

Amos - Introduction & Background

Title

Like Esther, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, and Joel, the title of the Book of Amos is derived from its principal actor. The name Amos is derived from the Hebrew root *Amas*, which means, "to lift a burden." Thus, Amos' name means "burden" or "burden bearer." "Amos lived up to the meaning of his name by bearing up under his divinely given burden of declaring judgment to rebellious Israel. The Greek and Latin titles are both transliterated in English as *Amos*."

Authorship

The designation "the words of Amos" (1:1a) reveals Amos as the book's author. The only use of the name Amos in the entire OT is in this book and his name is not to be confused with the father of Isaiah whose name was Amoz. Most hold that a single author wrote the Book of Amos. Constable observes, "Comparison with the writings of other eighth century prophets and the consistently vivid and forthright style of Amos make this conclusion virtually inescapable."

The book discloses much biographical information about its author. First, he is described as a shepherd (1:1; 7:14). Second, he is called a grower of sycamore figs (7:14). Constable explains his profession as follows: "Sycamore fig trees are not true fig trees but a variety of the mulberry family, which produces fig-like fruit. Each fruit had to be scratched or pierced to let the juice flow out so the 'fig' could ripen."

Third, his hometown Tekoa (1:1), which was in Judah and located 10 miles south of Jerusalem and 5 miles southeast of Bethlehem. Thus, Amos was from the southern kingdom (7:12). This city was located on the edge of the Judean wilderness, in a dry area, 2700 feet above sea level, and in marginal grazing land in between the Judean wilderness and Bethlehem. This grazing land helps explain why Amos' primary occupation was that of a shepherd. In fact, Amos seems to hint at this rural background several times throughout his book (3:4-5,12; 5:8,19; 9:9). Because the city guarded the main journey from En Gedi to Jerusalem, Rehoboam established it as a fortified city (2 Chr 11:5-12). Because fig trees did not grow in the dry area of Tekoa, it is likely that Amos regularly traveled to Jericho or En Gedi in order to carry on his trade as a grower of sycamore figs.

Fourth, Amos was not considered a professional prophet or a "prophet for profit" (7:14). In other words, he was not a member of a professional prophetic society comprised of those who earned their living through the art of prophesying. This fact makes Amos quite different from other prophets such as Isaiah, who was a man of the court, and Jeremiah,

who was a priest. Rather, he was simply a layman who was given the divine burden to preach to wayward Israel (3:8; 7:15).

Date

Amos obviously prophesied before 722 BC since he predicted the Assyrian judgment that was destined to come in that year (7:11). According to 1:1, Amos prophesied during a time when Uzziah was reigning over Judah (792–740) and Jeroboam II was reigning over Israel (793–753). Throughout his book, Amos implies that Jeroboam II was still alive (7:9–10). The overlapping interval between these reigns would indicate that Amos' prophetic activity transpired sometime in between 790 BC and 755 BC.

A further chronological marker is the "earthquake" (1:1). Zech 14:5 even alludes to this earthquake two hundred years after it occurred. Yadin finds evidence of this earthquake in Hazor around 760 BC. According to 1:1, Amos prophesied two years before the earthquake and thus he had to record the events spoken of in his book after the earthquake.

All things considered, a date of 760–755 BC for the composition of the book would not be far from wrong. Thus, Amos ministered after Obadiah, Joel and Jonah but before Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah. Amos' ministry still overlapped with Jonah, who prophesied to Nineveh, and Hosea, who prophesied to Israel. If this date is correct, perhaps a solar eclipse dated June 14, 763 BC prepared Amos' audience for His message (8:9).

Recipient

Despite the fact that some of the book concerns Judah (2:4–5; 6:1; 9:11), the northern kingdom of Israel is the book's addressee. The book mentions those in Samaria (4:1), sons of Israel (4:5), Jeroboam's family (7:9), and Amaziah the priest in Bethel (7:14–17). Numerous other references to Israel recur throughout the book (1:1; 2:6; 3:1,12; 7:10). The book also mentions many places in the northern kingdom of Israel. Moreover, judgment against Israel's surrounding neighbors is detailed in the book's opening section (1:3–2:3). Interestingly, most of the verses in this opening unit (1:3–2:16) pertain to Israel (2:6–16). Thus, while the book mentions judgment against these other nations, they are included in God's message to Israel to show them that they will be judged right along with the other nations despite the fact that they are His covenant people. Amos "delivered his message in Beth-el because it was the residence of the king of Israel and a center of idolatry" (7:13).

