

Amos

INTRODUCTION

The middle of the eighth century B.C. was a time of great prosperity for both Israel and Judah. Under Jeroboam, Israel had again gained control of the international trade routes—the King's Highway through Transjordan, and the Way of the Sea through the Jezreel Valley and along the coastal plain. According to 2 Kings 14:25, he restored the borders of Israel from Lebo Hamath (in the north) to the Sea of the Arabah (the Dead Sea in the south). Judah, under Uzziah, regained Elath (the seaport on the Gulf of Aqaba), and expanded to the southwest at the expense of the Philistines. Israel and Judah had reached new political and military heights, but the religious situation was at an all-time low. Idolatry was rampant; the rich were living in luxury while the poor were oppressed; there was widespread immorality; and the judicial system was corrupt. The people interpreted their prosperity as a sign of God's blessing on them. Amos' task was to deliver the message that God was displeased with the nation. His patience was exhausted. Punishment was inevitable. The nation would be destroyed unless there was a change of heart—a change that would "let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (5:24).

The Book of Amos is basically a message of judgment: judgment on the nations, oracles and visions of divine judgment on Israel. The central theme of the book is that the people of Israel have broken their covenant with God. As a result, God's punishment of their sin will be severe. Amos begins with a series of indictments against the seven neighbors of Israel, including Judah, and then he indicts Israel, too (1:3-2:16). Each foreign nation is to be punished for specific offenses either against Israel or some other nation. This judgment on the nations teaches us that God is a universal Monarch. All nations are under His control. They must answer to Him for their mistreatment of other nations and peoples. Israel and Judah, however, will be punished because they have broken their covenant with God. The next section (3:1-6:14) is a series of three oracles or sermons directed against Israel. These include the threat of exile. A third section (7:1-9:10) is a series of five visions of judgment, in two of which God withdraws. Finally, Amos promises restoration for Israel (9:11-15).

(Spirit Filled Life Bible's Introduction to Amos, Roy Edmund Hayden)

Amos 1:1-9:15

Amos was the sole example under the Old Testament of a man in an obscure position who was called to the prophetic office. His occupation was that of a herdsman in the little village of Tekoa, near Bethlehem. When out of employment in the care of someone's flocks he eked out a living by picking and selling the wild figs known as sycamore fruit.

In obedience to God's message, he journeyed to the Northern Kingdom (Israel), and, mingling with the crowds in Samaria on the occasion of some idolatrous festival, he began after the manner of ancient prophets his public address to the little company gathered around him either in the temple court or the public street. His weird eloquence and solemn manner would soon attract a crowd, and his evident prophetic inspiration give weight and authority to his message. In the case of Amos, the style of his address was well fitted to command attention. His messages were clothed in a poetic eloquence quite out of keeping with his humble calling and apparent advantages. There are no sublimer passages in any of the prophets than many of the splendid figures which Amos draws from the constellations of heaven, the tempests of the desert, the beauties of nature and the mystic realm of pure prophetic symbolism.

His first address was as tactful as it was eloquent. Beginning with a striking introduction, he announced that the Lord was about to thunder from Zion with a voice which should blast the verdure (lush vegetation) of the plains and wither the very forests of Carmel. And this voice was to be in judgment on Damascus and Syria, because of their cruel treatment of the people of Gilead whom they had defeated and tortured. The palaces of Ben-Hadad were to be destroyed and Syria was to go into captivity to distant Kir.

Nothing could have been more popular than such a message. Syria was Israel's ancient foe, and through all his audience there were doubtless mutterings of cordial assent and deep delight.

The prophet resumes; and now his message is against the Philistines. Upon Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron, the thunders of judgment are poured forth, and still his audience listens with unmixed delight.

Next the turn of Tyre comes and she receives her sentence: "I will send fire upon the walls of Tyre that will consume her fortresses" (Amos 1:10).

Next comes Edom, and her cruelty is remembered, and upon Teman and Bozrah the vials of judgment are emptied.

Ammon lies hard by and her children have had their part in the atrocious cruelties of recent wars. And so the vision rises of Ammon's fall as the whirlwind of battle sweeps over Rabbah and the king and his princes go forth into captivity.

Still the torrent of judgment rolls on, and now Moab passes out in the fires of judgment, and the palaces of Kerioth perish "in great tumult amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet" (2:2).

The heathen nations all have had their turn, and now the people listen with wonder as Judah, their own kindred kingdom, comes in for divine judgment too. "I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem" (2:5).

