

# Amos

## Amos 1-5

The prophets of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC included Isaiah and Micah who prophesied primarily in Judah, and Hosea, Jonah, and Amos who prophesied primarily in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Amos was not a professional prophet, rather he was an ordinary lower class working man, a shepherd and fruit worker, who couldn't ignore the call of God. He lived south of Jerusalem but prophesied in the vicinity of Bethel, one of the northern kingdom's temple locations and a residence of the king of Israel, Jeroboam II. Like the other prophets of his generation, he cried out against the prosperity and luxuries of the wealthy among his people, whose comforts were not shared by the poor they took advantage of.

The earthquake mentioned in 1:1 must have been memorable, as it was mentioned in Zechariah 14:5 230 years later. The earthquake apparently was foretold by Amos 2 years before it happened (Amos 3:14-15, 6:11, 8:8, 9:1, 9). Recent geological and archaeological studies affirm an enormous earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 to 8.2 struck Israel and Syria in about 760 BC.

Amos's prophetic message opens with affirming God's presence in Jerusalem, not Bethel, and his authority over everywhere. Then comes a series of similar indictments of 7 nations around Israel, including their sister state of Judah, highlighting their injustice, pride, and lack of mercy, before zeroing in on Israel herself as the 8<sup>th</sup>. Perhaps the audience in Israel was saying "amen, amen" to the first 7 denunciations of "those people," but the 8<sup>th</sup> was personal.

Amos charged the men of Israel with pagan morality, objectifying people as disposable property (2:6-8) and again the abuse and overuse of alcohol is cited (2:8, 12, 4:1, etc). God reminded them of how he had destroyed the powerful Amorites that lived in Canaan before them (2:9-11) who looked unbeatably large and powerful to 10 of the 12 spies in Numbers 13-14. Some, like Samson and Samuel served the LORD as Nazirites, others were called to be prophets, but Israel in Amos's day rejected both and refused to listen or follow, subverting those who were dedicated to the LORD (2:11-12). Thus, all the wealth and military might they put confidence in would be useless.

God took Israel to be a nation of his own (Deuteronomy 4) and that privilege carried with it covenant responsibilities, which they were ignoring (3:1-2) at their own peril. As Jesus later said, to whom much is given, much is required. Amos describes the words of the prophets warning Israel in 3:4-8, warnings which were going unheeded, and so disaster must fall. The rich who had multiple homes were not at all secure from the judgement hanging over Israel (3:13-4:3). The judgment on the comfortable and complacent, whose comfort depended on oppressing others, was to be devastating. Religious rituals at their temple(s) (4:4-5) were no substitute for actual repentance and change of behavior. Signs of trouble were already there, with problems in their supply lines and shortages of rain some places, and pest problems and rising violence (4:6-11), but no one seriously took those things as divine warnings to humble themselves and so, "prepare to meet your God" (4:12). The Creator makes his thoughts known to mankind by the prophets and their word, so those who don't listen are accountable (4:13).

The desolation Amos predicted in chapter 5 was still about 30 years away in terms of finality, so there is an appeal in 5:4b, 5:6, 5:14, 5:15 and 5:24 to seek the LORD and practice his ways and avoid the great calamity that hung on the dark horizon. The “day of the LORD” was going to be terrifying for those who were religious but not godly (5:18-23). The heart and center of the prophet’s message is in 5:24. This is what God calls every nation, the people of every nation, to be and do. Stephen saw these warnings as pointing to the New Covenant and Christ when he quoted 5:26-27 in Acts 7:42-43, and we can surely see Jesus in 5:4b, 6, 14, etc.

## Amos 6-9

Notice in Amos 6:1 that the comfortable and complacent, that is the rich and influential, occupants of both Zion (Jerusalem, Judah) and Samaria (Ephraim, Israel) are included in the prophetic condemnation. While they felt privileged and secure, they weren’t far from other cities and kingdoms that had enjoyed their day of prosperity and power. When personal comfort and pleasure (6:4-7) blinds people to the suffering of their neighbors or their own immorality, destruction will follow.

Amos 7 presents two visions of divine judgment that prompted Amos to intercede for the people he was prophesying against. Twice the LORD relented as he had on other occasions of intercessory prayer (see Exodus 32, Numbers 12, for example). However, after yielding twice to Amos’s appeals for mercy, the LORD showed Amos a wall built to a standard, and stated that the standard could not be forgotten, consequences for rejection of the standard (the Law, basic moral scruples and decency toward others) were inevitable. Building plumb walls is not an arbitrary set of standards, but a necessity for structures to work and last. The lineage of Jeroboam II (7:9) would be cut off by the sword, as had been previously prophesied about the dynasty of Jehu, they ruled for 4 generations (2 Kings 10:30).

As often happens with the words of prophets, Amos’s pronouncement of divine judgment against Jeroboam’s house/lineage (7:9) was spun by the priest at Bethel (not a divinely chosen priest or place of worship) into a direct threat against the king (7:11). Just a little misquote of what Amos actually had said. The priest Amaziah rightly identified the temple at Bethel as national religion, belonging to the king and the kingdom (7:13) rather than to the LORD. Despite the opposition and threats of Amaziah, Amos persisted because he knew God’s will. The contrast between the professional priest at the national shrine and the rustic herdsman called by God is highlighted in the confrontation in 7:14-15, especially the line about being taken from following the flock, which was said of David (2 Samuel 7:8). We don’t have a record of Amaziah’s reaction to Amos’s pronouncement of divine judgement in 7:17, nor an account of the fulfillment of that prophecy, but we can be sure what Amos said to him happened, as everything else Amos said was fulfilled.

Amos 8 begins with a Hebrew word play, the Hebrew for “end” and the Hebrew for “summer fruit” sounding alike. And ripe summer fruit is highly perishable. The LORD’s rejection of the rituals of a selfish self-indulgent people are dramatically reiterated. Victimized the poor and needy with trivial cheats and deceit in 8:4-6 is again emphasized. The pronouncement of the end of Israel as a kingdom and unified people includes language in 8:9-10 that should make us think

of what happened when Jesus was crucified, and there was darkness at noon for 3 hours, when God's one and only son was rejected and died on a bitter day. There was to be an interval of brokenness for Israel, including a dearth of prophets and teachers proclaiming the word of the LORD (8:11-12) and in the meantime the (false) god of Dan and Bethel, the "Guilt of Samaria" introduced by Jeroboam I, would disappear from the land.

Amos 9:1 and several previous references to shaking and houses being destroyed suggest that that the earthquake in 1:1 was a portent Amos foretold to lend weight to his warnings of divine judgment that would progressively destroy the whole nation in the next generation. As so often happens in the final words of the prophets, we have divine judgment for sins in 9:1-10 but the final words in 9:11-15 are promises of the coming kingdom when David's lineage (the Christ) once again reigns, not only over a renewed and rebuilt nation but over the nations (12). The kingdom Jesus purchased with his blood is blessed with abundance and renewal and limitless productivity, with divine security.