TEXTUAL PROBLEMS IN AMOS AND HOSEA

BY
ANDOR SZABÓ
Hencida, Hungary

PART ONE
A Prefatory Note

The aim of the present study is to sum up attempts at solutions of the most crucial problems I have had to face during my studies in Amos and Hosea.

There is a long series of outstanding monographs and commentaries published in the last two decades, which have shed new light upon these two prophets associated with the Kingdom in North Israel. Apart from a few exceptions I do not wish to recapitulate their findings or to criticize them. I want only to direct attention to passages in Amos and Hosea where I have suggestions differing from those of the studies to which I have referred.

My proposals are based on more than six years of study. Some of them are worked out in detail in my unpublished doctoral dissertation "Studies in the Book of Hosea", 1970 (in Hungarian). Again, in a one-volume commentary on the Bible for Ministers of the Reformed Church in Hungary, soon to appear, I have touched upon many of these problems together with the proposed solutions.

THE Prophet Amos

It is generally accepted that Amos was the earliest of the so-called

---

"writing prophets" in the canon of the Old Testament \(^2\). We have the only authentic explanation of his becoming a prophet in his own book and it is not an anthropological or psychological answer but a theological one: Yahweh took him from following the flock, and God himself said: "Go, prophesy to my people Israel" (vii 15). But what compelled him to become a writing prophet? (Let us leave on one side the fact that the construction of the book as we have it now may be attributed to the hands of his disciples and later prophetic circles in Judah.)

It would be a mistake to apply the system of Hegel and say that the prophetic movement gradually developed from the earlier prophets to the writing prophets and that Amos was the first of the latter. The facts are quite different. The greatest prophet of the previous era had been Elijah. Elisha received only two-thirds of Elijah's spirit (2 Kings. ii 9), the same proportion as the inheritance of the first-born son. So the beginning of the decline of the prophetic movement in the North is illustrated here. The Elisha stories are therefore more mythical and faint. And because the death of Elisha occurred in the time of the decline of Aram's power (2 Kings. xiii 14 ff.) in 800 B.C. we have to add some 40 years to reach the date of Amos whose activity is to be placed about 760 B.C. During those forty years the decline was hastened by violent factors too, as we shall see later. Not an historical evolution but a wonderful outpouring of the prophetic spirit after the decline of the prophetic movement in the North is to be seen in the activity of Amos, though it was personal, religious or political events that compelled him to put his prophecies into writing. To borrow an expression from the New Testament, God raised up a child from a stone. God had to call a herdsman, who was an outsider to the prophetic circles, and had to send him from Judah to the North with a new message; and he inspired him also to employ a new method, i.e. to put the message in writing. It cannot be explained by previous events. It was caused by a divine act of grace, and that opened a new epoch in the history of salvation in the Old Testament.

Amos said to Amaziah: "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son" (vii 14), and that consists of three factors, namely: 1. God made a new beginning with Amos; 2. Amos came from outside—that is to

\(^2\) M. Bič thinks so that Joel and Obadiah were earlier than Amos: Das Buch Amor; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1969, pp. 143,195.