Although Amos' view of Israel's future was undeniably bleak, the "final form" of his book is not completely negative in its outlook. As is well known, it ends with a brief but vivid portrayal of a restored nation exercising hegemony over the surrounding nations and enjoying extraordinary fruitfulness (9:11-15). Less spectacularly, the possibility is held out elsewhere that God will be "with" the nation, and that he will be gracious to "the remnant of Joseph" (5:14-15). Thus although impending doom is the book's predominant theme, its oracles of judgment are nonetheless interspersed with fleeting glimpses of a more positive future.

The purpose of this article is to look at one aspect of this future — namely, the depiction in Amos 3:9-6:14 of a remnant that survives the coming judgment. My reason for delimiting the text in this particular way is that it forms, I believe, a distinct section within the book. As I have argued elsewhere, 3:9-6:14 is structured as a palistrophe, consisting of a symmetrical arrangement of seven paired units about a central, unpaired unit. Nor is this structure merely decorative; on the contrary, it makes a vital contribution to the interpretation of these verses because the paired units are so-arranged as to mutually complement and illuminate each other. This means that each unit can be fully understood only through relating it to its palistrophic counterpart; and since this structuring will therefore be referred to several times in the following discussion, its main features are outlined in fig. 1.

The first passage to consider, then, is Amos 3:12 (unit Ax in fig. 1), in which the Israelites' "being rescued" (nšl in the niphāl) — presumably from the military catastrophe portended in vv. 11, 15 — is likened to the shepherd's "rescuing" (nšl in the hiphil) of a few scraps of a sheep from the mouth of a ravaging lion. Disaster is clearly the dominant motif here; but does the fact that a few scraps remain suggest that a remnant will survive the general destruction?
A PALISTROPHIC JUDGEMENT ORACLE (Amos 3:9-6:14)

A: Introductory Oracles (3:9-14)
   x: Israel Vis-a-vis the Foreign Nations (3:9-11)
   y: An Image of Ruin (3:12)
   z: The Devastation of Israel (3:13-15)

B: Heartless Indolence in Samaria (4:1-3)

C: Rejection of Israel’s Cult (4:4-5)

D: The Final Judgement (4:6-12)

E: Lamentations for Israel (5:1-3)
   F: Seek Yahweh! (5:4-6)
   G: The Corruption of Justice (5:7, 10)
   H: Hymn to Yahweh (5:8-9)
   G’: The Corruption of Justice (5:11-13)
   F’: Seek Yahweh! (5:14-15)
   E’: Lamentations for Israel (5:16-17)

D’: The Final Judgement (5:18-20)

C’: Rejection of Israel’s Cult (5:21-7)

B’: Heartless Indolence in Samaria (6:1, 3-7)

A’: Concluding Oracles (6:2, 8-14)
   x’: Israel Vis-a-vis the Foreign Nations (6:2, 8)
   y’: An Image of Ruin (6:9-10)
   z’: The Devastation of Israel (6:11-14)

Figure 1