

4. Amos 760-750 B.C.

The book of Amos has 9 chapters. It is a Pre-Exilic Northern Kingdom prophecy.

Date and Author

The date and author of the book are both given by Amos himself. *The words of Amos* [his name means “burden-bearer”] *who was among the shepherders* [or sheep breeders] from *Tekoa* [a village about 10 miles (16 km) south of Jerusalem in Judah]. This is near the hill country of Bethlehem, where the shepherds were watching their flocks at the time of the birth of Jesus. He also described himself as a *grower of sycamore figs*, a typical tree of the Jordan Valley around the Dead Sea (remember Zaccheus in Luke 19:2f). Unique among the other prophets, he said, *I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet... The Lord said to me, “Go prophesy to My people Israel”* (7:14-15). He probably meant he was not a full-time prophet, like Elijah and Elisha or Isaiah and Jeremiah. Amos was a farmer, sent by God with a message to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Date Written: A contemporary of Jonah, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, in the mid-700s B.C.

Date of Amos’ Ministry: *In the days of Uzziah, king of Judah (790-740 B.C.), and in the days of Jeroboam II son of Joash, king of Israel (793-753 B.C.), two years before the earthquake (Zechariah 14:5).* So, about 755 B.C.

Background

Amos was a southerner from Judah, who ministered in Bethel, the chief center of idolatry, near the southern border of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Bethel and Dan were the two cities where Jeroboam I set up golden calves to be worshipped (1 Kings 12:28; 2 Kings 10:29). Amos’ message was one of judgment to Israel, though in the last chapter he tells us the Lord would preserve a remnant, holding out hope that God would restore this remnant and draw all nations to Himself.

At the time of this prophecy, commerce thrived (8:5), an upper class emerged (4:1-3), and expensive homes were built (3:15; 5:11; 6:4, 11). The rich enjoyed an indulgent lifestyle (6:1-6), while the poor became targets for legal and economic exploitation (2:6-7; 5:7, 10-13; 6:12; 8:4-6). Slavery for debt was easily accepted (2:6; 8:6). While prosperity was high, the standards of morality had sunk to a low ebb (2:7).

Like many of the prophets, Amos spoke of *the day of the Lord*. He saw it as a time when God would judge sin, even (or especially) in His own people (5:18-20). Another day would come, however, when David’s kingdom would be restored, and it would include both Jews and Gentiles (9:13-15).

Amos’ writing style is often rhetorical. He used short, uncomplicated sentences, and often asked questions and provided explanations. He also knew the power of repetition. He illustrated his points with figures of speech and lessons from nature.

Purpose

The purpose of the book of Amos is to tell the Northern Kingdom of Israel that their current opulent lifestyle, based in idolatry, pride and oppression of the poor, would not last. God would bring every act into judgment. People who have God's truth live with greater responsibility than those who live in darkness.

Outline

The Predictions of Amos, 1:3–2:16

The Messages of Amos, 3:1–6:14

The Visions of Amos, 7:1–9:15

Theme

Subject: The God who created everything and led Israel into the Land

Complement: is a God of judgment—Judgment is an attribute of God. Therefore, God must judge sin, especially the sin of His own people.

Key Passage

Amos 5:21-24, *I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

Commentary

The Predictions of Amos, 1:3–2:16

Verses 1-2, After establishing the date and himself as the author, Amos told Israel that *The Lord roars* [like a devouring lion] *from Zion and Jerusalem*. The reference to *Carmel* (meaning “garden land”) is probably an emphasis on the prosperity of Israel that would soon be destroyed.

