(4.1-4).

Has this prophecy meaning for us today? Vision of universal peace, universal justice is still as relevant in our day as it was in his day, 2700 years ago. The prophets have been throughout these centuries the most contemporary preachers of



truth, of spiritual truth, of mankind. They have quickened every movement for social justice, brotherhood, peace in the world.

Well, I have given you these three great prophets in a way as Hillel gave the reply to the heathen who asked him to teach him the whole law while standing on one foot. He also said to him, "The rest is commentary. Go and study." There are the books. Read Amos and Hosea and Micah and the others, and Isaiah, and the great Isaiah of the exile, and Jeremiah, perhaps the greatest of all the prophets. Read them and study them. You will receive great elevation of spirit and great inspiration.





1) There arose - little band - a group of men who had a message for their people - man kind - which made Israel a distinct and separate people every where for nearly 3000 yrs.  
Not unaware of the novelty - revolutionary nature of their message they spoke of new revelations - a new heaven & new earth  
They foresaw that - thrusting a virgin messianic - as yet un-  
prepared - lonely ordeal of a leadership set them at naught  
no choice in obeying their message - gave them lift no  
Burden of a sp. compulsion on them - & it came to abide  
thru long centuries - & many strange reactions of -  
By it the world came to be profoundly agitated & the  
Spirit of man was goaded to new adventure  
in faith & social aspiration.

2) There were ~~few~~ over the teaching of Judas - a challenger and  
different faith.

In later times and other religions - these basic ideas gave  
impulse and substance to Christianity & Islam.

These prophets and their successors forwarded a way of life  
for their people while at the perceptible ocean  
current has flowed & travelling and dramatically thru the  
great waters of humanity.



3/ How prophecy and monotheism came to Israel is one with the problem (2)  
of how phil - art - came to Greeks; other distinctive specialness to the  
much can be explained by tracing back the myths, the  
various centuries the images & ideas & endeavours  
much more always remains unexplained - the myths &  
new ideas & insight - at each successive stage - unsolved mysteries  
Pleasant fantasy - traced monotheism - blind monsters  
- equally inspiring conceit - materialistic determinism  
seen in Mono-a by-product of phil. & Econ. imperialism  
Valley Babylon: Israel never built an Empire!

4/ Classical Age of Prophecy 8-6 c. - also Eliphaz - 9c. - Hebrew 10c.  
These prophets did not think of as Creators - innovators  
aware of a long tradition - dating back to time of Exodus  
& Moses 14-15c. - And of Abraham centuries before the  
Exodus - luxury

Covenants - at with Abraham - also at  Sinai - long revers of Israel  
classes of people - Israel 5c. Commercial civilization - and prophecy of Jeremiah II - Judah  
of. These covenants - were not being lived up to - Faithful to 3/11

to the mission and destiny - In what way rights of man  
① the Lord - 2, 2, 10c. Syncretism - "Baalim" - cross  
licentious rituals - sexual prohibition - human sacrifice  
Sophistication - magic - astrology - hermeneutics  
Temple Idols - art - houses - to murder - schools - verses of the Lord



② Moral Conduct - way to world / ad - Sacrifices - Had adapted that practice - no relation bet. Religion & morality

③ Justice - w/ to oppress - Rich were oppressing the poor  
"Grinding" - selling poor for a pair of shoes"

④

6. Amos - herdsman - (non-professional) - dress, & manner like  
Except for priests - an leader came from all walks of life  
- occas. from humblst - Mess - shepherd -

Rubens - Huld - Akiba - Hammer - Joshua - artisan, cloth,  
Alex Smith - tailor - baker - potter - charcoal burner - Regis, Denton,  
Born in Telaga - Judea - Call to North (765-750) - Regis, Denton,  
Lived in North - (division 933) - Call - X leaves home -  
goes to Samaria - Bethel - (Jerusalem had burnt)

Pagan worship rampant -

Social injustice moral corruption - ~~prosperity~~ great vicious in  
wealth - exploiting rich - misery, poor -

Preached - denounced - attacked by Amaziah - High Priest,

Bethel - Killed - Fake & Puppets - Mess of Contradictions

His Message - there is Covenant - dishonored - God will punish -  
- no special priests - God, all nations - ~~just as other nations were~~

① Ritual & Sacrifices will not save them - only Justice  
Let them not be regarded by their present prosperity



There are gathering storms - let them talk warning - dooms (4)  
will overtake their values

If they will repent - a <sup>few</sup> older age will come - Repentance

Only 9 short chapter - (found <sup>3rd</sup> among 12 minor prophets) - but  
the most revolutionary ideas in ancient world.

Read ① 2.4-16 (omit 7b-8)  
6.1-8

~~This week~~  
His confrontation with High Priest Amaziah (7.12-17)

After punishment & repentance - (9.11-15)

7/. Hosea - Tender - from love more > justice  
- too - found wide-spread idolatry - the broken covenant  
Via - in tearing his - in Judean Jerusalem -

He saw fall / Israel - (722) Assyrians - afraid

that a similar fate - (750-720)

# Unhappy personal experience - Homer - faithless - Beaverbrook

- faithless to another people's covenant - Israel & God - light  
captivity

branch - captivity - it will justify - for God is true - Heed love Israel

Final - repentance - restoration

Read ~~4.1-6~~ 4.1-6.7 and yet  
11.1-4 and 7-9

Final ~~2.1-3~~ 2.18-25



8/ Micah (739-693) - Born in Judah - a young contemporary  
of Hosea - combines ethical power; Amos - Compassion, Hosea

- The corruption which wealth brings in to Israel - <sup>judges it</sup> - <sup>corrupt</sup> <sup>after</sup> <sup>had</sup> - <sup>to</sup> <sup>have</sup> <sup>after</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>fact</sup> -
- The injustice done to the poor & weak - <sup>plus</sup>
- The violent persecution & follow
- The hope for future -

~~Read 2.1-3~~

Read 3.1-12.

6.1-8

True Religion

Great Hope for Israel - I prophesied -

P/N 13 X 13 13

- Israel is still not converted  
and Jerusalem not spiritual center  
the world - and a great, good day  
is coming.

4.1-4