By this time his audience must have been deeply stirred. Nothing could have pleased their national self-confidence so much as to have their rivals and enemies thus disposed of. But now, after a solemn pause, the prophet turns to his audience, doubtless with tones of sorrow, and beginning with the same formula as in the other cases, they are startled to hear him say: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath" (2:6). But the sensation deepens as he proceeds to specify his indictments and lay bare with a fearless hand the injustice, the oppression, the shameless impurity and the intemperance and vice of all classes. The chapters that follow doubtless contain portions of many addresses given at various times.

They literally burn with holy invective and scathing rebuke. "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion" (6:1), the prophet cries out, "and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria" (6:1).

You put off the evil day
 and bring near a reign of terror.
You lie on beds inlaid with ivory
 and lounge on your couches.
You dine on choice lambs
 and fattened calves.
You strum away on your harps like David
 and improvise on musical instruments.
You drink wine by the bowlful
 and use the finest lotions,
 but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.
Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile. (6:3-7)

The LORD God Almighty declares:

"I abhor the pride of Jacob
 and detest his fortresses;

I will deliver up the city
and everything in it." (6:8)

It would seem as if his next address was given at Bethel in the temple of idolatry there. It consisted of three startling visions. In the first he saw a swarm of destructive locusts sweeping over the land and he cried out to God to forgive and stay His hand. The prayer was heard and the scourge arrested.

Next a consuming flame appeared upon the great sea, and it sucked up the waters of the mighty deep and threatened to devour the land. Again the prophet pleaded and the judgment was stayed. In the third vision the Lord stood upon a wall with a plumb line in His hand indicating the crookedness of the kingdom. But now there was no reprieve and the sentence went forth, "I will spare them no longer" (7:8). "The sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam" (7:9).

Up to this point Amos had been tolerated by the authorities but now the high priest Amaziah interposed. The mention of the king's name and the awful threatening before the people seemed to him treasonable and dangerous, and he sent word to the king to ask what he should do. The answer came back that Amos was to be sent to his home, and with insolent language Amaziah ordered him to get out. As he turned away he told the high priest that he was nothing but a common herdsman, but that he had come at God's command; and he added as he left this awful judgment:

You say,

"Do not prophesy against Israel
and stop preaching against the house of Isaac."

Therefore this is what the LORD says:

"Your wife will become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword.
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." (7:16-17)

Amos leaves another message as he crosses the borders of Israel. It consists of two visions. The first is the vision of a basket of summer fruit so ripe as to be almost rotten, and telling of the nation's ripeness for its speedily approaching doom. The second is the vision of the Lord standing by the altar and commanding the angel to smite the altar, with the fearful threat added,

Though they dig down to the depths of the grave,
from there my hand will take them.
Though they climb up to the heavens,
from there I will bring them down.
Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel,
there I will hunt them down and seize them.
Though they hide from me at the bottom of the sea,
there I will command the serpent to bite them.
Though they are driven into exile by their enemies,
there I will command the sword to slay them.
I will fix my eyes upon them
for evil and not for good.

The Lord, the LORD Almighty,
he who touches the earth and it melts,
and all who live in it mourn—
the whole land rises like the Nile,
then sinks like the river of Egypt—
he who builds his lofty palace in the heavens
and sets its foundation on the earth,
who calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out over the face of the land—
the LORD is his name. (9:2-6)

But now the visions change. Judgment has spent its force and mercy again rejoices against judgment. Down through the coming ages, the prophet looks and beholds God's faithful covenant love preserving Israel, though scattered among the nations and sifted like corn in a sieve, "and not a pebble will reach the ground" (9:9). Judah, also, while punished, is to be preserved. Down in the distant future is the glorious promise of the coming of the Lord and the restoration and reunion of both Israel and Judah in their own land amid blessings so beneficent that we can only quote the prophet's sublime language to describe it:

"The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman
 and the planter by the one treading grapes.
New wine will drip from the mountains
 and flow from all the hills.
I will bring back my exiled people Israel;
 they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.
They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;
 they will make gardens and eat their fruit." (9:13-14)

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Questions: Amos 1:1-2:16

God often uses "the weak things of the world to confound the mighty:" and so He chose a simple shepherd, Amos, as His prophet, to reprove Israel and her king, Jeroboam II, in the height of their prosperity. The words which Amos spoke as a burden *falling heavily upon Israel* (so the Hebrew expresses), were the embodiment in Divinely-taught speech of a Divinely-sent vision. A warning, and two years' time for repentance, were given before the terrible earthquake came, which, with still more awful impressiveness, foreshadowed the coming upheaval and overturn of the whole state. (A. R. Fausset) **What is the Lord's disposition or mood as He comes to do His judgmental work?**

Ps. 29 Hos. 11:10 Joel 3:16 Amos 1:2

What are some of the accusations God has against Israel, Judea and the surrounding nations?