Place of Writing

Although Amos preached to Israel, it is likely that he composed his book in Judah. Two reasons make this position tenable. First, Amos was originally from Judah (7:12). Second, because his ministry was opposed in Israel, he probably returned home to write his book. In fact, Amaziah demanded that he return home (7:12–13).

Historical Context

In the north, Jeroboam II had expanded Israel's borders, annexed Aram-Damascus (2 Kings 14:25), and recovered territory that had previously been under Judah's control (2 Kings

14:28). "As a result, Israel had become the largest, most influential country along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea." Despite these successes, Jeroboam II also led Israel into religious apostasy (2 Kings 14:23-34). Thus, the north experienced social injustice, materialism, and immorality alongside its prosperity and expansion.

An identical pattern persisted in Judah. In the south, Uzziah had similarly expanded Judah's borders into Philistine territory (2 Chr 26:6), into Arabian and Meunite territory (2 Chr 26:7), into the Negev (2 Chr 26:10), and into the Transjordan (2 Chr 26:8). In addition to subduing the Philistines, Ammonites, and the Edomites, Uzziah had fortified Jerusalem. Despite the fact that Uzziah is typically categorized as a good king, he still failed to remove the high places. Therefore, spiritual adultery, idolatry, and syncretism persisted during his reign (2 Kings 15:4).

Thus, at the time of Amos, both Israel and Judah were at peace with one another, enjoyed a level of peace and prosperity not experienced since the time of Solomon, and were unthreatened politically due to the weakness of Assyria,¹³ Syria, Babylonia, and Egypt. Both Elisha (2 Kings 13:17-19) and Jonah (2 Kgs 14:25) had predicted this "golden age" in Israel's national life. This era of prosperity made Amos' predictions of imminent disaster unpalatable to the ears of his listeners. Moreover, this prosperity did little to curb the nation's appetite for syncretistic worship¹⁴ and immorality. Sunukjian explains:

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 indolent, 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). Standards of morality had sunk to a low ebb (2:7).

Meanwhile religion flourished. The people thronged to the shrines for the yearly festivals (4:4; 5:5; 8:3,10), enthusiastically offering their sacrifices (4:5; 5:21-23). They steadfastly maintained that their God was with them, and considered themselves immune to disaster (5:14,18-20; 6:1-3; 9:10).

Message

Yahweh has a right to judge all nations in righteousness in the future Day of the Lord on account of their social injustices. This divine prerogative is especially true regarding God's own covenanted nation Israel due to her violations of the Mosaic Covenant involving mere religious ritual at the expense of morality and social justice (5:24) during a time of national prosperity. However, because of the Abrahamic covenant, God will preserve a remnant of Israel and then use it to draw all nations to Himself during the millennial reign of Christ.

Purpose

The purpose of the Book of Amos is to announce impending judgment through exile that is to come upon the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC on account of her numerous covenant violations.

Theological Themes

Numerous theological themes recur throughout the Book of Amos. *First*, the prophet emphasizes Israel's need to manifest fidelity to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, throughout his book, Amos demonstrates a great comprehension of the Pentateuch (Amos 2:7; Deut 23:17-18; Amos 2:8; Ex 22:26; Amos 2:12; Num 6:1-21; Amos 4:4; Deut 14:28; 26:12; Amos 4:5; Lev 2:11; 7:13). *Second*, the prophet routinely condemns ritualistic religion that is devoid of social justice and morality (4:4-5; 5:1-14) and internal reality (6:6). *Third*, Amos pleads for social justice (2:6-7; 4:1; 5:7, 11-12,15,24; 6:1,4,12; 7:3-9; 8:4,6). *Fourth*, because God judges both the pagan nations (1:3—2:3) as well as His covenanted people (2:4-16), Israel's special role in God's redemptive program does not exonerate her from judgment (2:9-11; 5:18-20,27). *Fifth*, God as God Almighty is consistently found throughout the book. *Sixth*, because Amos is quoted many times in the NT (Amos 8:9; Matt 24:29; Amos 5:25-27; Acts 7:42-43; Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:16-18; Amos 4:11; Rom 9:29), his book furnishes much material for NT themes. *Seventh*, the Book of Amos demonstrates how prosperity can destroy spirituality. *Eighth*, the book emphasizes God's sovereignty as it portrays Him not only controlling natural phenomenon (4:3; 5:8) but also controlling the migrations of people (9:7). *Ninth*, the book emphasizes the Day of the Lord in which God will not only judge His own people (5:18-20) but also bless them (9:11,13).

