

AMOS

Outlined Bible

Personal Background

The meaning of the name *Amos* (which is from the Hebrew verb *amas* = "to lift a burden, to carry") is "burden-bearer." He was a native of the southern kingdom of Judah, from the town of *Tekoa* -- about six miles south of Bethlehem, twelve miles south of Jerusalem, and eighteen miles west of the Dead Sea. *Tekoa* was the center of a large sheep-farming district.

Amos describes himself as one who had three different occupations:

Shepherd (Amos 1:1) --- This is the Hebrew word *noqed*, which was a word used to describe a man who tended a particularly small, rugged, speckled variety of sheep (called *naqod*) which required less food and could live well in the desert, and which produced wool of superior quality and of great value.

Herdsman (Amos 7:14) --- This is the Hebrew word *boqer*, which refers to one who raises or tends cattle.

Cultivator of Sycamore Figs (Amos 7:14) --- This was the wild fig (*siq-mim* in Hebrew) which exuded a ball of sap when nipped at the right season, and which hardened into a sort of edible fruit which the lower classes were able to afford. This tree was found at a lower altitude than *Tekoa*, so Amos undoubtedly had to do some traveling (perhaps down to the Dead Sea region) to tend these trees.

"These occupations made it necessary for Amos to do a large amount of traveling to the wool and cattle markets of Israel and Judah. In this way, he learned firsthand the military, social, and economic conditions and practices of rich and poor alike" (John T. Willis).

Amos was *not* a "professional" prophet, but a common man utilized by the Lord to deliver His Word to His people. "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet ... but the Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.' And now hear the Word of the Lord!" (Amos 7:14-16). He had no special training; he was not a graduate of the *School of the Prophets* (variously referred to as "bands" -- I Samuel 10:5, 10, and "companies" -- I Samuel 19:20, and "sons of the prophets" -- I Kings 20:35); nor was he descended from or related to any prophets.

He was not even a citizen of Israel (the northern kingdom), but rather of Judah (the southern kingdom). Nevertheless, God sent him to Israel to proclaim the Word to the people of the northern kingdom. He was not a man of wealth, yet was sent to warn the wealthy; not a man of luxury, or one who was lazy, yet sent to those who were both. ***All of this was designed to separate the MAN from the MESSAGE.*** There was to be nothing about this man which would attract a personal following. It was the ***message*** God desired the people to focus upon, not the ***messenger!***

Amos did most, if not all, of his prophetic work (the totality of which probably did not last over a year or so --- Amos 1:1) in the city of ***Bethel*** (Amos 7:10), where he was denounced by Amaziah the priest and forbidden to preach further in Israel.

"Someone has described Amos as 'the first Great Reformer.' He was not of the school of the prophets, who by this time were disposed to cry what the people wanted ... There was not in Amos the sympathy, warm love, and feeling of the statesman or citizen, but a cold sense of justice and right. He was the stern prophet of justice and righteousness. Hosea's spirit was summed up in the word ***lovingkindness***; Amos' is summed up in the one word ***justice***" (Homer Hailey).

"The dark days in which he lived called for a man of sturdy moral fiber and fearlessness. Such was Amos. His character, molded in the harsh terrain of the wilderness of Tekoa, enabled him to stand before the priest and the people, proclaiming the word God had given him" (***Expositor's Bible Commentary***). "At

the call of God, he left his home in Judea as a mere layman to proclaim a hostile message in the proud capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Without any status as a recognized prophet, he braved the prejudice of the Ephraimite public to carry out faithfully his commission from God. A man of rugged convictions and iron will, he could not be deflected from his purpose even by the highest functionary of the Samaritan hierarchy" (Gleason L. Archer, Jr.).

Date

Amos 1:1 gives us a fairly accurate picture of when this prophecy occurred. It was during the days of King Uzziah (792-740 BC), and King Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 BC). His mission to Bethel was also more precisely dated as occurring "two years before the earthquake." This was a very severe earthquake in the reign of Uzziah which was remembered for centuries afterward --- "You will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah" (Zechariah 14:5). As a result of this information, most scholars date his prophetic work somewhere between 760 and 755 BC.

Historical Background

This was a time when the fortunes of the northern kingdom (Israel) had reached one of their highest points of prosperity and peace. Jeroboam was able to extend his borders almost to those of the old Davidic kingdom. There was also peace with the southern kingdom (Judah). "After a long period of conflict during which Judah was in many respects subservient to Israel, there was now a spirit of co-operation and mutual enterprise resulting in a flow of trade and commerce between the two kingdoms" (*New Layman's Bible Commentary*).

It was a time of great economic well-being and national strength. The increase in wealth also led to extensive building programs. The simple brick of earlier days gave way to buildings of hewn stone and ivory decorations. They had "winter houses" and "summer houses" (Amos 3:15). They had "houses of ivory" (Amos 3:15), and "houses of well-hewn stone" (Amos 5:11). They reclined on "beds of ivory" (Amos 6:4); sprawled on couches; ate and drank to their fill; anointed themselves with the finest oils; were surrounded by music (Amos 6:4-7). In short, they were "*at ease in Zion*" (Amos 6:1).

