101. Did the Bible begin then with a protest?

As we have already learned, there was other literature in existence at the time which finally found its way into the Bible; but the first book to be completed was the little book of prophecy by the humble shepherd of Tekoa. It was the protest of a poor countryman against the woeful wrongs under which the people were suffering at the hands of a political ring of money lords who were in control of the government.

Because the religious leaders allowed those wrongs to continue, he charged them with complicity in the crimes. Because the rich and noble classes participated in those evils, he charged them with being sinners. Because the nation was guilty of allowing such conditions, he predicted its downfall, declaring that God would never come to the rescue of a people who were not primarily concerned with the establishment of justice. "Let justice roll down . . . . like an ever-flowing stream," he shouted (5:24), and his cry has been echoed by crusaders for justice ever since that day.

102. Who was Hosea?

The second of the writing prophets of the eighth century B.C. and the only prophet from Israel whose writings are to be found in the Old Testament.

103. Who were the writing prophets?

There had been other prophets—true prophets such as Elijah and Elisha—who had appeared among the people and spoken in behalf of Yahweh, but we have no record of their sermons except that which was preserved for us in traditions and fragmentary records. With Amos, however, we come upon a new type of prophet—one who saw the value (perhaps under the force of necessity) of putting his message into writing that it might not die with him. There may have been other prophets who spoke out just as courageously at the same time, but of them we have no records. And the only reason why we know about Amos and his preaching is because he wrote his message down. In doing so he launched a precedent which has given us some of the greatest religious literature in existence.

104. When did Hosea preach?

A few years after Amos' appearance at Bethel, the exact date being unknown. It is believed, however, that his preaching career occurred during the closing days of the reign of Jeroboam II, and in the midst of the chaotic days that followed, down to about 736 B.C. Thus his ministry covered a considerable part of one of the painful periods of Hebrew history.

105. What was Hosea's background?

The fact that his father is mentioned (Hosea 1:1) would seem to

indicate that he was a member of a family of some social importance, perhaps one of the small landed gentry. There is no information as to how he earned his living, which suggests that he may have lived off the income of a modest rural estate. He seems to have been a prophet all his adult life, and yet he was connected with no professional group. He was reared inside the little kingdom of Israel, and when he preached he was speaking to his own people. He dealt with them much more sympathetically than did Amos, for the Tekoan shepherd was brusque and harsh, while Hosea was gentle and affectionate. Amos referred to the nation as Joseph (Amos 5:6, 15; 6:6), whereas Hosea used the intimate and affectionate name Ephraim no less than thirty-six times. It is a little singular that he makes no such passionate defense of the poor as Amos did; but he seems to have been fully aware of the state of the nation, the dangers that threatened from without, and to have had a definite political policy for the government which he urged with all the powers at his command.

106. What was the state of religion in Israel?

Both Israel and Judah were Hebrew kingdoms, of course, and there was no great difference in the racial stock. But after the division of the kingdom the two nations followed entirely different lines of religious development.

The primitive religions of the East all centered about the idea of increase, as we have noted, and religious worship was practiced as an effort to cajole the gods (Baalim) into providing abundant crops and an increase of the herds. Religion and economics were always very closely allied. This resulted in an emphasis on the sex motif, which became the theme of religious worship.

It was a common practice for the Baal worshipers to present their daughters to the shrines as "wives of the gods." There they served as prostitutes, hired out to worshipers, their earnings going to the support of the shrine. It would be a mistake to think of this as being the same as modern commercialized vice, however, for the practice was circumscribed by certain restrictions which prevented it from being mere promiscuity. It was surrounded by the sanction of religion, and bore no stigma in the minds of the ancients.

107. What effect did this have on the Hebrews?

While the Hebrews lived in the wilderness they were simple nomads, and Yahweh was their God. They thought of him as a storm god, a god of battles, and as a protector; but they did not think of him as an agricultural god because they themselves had no concern in agriculture.

When they moved out of the wilderness into the Land of Promise they faced the necessity of altering their whole way of life. Their living no longer depended upon good fortune in finding lush oases where