Verses 1:1–2:8, Eight times, to emphasize the repetition of their sins, Amos used the phrase “*For three transgressions...and for four I will not revoke its punishment.*” The object of God’s judgment starts with six nations outside of Israel, where the Jews would be glad to hear of it. The specific sins show us what God hates:

- Damascus (1:3-5) because they *threshed Gilead* with sharp iron
- Gaza (1:6-8) because of slave trafficking
- Tyre (1:9-10), who broke a covenant, apparently with David and Solomon, to sell Hebrews into slavery
- Edom (1:11-12), because of their hostility toward the Jews, coming against their *brother with the sword*
- Ammon (1:13-15) *because they ripped open the pregnant woman of Gilead* (referred to in 2 Kings 15:16)

- Moab (2:1-3) *because he burned the bones of the king of Edom* (possibly referring to their offering of the son of the king of Edom as a burnt offering in 2 Kings 3:26-27)

These pagan nations would go into exile or be destroyed in a judgment from God, for their general wickedness, but the announcement of judgment was also closing in on Israel. Amos gets closer and closer to home.

Next addressing the sins of:

- Judah (2:4-5) *because they rejected the law of the Lord and their lies have also led them astray*
- Israel (2:6-8)—Amos focuses on the judgment of Israel, based on five sins: (1) *because they sell the righteous for money*, (2) they take advantage of *the helpless*, (3) they *turn aside...the humble*, (4) *a man and his father resort to the same girl*, (5) and ruthless foreclosure because of debts.

Verses 9-16, In the last paragraph of chapter 2, God, through Amos, talks about what He has done for ungrateful Israel. He took them from Egypt gave them the land of the Amorites (a Bedouin people who lived among the Canaanites and may have pre-dated them in the Land), He gave them prophets and Nazirites, both of whom Israel rejected. God pictures Himself *as a wagon weighed down with sheaves*.

The Messages of Amos, 3:1–6:14

Chapter 3, *You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth* (v. 2). They have a unique covenant relationship with God. And because they broke that covenant, God must keep His part and bring judgment for disobedience (Deuteronomy 27–30). Using seven rhetorical questions, Amos told Israel that some events are inseparably connected, once the first event has happened (representing Israel’s sin) then the second event will certainly happen. Amid his details of God’s judgment, Amos says (in 3:10) their violence has made them ignorant of what is right.

An Application: Continual justification of sin causes ignorance of what is right. *“But they do not know how to do what is right,” declares the LORD, “these who hoard up violence and devastation in their citadels.”*

Verses 4:1-3, God specifically addresses the wealthy, well-fed, women of Samaria. He refers to them as *you cows of Bashan* (today’s Golan, a high plateau in upper Galilee), where the cattle were known for being well-fed (Psalm 22:12). These are women, *who say to your husbands, “Bring now, that we may drink!”* But *The Lord God has sworn by His holiness* that they will be carried off, that is, in captivity to Assyria and in a violent manner. The reference to *Hamon* is unknown, it may be Mount Hermon on the northern edge of Israel, which would be the last place of their homeland they would ever see.

Verses 4-5, Here God sarcastically refers to their useless sacrifice at Bethel and Gilgal, former places of true worship, which now were combined with golden calves for ritual worship as they *multiply transgressions*.

Verses 6-13, Then God listed a number of hardships He imposed on Israel, while repeating four times the phrase, “*Yet you have not returned to me,*” declares the Lord.

An Application: This is not to say all hardships are a judgment of God, but He specifically told Israel that they would be cursed by Him if they sinned (Deuteronomy 27; Isaiah 1:19-20). The point is, God will keep His promises, including His judgments, exactly as He said He would.

Amos 5:1-17, Injustice will be judged. They *turn justice into wormwood [or bitterness]* (verse 7). God who *changes deep darkness into morning* (verse 8) can change prosperity to adversity.

Verses 18-27, Unacceptable worship will be judged (5:18-27). Their songs are just noise to God (verse 23). From the beginning, soon after they left Egypt, they worshipped idols (verse 25).

Chapter 6, This chapter details the luxurious lifestyle of the Israelites as a reason for their certain judgment. They...*recline on beds of ivory and sprawl on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall...improvise to the sound of the harp, and like David have composed songs for themselves and drink wine from sacrificial bowls while they anoint themselves with the finest of oils* (verses 4-6). But apparently, it is not just the luxury but the attitude that accompanied it. *The Lord God of hosts has declared: “I loathe the arrogance of Jacob, ...therefore I will deliver up the city and all it contains”* (verse 8).

