Among them the principles of the desert *mishpat* still prevailed, and to such a prophet as Amos the "modern ways" of the new commercial centers of Judah and Israel were indicative of a general dissolution of life. We must never forget this desert background as we listen to him preach.

61. Where did Amos begin preaching?

Most of the prophet's simple needs could be satisfied in the desert, but he was under the necessity of going to the northern and southern markets with wool and figs to exchange for those goods which the desert did not supply. Those trips took him to the Judean markets of Hebron, Jerusalem and Beersheba; but they also took him to the larger and better markets of Gilgal, Bethel, and Samaria in Israel. He may even have traveled as far as Damascus in Syria; but from his book we know that the one fateful experience which started him off as a writing prophet occurred at the shrine of Bethel.

62. What was that fateful experience?

Having gone to Bethel for business reasons and having visited the shrine whereat he proposed to worship Yahweh, he had been profoundly moved by the evils he found in the city and the utter indifference of the religious leaders. Seizing an opportune time during the festivities at the shrine, he had taken his position on the steps near to the altar and delivered a speech to the worshipers in which he lashed out at the iniquities of the day, not even sparing the royal court.

The religious festivals at Bethel were accompanied by much wine-drinking and other excesses, and the picture of this stern desert prophet in vigorous denunciation of the half-drunken throng is one of the most stirring scenes in the Old Testament.

Amaziah, the priest in charge of the shrine, expelled him because of his reference to the royal house, charging him with treason and driving him from the city. As a result of this experience he wrote down the gist of his message, together with an abbreviated account of his experience, and this written record is what we have in the Old Testament.

63. Did he do all his preaching in Bethel?

So far as we know, he did. Some scholars think he may have made several speeches and that his book contains the summary, but there is nothing to prove such a theory.

64. Do we have any other information about Amos?

Strange to say, there is no mention of the prophet elsewhere in the Old Testament. In the nine short chapters of his book we have all the information about him that the Scriptures give.

65. Did Amos understand his times?

As a shepherd deep in the hills of Judah, far removed from the busy

life of the cities, and remote from the changing civilization of the kingdom which was brought about by the rising tide of commercialism, he was in a position to get a perspective on life which those who lived in the midst of feverish activity were almost sure to miss. On his trips to the markets he traveled the crowded caravan routes and listened to the gossip of the world. In the trading centers he found men who could give him news from everywhere. His sharp eyes penetrated the gilded disguises of the new culture and saw suffering and wretchedness festering just under the surface. His book bears evidence of having been written by a close observer, a keen analyst, a careful thinker, and a man with an exalted sense of honor and justice. Above all, he was a man with an acute sense of God.

66. What weakness did he see?

1. He was sure that Israel had lost favor with Yahweh because injustices were allowed to go unrebuked and uncorrected.
2. He sensed some impending disaster and was convinced that Israel was utterly unprepared to stand up against it.
3. He saw that the strength of the nation was corroded away by its injustices and immoralities.
4. He believed that the false confidence which lulled the nation into a fatuous complacency was due to a popular religious doctrine generally called the "Day of Jehovah."
5. To Amos it was plain that the ill-founded optimism of the nation was a by-product of its false conceptions of God.

67. How had Israel lost the favor of Yahweh?

According to Hebrew belief the covenant of Sinai established a special partnership between Yahweh and the Hebrew nations. If the people kept the laws of Yahweh he was bound to protect them. It was of the utmost importance, then, that there should be a perfectly clear understanding of these laws.

The established priests taught Israel that the one sure way to keep the good will of Yahweh was to offer sacrifices on his altars according to the correct form, and to perform certain ceremonies in an acceptable fashion. Having performed those rites and ceremonies correctly, they believed Yahweh was under obligations to protect them against all foes. They had no thought that personal morals or social behavior had anything to do with the matter. And the fact that Jeroboam's reign had been attended by a brilliant prosperity seemed to add sanction to the priests' theory.

Amos, on the other hand, with his ideals of desert *mishpat,* believed that Yahweh was interested in moral behavior and social justice. To an orthodox Hebrew a man who did not offer sacrifices in the correct fashion was a traitor to his country, but to Amos one who worked injustices on his neighbor was a traitor. To him social immorality, not neglected altars, was high treason (2:6-8).