"Concurrently with the increased wealth there was an associated rise in those social evils which characterized the prosperity of Solomon's reign; the rich became very rich and the poor became even poorer" (*New Layman's Bible Commentary*). "As their economic well-being and national strength continued to foster their security, an internal decay was eating at their vitals" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

There was a complete lack of social concern in the land. The rich would stop at nothing to increase their profits, including economic exploitation of the poor. Even the legal system was corrupted, and the poor had no recourse even in the courts. "The rich enjoyed an indolent and indulgent existence, urged on by the rapacity of their wives who demanded more and more luxuries" (*New Layman's Bible Commentary*). "Back of all moral, social, and political corruption there lies a basic cause: *Religious decay and apostasy*" (Homer Hailey). The people were *religious*, but they were far from being *spiritual*. Their religion consisted of external acts --- they were putting on a show for God, but He was not fooled. "They prided themselves in their expensive 'church buildings.' They boasted of the numerous sacrifices which they offered, and of the fact that they offered them *exactly* as the Law prescribed ('legalism'). They gloried in their perfect attendance record at the worship services. They were well pleased with their efforts to sing praises to the Lord. But, by way of contrast, Amos rejected the idea that *quantity, numbers, and external show* was really religion!" (Willis). Some have criticized Amos for being a preacher of a "social gospel." However, "God made it clear that the *heart* of religion was to love God with all the heart, and to love one's neighbor as himself. Without these two elements, any number of external acts is meaningless to God" (Willis).

"The prophets had degenerated into time-servers, blinded with the complacency of the nation. Religion certainly flourished in the nation but it was a religion that was completely divorced from reality. There was a great deal of activism and outward show with crowds thronging the shrines at the times of the great festivals. Their Ritual was elaborate, but there was no true life and no evidence that real spiritual values had any place, and Yahweh was patronized with a presumption bordering upon arrogance" (*New Layman's Bible Commentary*).

"Extravagant religious ceremonies and rites were manifested on every hand. Tithes were offered every three days; free-will offerings were abundant and the amounts advertised (Amos 4:4-5). Religious fervor was high, but true spiritual devotion to God was utterly lacking" (Homer Hailey). "It was a religion which was empty in content, though full of ritual. Amos insisted that God had no time for ritualistic religion without heart" (*New Layman's Bible Commentary*).

The Message of Amos

The book of Amos falls into three major divisions:

Chapters 1-2 --- A series of oracles against "outside" nations, ending with similar oracles against Judah and Israel.

Chapters 3-6 --- Condemning various sins which were prevalent in Israel.

Chapters 7-9 --- Some information concerning the call of Amos, and five visions which reflect some of the basic themes of his message.

The Oracles Against the Nations:

Damascus --- 1:3-5

Gaza --- 1:6-8

Tyre --- 1:9-10

Edom --- 1:11-12

Ammon --- 1:13-15

Moab --- 2:1-3

Judah --- 2:4-5

Israel --- 2:6-16

"The significant thing about this series, which in general denounces atrocities of war, is that Amos announces that God is concerned with sin wherever it occurs. He is the international God of Justice, punishing sin wherever it occurs" (Jack P. Lewis).

In the *Five Visions of Amos* we find the main themes which God wanted this man to emphasize. They are basically visions of doom!

The Locusts (Amos 7:1-3) --- Locusts in Palestine were uncontrollable and considered "an act of God." Amos saw in them the threat of God's punishment and by pleading for the land was able to convince God to relent.

The Great Fire devouring the land (Amos 7:4-6) --- Some see this as a famine or drought. Again, the prophet pleads with the Lord, and He relents.

The Plumb Line (Amos 7:7-9) --- The doom of the house of Jeroboam is announced. Amos pleads no further.

The Basket of Summer Fruit (Amos 8:1-3) --- Prophets frequently convey their message by puns not intended to be humorous. From the similarity of *summer (qayits)* and *end (qets)* in Hebrew, the Lord teaches Amos that the end is at hand. "The end has come for My people Israel" (Amos 8:2). 62

The Lord Standing Beside the Altar (Amos 9:1f) --- The command is given to smite the Sanctuary and to destroy the sinful people of the land. "The point of this last vision is that when God finally sends the Assyrians to overthrow Israel, that there will be no way for sinners to escape punishment, no matter how hard they try" (John T. Willis).

AMOS

Summarized Bible

Amos was not of the school of prophets. He was a shepherd and dresser of sycamore fig trees from the countryside of Judah. He prophesied in the northern Kingdom of Israel where Jeroboam was King.

Amos records that the Lord said for sins of – Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, Israel I will not turn back my wrath. He then names the countries or cities stating, I will destroy them and their kings. "Therefore, this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel." (Amos 1)

The Lord shows his mercy begging Israel to "Seek me and live; do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing. Seek the Lord and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it." (Amos 5:4-6)

"Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph." (Amos 5:14-15)

"I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them." (Amos 5:21-22)

"Therefore, your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a pagan country. And Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land." (Amos 7:17)

"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign Lord, "when I will send a famine through the land — not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it." (Amos 8:11-12)

"For I will give the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble will reach the ground. All the sinners among my people will die by the sword, all those who say, Disaster will not overtake or meet us." (Amos 9:9-10)

Key Points from Amos

- To be one of God's servants does not require special training.
- Seek the Lord and live.
- Israel was not prepared to meet their God. Are we?
- God does not accept worship when one's heart and actions of their daily life are not pleasing to Him.