Unique Characteristics

The Book of Amos boasts several outstanding characteristics. *First*, Amos presents his material in a variety of forms such as prophecies, sermons, visions, and promises. *Second*, Amos employs numerous similes. *Third*, Amos frequently mentions earthquakes (1:1; 8:8; 9:1,5). *Fourth*, Amos is one of the easier prophetic books to outline.

Fifth, Amos speaks far more about judgment than he does about hope. Only the book's final verses are devoted to hope. *Sixth*, Amos 9:11-15 is one of the greatest sections of Scripture describing millennial conditions. *Seventh*, Amos is one of the most direct and confrontational prophets (4:1). *Eighth*, Amos represents the first of the two writing prophets to the northern kingdom.

Ninth, while Amos was a resident of Judah and wrote his book from Judah, he prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel. *Tenth*, aside from Jeremiah, Amos may be the most autobiographical of all the prophets. *Eleventh*, Amos often reveals his rural roots throughout his book (2:13; 3:8,12; 4:1; 6:11-14; 8:1-2). *Twelfth*, Amos exhibits a vivid style. *Thirteenth*, Amos employs various rhetorical devices designed to elicit repentance so judgment can be averted (4:6, 8-11; 5:4, 6, 14).

Structure

The Book of Amos has five sections. The *first* section consists of autobiographical information (1:1-2). The *second* section contains eight prophecies against Israel and the nations surrounding Israel (1:3—2:16). Each new prophecy begins with the phrase "for

three transgressions of...and for four I will not revoke its punishment." The accompanying phrase "because they..." explains the sin that each nation has committed. The phrase "so I will..." explains the punishment that God will execute on each nation. The phrase "I will send fire" is repeated seven times in this section to signify divine judgment (1:4,7,10,12,14; 2:2,5).

The *third* section consists of three sermons (3:1—6:14) dealing with the causes and certainty of coming judgment. "Hear this word" marks the beginning of each sermon (3:1; 4:1; 5:1). The first part of the sermon consists of the sin of the nation. The second part of each sermon begins with the word "therefore" (3:11; 4:12; 5:16) and explains what God will do as a result of Israel's sin. The third sermon ends with two woes each beginning with the word "alas" (5:18; 6:1).

The *fourth* section contains five visions (7:1—9:10). Each new vision is identified through the repetition of the phrase "the Lord God showed me" (7:1,4,7; 8:1; 9:1). While the calamity portrayed in the first two visions was averted through Amos' intercession, the third vision showed why judgment could no longer be averted. The narrative insertion (7:10-17) illustrates the third vision. The final two visions describe the coming judgment.

The *fifth* section of the book contains five promises pertaining to Israel's millennial restoration (9:11-15). Thus, while the preceding sections focus upon judgment, the final section focuses upon hope. While the second section focuses mostly on the surrounding nations, the subsequent sections focus upon Israel. In sum, the second section pronounces judgment on the surrounding nations, the third section gives the causes and certainty of coming judgment upon Israel, the fourth section describes the future judgment for Israel, and the fifth section enumerates promises after judgment.

Christ in Amos

"The clearest anticipation of Christ in Amos is found at the end of the book. He has all authority to judge (1:1—9:10), but He will also restore His people."

Genre

The Book of Amos' primary genre consists of prophecy (covenant enforcement) and poetry (parallelism). Sub-genres include narrative (7:10-17), numerical parallelism (1:3), hymns (5:1-2), and doxology (4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6).

Outline

I. Introduction (Amos 1:1-2)

(1) Biographical information about Amos (1:1)

- (A) Name: Amos (1:1a)
- (B) Profession: shepherd (1:1b)
- (C) Residence: Tekoa (1:1c)
- (D) Subject matter: visions (1:1d)

(E) Time frame: Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel two years before the earthquake (1:1e)

(2) Message: divine judgment (1:2)

II. Eight prophecies of judgment against the nations (Amos 1:3—2:16)

(1) Damascus (1:3-5)

(A) Because they threshed Gilead (1:3)

(B) God will exile Damascus (1:4-5)

(2) Philistia (1:6-8)

(A) Because they captured some Israelites and sold them to Edom (1:6)

