system) thought it was good because it was good for them, and none seemed to be conscious of the seriousness of the social changes taking place inside the nations. Of all those who had any part in fashioning national policies only the prophets seemed to be aware of the meaning of deep, underlying issues.

44. What part did the prophets play in the crisis?

Each of the four prophets we are to study was immersed in the life of which he was a part. Not one of them was a dreamer, with his eyes fixed on some far-off divine event. Each had made a study of his times—of the political forces at work, and of the moral issues involved—and each was perfectly sure he knew the secret by which the nations' security might be insured. Each believed profoundly that he was speaking the mind of Yahweh when he preached to one of the nations. Each was amazingly well informed on the subject of world conditions, and the message of each was directed at the nations and dealt with the crisis through which Israel and Judah were passing. None of them organized any "pressure group" and none held any political office, but each depended upon the power of preaching to correct the wrongs against which he inveighed. They were, in the best sense of the word, preachers of the gospel of Yahweh, and yet they were all laymen. There was not one professional religionist among them.

45. Were they political prophets?

They were men to whom all of life seemed sacred, to be lived under the eye and subject to the approval of God. They did not divide life into two compartments—sacred and secular. It was all of one piece and must be made satisfactory to God in every aspect. This was their fundamental message. Social standards, economic systems, religious rites, political rights, national policies, sacrifices, personal morals—all had to have the approval of God. It is highly significant that none of them dealt with the question of "personal religion."

46. Why did they not deal with personal religion?

Because religion to them was a national or racial matter and not an individual question. A careful study of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah reveals the fact that their messages were always delivered to the nation, or to individuals as members of the nation. They were concerned with saving the nation, content in the belief that the individual would be saved if the nation were saved. The sins of individuals and classes were always viewed as part of the national sinning, and individuals were rebuked for their sins not as individuals but as segments of the nation. What we think of as "personal religion" did not develop among the Hebrews until a hundred and fifty years later, under the teachings of Jeremiah.

47. Were they professional prophets?

Each of the eighth-century prophets was an individualist who had no connections with any professionally religious group. At least one of them (Amos) proudly disclaimed all connections with the professional prophets (7:14).

48. What does this mean?

Among the Hebrews there were those who were known as "sons of the prophets." By this it was not understood that they were physical descendants of prophets, but that they were members of a professionally prophetic group. They were, in a sense, fortunetellers; and the public believed they spoke for God and that they received their messages while in some ecstatic state (I Kings 11:25; II Kings 3:15; Ezekiel 1:3; 3:14; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1). At times, because of their emotional excitement, they were thought to be demented (Jeremiah 29:26). They made their living by their profession (I Samuel 9:7-8), and their custom of prophesying for pay had brought them into no small disrepute.

Between these professional prophets and the "true prophets" whose writings we find in the Old Testament, there was almost constant friction. It is highly important that the student keep in mind at all times the difference between the professional prophets and the true prophets who produced so large a portion of our Old Testament.

49. Who was Amos?

He was a poor man, without social importance, who earned a precarious living among the limestone hills southeast of Jerusalem, herding sheep (1:1; 7:14) and gathering wild figs in the lowlands which he prepared for the market as food for the very poor. He was, in every sense, a son of the people, and it is of very great significance that such a man should write the first complete book of the Bible. It is for this reason that the student should know something about his background.

50. What about Amos' background?

The fact that his father's name is not mentioned indicates that he did not belong to one of the landed families. Those who belonged to honorable lines were usually careful to identify themselves by their family names.

Amos was a man without prestige, political importance, wealth, schooling, or priestly connection. The sheep he tended were a peculiar breed whose wool was of the finest quality. The housewives of the region of Tekoa enjoyed a wide reputation for their homespun because of the superior quality of the wool they used (Proverbs 31:24). The shepherds themselves were the butt of much ridicule because of the bizarre appearance of the sheep they tended, which were almost naked of wool about the head and face.