Questions: Amos 3:1-15

Who is the roaring lion in Amos 3:4 and 3:8?

Amos 1:2

What is Israel's punishment for being blinded by the habit of sin, so as "not to know how to do right" (Amos 3:10)?

Amos 3:11-15

Questions: Amos 4:1-13

Are the "cows of Bashan" (wives) (Amos 4:1) spurring their husbands to do more wickedness by demanding more wealth and luxury?

Israel "proclaimed and published" their own "free offerings," like the hypocrites, whom the Lord Jesus censures (Amos 4:5). For men form a very exaggerated notion of their own liberality; while all the time they withhold that without which all other gifts are vain—the heart. All their doings were accompanied "with the leaven" (Amos 4:5) of pride, self-will, and real disobedience to God, amidst all their parade of obedience. It was what they 'liked' they did, not what God liked. The gratification of their own likings, therefore, was all that they really gained by their religious observances, not the averting of God's displeasure at their sin. (A. R. Fausset) **Is Amos being sarcastic as he tells the people to come and transgress in Amos 4:4-5?**

What had the Lord done to make the people return to Him?

Amos 4:9-11

"Yet you have not returned to Me," says the Lord in Amos 4:11. **What will the Lord do next?**

Questions: Amos 5:1-27

What four or five words sum up for the Israelites and us our whole duty?

Ps. 69:32 Amos 5:4-5

Does the word “hate” in Amos 5:21 sum up how the Lord feels about all the religious activity going on in Israel?

Isa. 1:14

Questions: Amos 6:1-14

Reckless "ease" is the sure forerunner of "woe" (Amos 6:1). The careless are in danger wherever they are; but they are in especial danger "in Zion." Vain confidence, in the midst of religious privileges, neglected or abused, incurs the weightiest condemnation. They who rely on any strength outside of God shall be as the Israelites, who "trusted in the mountain of Samaria," and whose trust awfully disappointed them. (A. R. Fausset) **For what sins are the nobles of Israel especially condemned?**

What does the Lord threaten to do to Israel?

Amos 6:14

Questions: Amos 7:1-8:14

The locust and the fire are relented because Amos intercedes with God and asks for a change in His intention. **Is the power of intercession still able to secure deliverance today?**

The wall (Amos 7:7) (Israelite state) was originally made straight by the perpendicular plumb line. **Why is it now considered a crooked wall.**

Acts 5:29

Amos resumes the thread of his prophecy just at the point where it was broken off by the interruption of Amaziah. To contend with God is vain, and only reveals the impotence of the puny rebel that lifts himself up against his Almighty King. As the last vision—viz., that of the plumb-line (Amos 7:7-8)—declared the certainty of the coming end, so the vision here of the basket of summer fruit declares its nearness. The fruit gathering closed the whole harvest. So the whole course of God's mercies, chastisements, and providential warnings were now completed in the case of Israel: as He said respecting the sister kingdom of Judah, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" (Isa. 5:4) As in holiness so in sin, there is a sowing, a growth, and a maturity. After the appointed cycle of heavenly influences has acted for the due time, the harvest time comes. As believers are then ripe for glory (Mark 4:27-29), so are unbelievers ripe for shame and punishment. The long period of God's patience and forbearance towards sinners at last terminates, and judgment ensues. (A. R. Fausset) **How did Amos respond to Amaziah's controlling tactics?**

What type of famine would come after the famine that brought on starvation?

Questions: Amos 9:1-15

"The tabernacle of David" (Amos 9:11) is the Davidic dynasty the Lord will raise up in the Person of the Christ returning in glory at His second advent to establish the kingdom over Israel (Acts 1:6). James quoted this great prophecy at the first church council (Acts 15:15-17). The Holy Spirit on that momentous occasion employed it to unfold the divine program for the future; that is, in this present age God is calling out a people for His name. After that the Lord will return and reestablish the Davidic dynasty in Christ, Amos 9:11-12, and millennial prosperity, Amos 9:13, will result in a restored Israel, Amos 9:14-15. (Merrill F. Unger) **Is it God's way often to wait until man's extremity, and then to interpose, as His most fitting opportunity, that the glory of salvation may be all His own? What bright and glorious promise does Amos close his prophecy concerning a remnant in Israel? Is there also an inclusion for Gentiles in this prophecy?**

Ps. 2:8 Jer. 30:7 John 4:35 Acts 15:13-17