(B) God would kill the Philistines: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron (1:7-8)

(3) Tyre (1:9-10)

(A) Because they captured some Israelites and sold them to Edom and ignored the covenant between Israel and Tyre (1:9)

(B) God will destroy Tyre (1:10)

(4) Edom (1:11-12)

(A) Because they purchased Israelite slaves from the Philistines and the Phoenicians and sought to harm Israel for material gain (1:11)

(B) God will destroy Teman and Bozrah (1:12)

(5) Ammon (1:13-15)

(A) Coveted Gilead and ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to expand her borders (1:13-14)

(B) God will destroy her capital Rabbah and send her king into exile (1:15)

(6) Moab (2:1-3)

(A) Because they desecrated the tomb of Edom's King (2:1)

(B) God will judge Moab's ruler and her officials (2:2-3)

(7) Judah (2:4-5)

(A) Because they rejected God's law (2:4)

(B) God will destroy Jerusalem (2:5)

(8) Israel (2:6-16)

(A) Because they rejected God's law (2:6-12)

(a) Sin (2:6-8)

(i) Social injustice (2:6-7a)

(ii) Sexual immorality (2:7b)

(iii) Religious hypocrisy (2:8)

(b) Forgot God's past deeds (2:9-11)

(i) Destruction of enemies (2:9)

(ii) Guidance after the exodus (2:10)

(iii) Provision of spiritual leadership (2:11)

- (c) Pervert spiritual leadership (2:12)
 - (i) Made Nazirites drink wine (2:12a)
 - (ii) Silenced the prophets (2:12b)
 - (B) God will crush Israel (2:13-16)
- III. Three sermons of judgment (Amos 3:1—6:14)
 - (1) Fact of Israel's destruction (3:1-15)
 - (A) Sin (3:1-10)
 - (a) Israel's privileged position (3:1-2)
 - (b) Divine announcement of judgment (3:3-8)
 - (c) To be witnessed by the pagans (3:9-10)
 - (B) Judgment (3:11-15)
 - (a) God will use another nation to judge Israel (3:11)
 - (b) The judgment will be comprehensive (3:12)
 - (c) The coming judgment will alter national idolatry and national sin (3:13-15)
 - (i) National idolatry (3:13-14)
 - (ii) National prosperity (3:15)
 - (2) Cause of Israel's destruction: depravity (4:1-13)
 - (A) Sin (4:1-11)
 - (a) Cows of Bashan (4:1-3)
 - (i) Sin (4:1)
 - (a) Oppressed the needy (4:1a)
 - (b) Preoccupation with their physical appetites (4:1b)
 - (ii) Captivity (4:2-3)
 - (a) With hooks (4:2)
 - (b) Through breaches in the walls (4:3a)
 - (c) To Harmon (4:3b)
 - (b) Sons of Israel (4:4-11)
 - (i) Religious hypocrisy (4:4-5)
 - (ii) Failure to heed the warnings of the covenant curses (4:6-11)
 - (a) Famine (4:6)
 - (b) Drought (4:7-8)
 - (c) Locusts (4:9)
 - (d) Plagues and warfare (4:10)
 - (e) Destruction (4:11)
 - (B) Judgment (4:12-13)
 - (a) Exhortation to prepare to meet God (4:12)
 - (b) Reminder of God's sovereignty (4:13)
- (3) Certainty of Israel's judgment: funeral dirge (Amos 5:1—6:14)

