

Amos

Overview and Summary

Author:

- ⇒ We are told at the outset that the words in this book were given by Amos in verse 1:1
- ⇒ What we know about Amos comes only from what he says about himself throughout the text. Nowhere else in the Bible do we read about the ministry or workings of Amos. We can know the following about Amos:
 - Before his call to prophesy, Amos was a “shepherd” (1:1). The Hebrew term used can more literally be translated as “breeder of sheep.” This suggests that Amos was not necessarily a lowly shepherd but was wealthy enough to own and breed sheep.
 - Before his call to prophesy, Amos was also a “grower of sycamore figs” (7:14). The word “grower” technically refers to one who prunes sycamore fig trees to spur on continued growth in the plant. Amos, therefore, was in charge of growing a larger herd and growing sycamore figs.
 - Amos was not a “professional” prophet, namely he was not involved with any prophetic school or group but was a simple lay worker.
 - Amos was from the town of Tekoa, which is located five or so miles southeast of Bethlehem. Amos then was from the southern nation of Judah.
 - From reading the book as a whole we can see that Amos was intimately aware of the politics of the surrounding nations as well as intimately aware of the Old Testament.

Date:

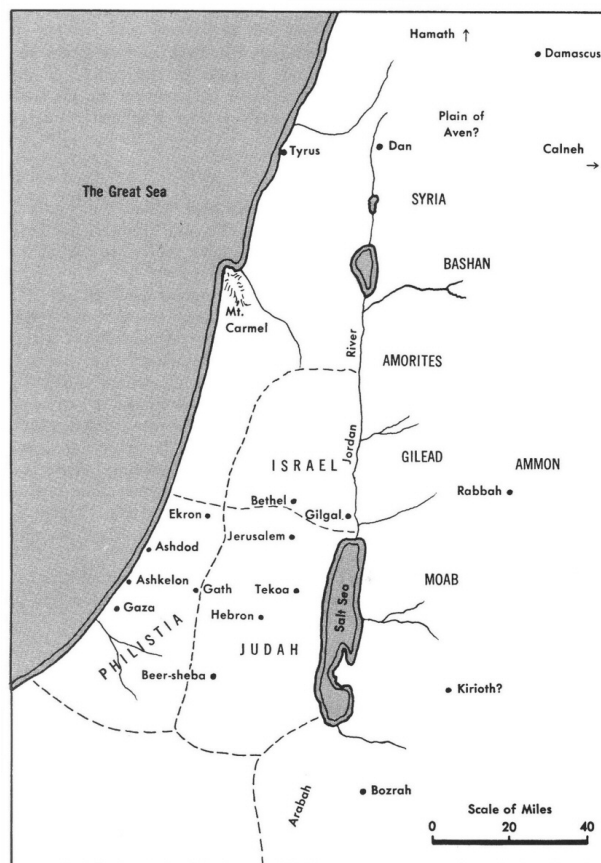
- ⇒ Verse one tells us that Amos’ prophetic ministry took place “in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel.”
 - Uzziah reigned in Judah from 787-757BC, while Jeroboam II reigned from 787-747BC.
- ⇒ To further narrow the timeframe down, Amos says his ministry came “two years before the earthquake.” Archaeological evidence suggests that a great earthquake hit the area around 760BC, meaning Amos’ ministry most likely occurred around 762BC.
 - The prophet Zechariah also mentions this event in 14:5, “You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah.” Such a mention of this event suggest that this earthquake was a large cultural event that was forever present in the minds of Amos’ audience.

Audience:

- ⇒ Amos states that his prophetic word is directed toward the nation of Israel.
 - Amos's audience is not simply a king, rulers, or the religious elite (as seen elsewhere in the prophets) but instead he is writing to condemn an entire nation.
 - 170 years prior, Israel was divided into two distinct kingdoms. Israel occupied the northern region of the Promised Land while Judah occupied the southern region.
 - Being from Judah, Amos was a foreign prophet in Israel.
- ⇒ During this time in Israel's history, the nation was experiencing a time of relative peace, prosperity, and expansion. Jeroboam II ruled over an area that rivaled the extent of Solomon's territories. The military was superior in the region. The economy was booming, which led to an expansion of the upper class. In other words, everything seemed to be going right.
 - Israel had set up alternate worship locations in Bethel and Gilgal.

Various Nations:

- ⇒ While addressed to the nation of Israel the message of Amos also contains judgments directed to the following cities/nations: Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah.
 - Each of these cities/nations surround Israel and have committed egregious sins which God condemns and pronounces judgment.



How to Interpret Amos:

- ⇒ As a prophetic book, it is important to understand the geography, regional politics, history, and current religious status of Israel. Doing so allows the reader to better understand not only what Amos is saying but why the prophecy against Israel (and other nations) is so necessary.
- ⇒ The book is also full of imagery which requires the reader to look at what Amos is saying and then determine how such a use of imagery helps paint a picture for the reader.
- ⇒ Within the prophetic genre, Amos contains oracles, sermons, and visions. Each literary style is enlisted to help cast judgment upon Israel.