An Application: God is often against the wealth of the Israelites. We should live in humble thankfulness for anything God has given us, remembering—we are only using it temporarily. We will be held accountable for what we do with it, and it will soon all pass away. Do not have anything more than what you use to bring glory to God.

The Visions of Amos, 7:1–9:15

Verses 7:1-3, vision #1, God *was forming a locust-swarm*, to strip the land clean of all vegetation. Amos begged God to not do it, so God did not do it.

Verses 4-6, vision #2, *The Lord God was calling to contend with them by fire, and it consumed...the farmland*. Amos begged God to not do it, so God did not do it.

Verses 7-9, vision #3, A plumb line was used to see if a wall was straight. *The Lord said to me, “...Behold I am about to put a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel. I will spare them no longer. The high places...will be desolated and the sanctuaries...laid waste. Then I will rise up...with the sword.”*

Verses 10-17, Next, Amos tells us about a historical incident which occurred as a response to his prophecy. *Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel [a former worship center made by Abraham and Jacob, which had become an idolatrous worship center] sent word to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words.”* Here we have a contrast, as is often the case, between a priest of the people and one bringing the prophecy of God. One refused the Word of God, the second delivered it.

An Application: Do not be surprised if the official religious leadership rejects the Word of God.

Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah [the home country of Amos] and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence.” Amos then replied that he was a shepherd, not a prophet. Then he added, *But the Lord took me...and said to me, “Go prophesy to My people Israel...Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.”*

Verses 8:1-3, vision #4, Then the Lord showed Amos a basket of summer fruit, meaning it was the end of the season and the fruit would soon be overripe and spoiled. The point was, *“The end has come for My people Israel. I will spare them no longer.”*

Verses 4-7, The evidence is that they could hardly wait for the new moon and sabbath days to be over so they could get back to cheating people and oppressing the poor. God’s response, *The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob, “Indeed, I will never forget any of their deeds”* (v. 7).

An Application: God does not forget. In our case, God does not forget our sin, but He also does not forget that Jesus paid for our sin on the cross. And if we receive Him, God does not forget that either.

Verses 8-14, But the worst part of the judgment of God on the Land is not the physical devastation but *“When I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the LORD ...They will go to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, but they will not find it”* (vv. 11-12).

An Application: The worst thing to happen to any nation, society, or individual on earth is when they are disconnected from the Word of God, as they are today, by promoting sin and replacing the Word of God with a progressive agenda.

Chapter 9, vision #5, Chapter 9 begins with a prophecy of the final destruction of Israel historically and ends with a prophecy of the coming restoration of Israel in the future Millennial Kingdom.

Verses 1-10, Apparently, at the time of a major festival when Israel was gathered to the idol worship center at Bethel, Amos reports, *I saw the Lord standing beside the altar.* The Lord was with them, but not to bless them. Instead, *He said, “Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake and break them on the heads of them all! Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword; they will not have a fugitive who will flee, or a refugee who will escape.”* But the first bit of hope for the future is in verse 8: *Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, “And I will destroy it from the face of the earth; Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,” declares the LORD.*

Verses 11-15, The final prophecy of Amos looks to the distant future. *In that day* [after the Second Coming of Christ at the time of the Millennial Kingdom], God told Amos: *“I will raise up the fallen booth [kingdom] of David...and rebuild it as in the days of old”* [when all 12 tribes of Israel were together in the Land under David]. Then that kingdom is characterized by a prosperous Land (verse 13), prosperous cities (verse 14), and their permanent residence in the Land (verse 14).

An Application

Justice is an attribute of God. Therefore, God must judge sin. Our understanding of the spiritual life must begin with the understanding that God, the only God, the Creator of the universe, is a God of judgment. In Communion, we remember Christ's death on the cross.

But why did Jesus have to die?

Answer: to pay for our sin.

But why did Jesus have to pay for our sin?

Answer: Because God has to judge sin.

But why does God have to judge sin?

Answer: Because that is His character, He is a just God, a God of Judgment.