

Background Notes on Classical Hebrew Prophets

- I. Ancient Israel split into two kingdoms- North (Israel) and South (Judah)-922 B.C.E.
 - A. Caused by political differences: North did not want to accept rule of new king; time period characterized by chaos and confusion.
 - B. *Question: What problems would this kind of political change cause for everyday people?*
 - C. Social and religious strife ensued.
 1. Many turned away from traditional religious practices and the law.
 2. Widespread lack of concern and care for the needy: poor, widows, orphans, etc.
 3. *Question: How would neglecting the needy affect society?*
- II. The prophets emerged as advocates for change/reform.
 - A. They challenged the people to turn back to their religion.
 - B. They chastised the people for social injustice, especially neglect of the needy.
 - C. They believed they were imparting the word of God.
 - D. Ancient Hebrew word for prophet is *nabi* (literally, "mouthpiece").
- III. Two prophets illustrate this particular type of advocacy.
 - A. Amos
 1. He came from the south and prophesied to the north.
 2. He was a shepherd and farmer and returned to his profession after delivering his prophetic message.



3. *Question: Amos came from the country and spoke to the city. Would this cause any difficulty for him?*

4. He accused the wealthy of neglecting the poor and needy.

5. He urged them to change their ways immediately or suffer dire consequences (attack from a foreign nation).

B. Jeremiah

1. He came from the south and spoke to the south.

2. He was a priest.

3. He charged the people with lack of justice and not defending the rights of the needy.

4. He suffered for his stance.

a. He was imprisoned and beaten.

b. He was thrown in a well and left to die.

5. *Question: Why do you think Jeremiah was punished by his own people for delivering his message?*

c. Both were advocates for social change and were ignored in their lifetime, but history proved them to be accurate.