Structure & Content:

- ⇒ There have been many alternative suggestions as to how this book may be structured:
 - Two Major Sections: The Words of Amos (ch 1-6) & The Visions of Amos (ch 7-9).¹
 - Five Major Sections: Introduction (1:1-2), Oracles Against the Nations (1:3-2:16), Sermons Against the Nation of Israel (ch 3-6), Visions of Judgment (7:1-9:10), and Promises of Hope (9:11-15).²
 - Seven Major Sections: For Three Sins, Even for Four, I Will Send Fire (ch 1-2), The Lion Has Roared (ch 3-4), Yahweh Demands Justice, Not Ritual (ch 5), Judgment on the Wealthy and Complacent (ch 6), Four Visions (7:1-8:3), Judgement on Israel (8:4-9:10), and Hope and Restoration (9:11-15).³
- ⇒ Chapter 1: After introducing himself and describing the time period of his prophetic ministry Amos goes on to cast prophetic judgment on five different cities/nations: Damascus (Syria/Aram), Gaza (Philistia), Tyre, Edom and Ammon. Each of these judgments is structured the same. First, Amos begins by saying, “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of ____ and for four, I will not revoke punishment.” This is followed by a recounting of one transgression of the city/nation. Lastly, Amos listed the judgment cast upon each city/nation.

¹ Billy K. Smith, and Franklin S. Page. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*. Vol. 19B. The New American Commentary. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995).

² Hitchcock, Mark. *Bible Briefs*.

³ J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

- ⇒ Chapter 2: Using the same formula as chapter 1, Amos continues his condemnation of these cities/nations, adding Moab and Judah to the list. So far seven cities/nations have been listing, suggesting completion to the judgment, but Amos surprises the reader by now casting a prophetic judgment upon Israel, but instead of listing only one sin, Amos lists four. Verses 9-11 then remind Israel of God's role in saving them in their past (i.e. destroying the Amorites, freeing them from Israel, raising up a priesthood to mediate before God). The chapter concludes with Amos telling Israel that no man is too strong to resist or too fast to flee God's coming wrath.
- ⇒ Chapter 3: With focus squarely set on Israel, Amos levels God's people by sharing God's promise to judge Israel for their opulence, oppression, and violence. God promises that he will not relent on Israel. He is a lion and Israel is his prey. Their strongholds will be torn down, and their false places of worship (Bethel) will be decimated.
- ⇒ Chapter 4: Continuing to list the transgressions of Israel, Amos focuses on the women of the northern nation and calls them "cows of Bashan." Bashan is a fertile region near the Jordan River Valley, therefore he is pointing out the opulence of these women. Amos continues by focusing on Israel's centers for worship: Bethel and Gilgal, which are not home for worship (although true worship should have been in Jerusalem) and are now home for transgression. God reminds the people of his previous attempts to show the people their need to return to God through four warnings: drought, crops dying, regional battles, and the occasional overthrow of various cities. Because they have not taken heed to these warnings, the Creator has the power and right to send Israel into exile.
- ⇒ Chapter 5: The first fifteen verses of this chapter are littered with both messages of judgment and calling the people to turn away from their former way of living. To this point Israel had "trampled the poor," "exact[ed]" unfair taxes, "afflicted the righteous," and "turned aside from the needy." Therefore, God calls Israel to "seek the Lord and live," "seek good, not evil," "hate evil and love good," and "establish justice." The reader of Amos is hopeful that Israel will indeed turn and repent from their evil ways, but verse 16-17 reminds us that Israel will not and they will experience exile. Lastly, we read that God does not require ritual or sacrifice, in fact God hates them, he requires justice and righteousness.
- ⇒ Chapter 6: Amos now takes aim at the wealthy and the complacent in Israel. Instead of seeking the Lord, the people are seeking the best of what the earth can give them. Instead of seeking righteousness they seek wickedness, so that they might live complacent/opulent lives. Therefore, God promises to strike down their houses

they've made on the backs of injustice and wickedness. They will be captured and oppressed.

- ⇒ Chapter 7: The beginning of this chapter we read of a conversation Amos has with the Lord. Twice God is prepping a plague to send over Israel and Amos pleads that the Lord relent, which he does. God then shows Amos a vision of a plumb line which shows that Israel does not measure up to the standard God has for the people and therefore he must send them into exile. After God tells Amos this, we are given a short historical interjection. Bethel's priest, Amaziah, tells the king of Israel (Jeroboam II) that Amos must stop prophesying against Israel. Amos then confronts this priest with a personal judgement from the Lord that his entire family will lie in ruin and Amaziah will die in an "unclean land."
- ⇒ Chapter 8: Here we read a second vision given to Amos, this time one of a basket of ripe summer fruit. The point being, just as the summer fruit is ripe to be eaten, Israel is ripe to be exiled and judged for their wickedness and refusal to turn to the Lord. The bustling centers of worship will be quiet, feasts will be a time of mourning, lamentation will be the cry of the nation, and there will be a great famine of the word of the Lord on the land.
- ⇒ Chapter 9: Beginning with the assertion that there is no place to hide from God, he is the omnipotent creator of all living things who "touches the earth and it melts." God will indeed punish Israel, yet God promises "I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob." The book ends on a note of hope where God promises to raise up, repair, rebuild and restore Israel back in the Promised Land. Verse fifteen says, "I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them."

Message:

- ⇒ Amos is a book of destruction as it's primary aim to inform the nation of Israel of the coming judgment brought by the hand of God.
- ⇒ Primary reasons for this upcoming judgment include: social injustice, opulence, and failure to worship/submit to God.
- ⇒ While God brings judgment, he also promises a future restoration for Israel and fulfilment to the land promises given to her.