- (A) Mourning because of God's impending judgment (5:1-3)
 - (a) Dissemination of the nation (5:1)
 - (b) Dissemination of Israel's army (5:2-3)
 - (B) Reasons to seek the Lord (5:4-15)
 - (a) Seek God instead of cultic worship (5:4-5a)
 - (b) Seek God because of His sovereignty (5:5b-9)
 - (i) Sovereignty over judgment (5:5b-7)
 - (ii) Sovereignty over creation (5:8)
 - (iii) Sovereignty over the strong (5:9)
 - (c) Seek God because of Israel's sins (5:10-13)
 - (i) Injustice (5:10)
 - (ii) Self-enrichment at the expense of the poor (5:11-12)
 - (iii) Silence in the presence of evil (5:13)
 - (d) Seek God because He is gracious to those who... (5:14-15)
 - (i) Seek good not evil (5:14)
 - (ii) Establish justice (5:15)
 - (C) Mourning because of God's impending judgment (5:16-17)
 - (a) The mourners (5:16-17a)
 - (b) God's coming is the cause of mourning (5:17b)
 - (D) Two concluding woes (Amos 5:18—6:14)
 - (a) Concerning the false security of religion (5:18-27)
 - (i) False security regarding the Day of the Lord (5:18-20)
 - (ii) False security regarding religious ritual (5:21-26)
 - (iii) Resulting exile (5:27)
 - (b) Concerning the false security of riches (6:1-14)
 - (i) False security of riches (6:1-6)
 - (ii) Resulting in exile (6:7)
 - (iii) False security of pride (6:8a)
 - (iv) Resulting in destruction (6:8b-14)
 - (a) City to be captured (6:8b)
 - (b) Jewish people destroyed (6:9-10)
 - (c) Homes destroyed (6:11)
 - (d) A nation to be raised against Israel (6:12-14)
- IV. Five visions of judgment against Israel (Amos 7:1—9:10)
- (1) Locusts (7:1-3)
 - (A) Vision (7:1)
 - (B) Amos' prayer (7:2)
 - (C) Judgment averted (7:3)

- (2) Fire (7:4-6)
 - (A) Vision (7:4)
 - (B) Amos' prayer (7:5)
 - (C) Judgment averted (7:6)
- (3) Plumb line (7:7-9)
 - (A) Vision (7:7)
 - (B) Judgment (7:8-9)
 - (a) Judgment cannot be averted (7:8)
 - (b) High places to be made desolate (7:9a)
 - (c) Sanctuaries to be laid waste (7:9b)
 - (d) House of Jeroboam to be attacked by God (7:9c)
- (4) Parenthetical insertion: illustration of the plumb line vision (7:10-17)
 - (A) Opposition of Amaziah the priest to Amos (7:10-13)
 - (a) To Jeroboam concerning Amos (7:10-11)
 - (b) To Amos (7:12-13)
 - (i) Prophecy in Judah (7:12)
 - (ii) Do not prophesy in Bethel (7:13)
 - (B) Amos' response to Amaziah (7:14-17)
 - (a) Regarding his calling (7:14-15)
 - (b) Regarding Amaziah (7:16-17)
 - (i) Rehearsal of Amaziah's attack (7:16)
 - (ii) Prophecy concerning Amaziah (7:17)
 - (a) Wife will become a harlot (7:17a)
 - (b) Children will be killed (7:17b)
 - (c) Land will be divided (7:17c)
 - (d) To be killed (7:17d)
 - (e) Nation will be exiled (7:17e)
- (5) Basket of summer fruit (8:1-14)
 - (A) Vision (8:1-2a)
 - (B) Judgment (8:2b-14)
 - (a) Prediction of judgment (8:2b-3)
 - (b) Israel's sins leading to judgment (8:4-6)
 - (i) Mistreating the poor (8:4)
 - (ii) Placing materialism over religious obligations (8:5a)
 - (iii) Dishonest commercial activity (8:5b-6)
 - (c) Results of judgment (8:7-14)
 - (i) Topographical changes (8:7-9)
 - (ii) Laughing turned into mourning (8:10)

(iii) Famine of God's Word (8:11-14)

(6) Altar (9:1-10)

(A) Vision (9:1a)

(B) Judgment (9:1b-10)

(a) Bethel as place of judgment (9:1b)

(b) Extent of judgment (9:1c-4)

(i) Temple destroyed (9:1c)

(ii) Worshipers killed in the Temple (9:1d)

(iii) Refugees killed by God (9:2-4)

(a) In Sheol and heaven (9:2)

(b) On Carmel and in the sea (9:3)

(c) In the captivity (9:4)

(c) God as the source of judgment (9:5-6)

(d) How the judgment will impact Israel (9:7-10)

(i) Israel to be judged like other nations (9:7-8a)

(ii) Remnant to be spared (9:8b)

(iii) Diaspora predicted (9:9)

(iv) Rebels to be purged (9:10)

V. Five promises regarding Israel's future restoration (9:11-15)

(1) Restoration of the Davidic dynasty (9:11)

(2) Israel to subdue her enemies (9:12)

(3) Millennial agriculture productivity (9:13)

(4) Millennial reconstruction (9:14)

(A) Captives return (9:14a)

(B) Cities built (9:14b)

(C) Prosperity (9:14c)

(5) Permanent settlement in the land (9:15)