

THE BOOK OF AMOS

Message:

God's relationship with His people includes judging them in righteousness when they sin and restoring them in grace.

At the heart of this message is the covenant between Yahweh and his people. Covenantal concerns are central to the Yahweh's accusations (e.g., mistreatment of the poor, failure to observe sabbatical and jubilee regulations, etc.) and to the subsequent judgment (see Lev 26:14–35 and Deut 28:15–63). The promise of restoration is also tied to the Covenant (Lev 26:40–45 and Deut 30:1–10).

Author:

According to Amos 1:1, the author of the book is Amos. The name means “burden-bearer.” Amos further describes himself as a “shepherd”¹ from Tekoa.” Some suggest that the designation “shepherd” is somewhat misleading. For example, Cragie suggests that, “Amos was not a simple shepherd. He was in the sheep business, a manager of herds, contributing both wool and meat to the economy.”² Others have noted that such assumptions may exceed the evidence.³ In any case, Tekoa was a town about 6 miles southeast of Bethlehem and about ten miles south of Jerusalem, in what be in his day, Judah or the southern kingdom.⁴ Strategically located on a hill in the wilderness of Tekoa (2 Chron 11:6; 20:20), the town served as a lookout against invaders approaching Jerusalem (Jer 6:1). In Amos 7:14–15, the author states he was not a prophet or a son of a prophet. That is, Amos was not a prophet in a professional sense (i.e. part of a prophetic school), but a layman called by God to be a prophet. In these same verses he notes that on top of being a herdsman, he was also a grower⁵ of sycamore figs. Nonetheless, Amos notes clearly that, “the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, ‘Go prophesy to My people Israel.’” Douglas notes, “Amos is an illustration of the biblical principle that spiritual gifts are more important than academic training for ministry, for his oracles are fully as powerful and compelling as any in the OT . . .”⁶

¹ The term translated “shepherd” is rare Hebrew term only occurs in the Old Testament here and 2 Kings 3:4.

² Peter C. Cragie, “Amos the *noqed* in the Light of Ugaritic,” *Studies in Religion* 11 (1982): 33.

³ Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Ancor Bible, (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 188.

⁴ Tekoa is identified with modern day Khirbet Taqu’a.

⁵ *HALOT* notes that a בלס is one who would “scar the unripe sycamore figs (with finger-nail or iron tool) in order to promote ripening.”

⁶ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 31 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 284.

Recipients:

According to Amos 1:1, the original and primary recipients for the prophecies was the Northern Kingdom Israel. This is confirmed by the geographical references (Samaria, Bethel, etc.) as well as the encounter with Amaziah (7:10–17). However, Judah may have been a secondary target. Not only is Judah included among the nations under God’s judgment, but she is also alluded to elsewhere in the book. For example, Judah is likely included in Amos’ reference to the “entire family” in 3:1–2 (cf. 2:10). Furthermore, as inspired Scripture, Amos was written for God’s people in every generation (2 Tim 3:16)

Dating:

Amos 1:1 places his prophecies during the reigns of Uzziah⁷ King of Judah (790–740) and Jeroboam II the King of Israel (793–753).⁸ Taking the overlapping reigns into consideration, Amos prophesied between 790–753 B.C. Amos provides one other chronological clue: “two years before the earthquake.” Unfortunately, the dating of this earthquake is uncertain. However, it must have been memorable for the prophet to mention it. It is probably the same one mentioned in Zechariah 14:5.⁹ Some scholars link Amos’ reference to an earthquake in Hazor in 765–760 B.C.¹⁰ This chronological evidence taken with the historical setting noted below has led many commentators to suggest a date around 760 B.C.

Historical Setting:

Amos ministered during a time when both Israel and Judah were experiencing political stability and economic prosperity. This stability and prosperity was fostered in part by the long reigns of Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II in Israel. (1:1) had brought stability, prosperity, and expansion to the two kingdoms. Judah subdued the Philistines to the west, the Ammonites to the east, and the Arab states to the south. Similarly, the weakness of surrounding nations and the growing strength of Israel combined to bring Israel into the height of its prominence. Israel’s control of the major trade routes through the region resulted in unprecedented economic prosperity.

Unfortunately, the political and economic successes were not matched spiritually or morally. Economic prosperity led to self-indulgence (see 6:1-6), exploitation of the poor (2:6–7; 5:7, 10–13; 6:12; 8:4-6), sexual immorality (2:7), pride (6:8), and idolatry (8:14). Ironically, this spiritual and moral descent occurred while religion flourished. The people faithfully attended the

⁷ Uzziah is also called Azariah (Kings 14:21; 15:1-7). Uzziah became king at the age of sixteen. His 52 year reign was longer than any previous king of Judah or Israel. He is known as a capable and powerful king who extended Judah's territory and reigned during a time of great prosperity.

⁸ Jeroboam II, king of Israel, was a competent leader whose greatest accomplishment was probably the expansion of his kingdom into the Transjordan (2 Kings 14:23-29).

⁹ Josephus mentions an earthquake in connection with the events of 2 Chronicles 26:16-20 (*Ant.* 9.10.4).

¹⁰ Philip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah-An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 38.

shrines at Bethel, Dan, Gilgal, and Beer-sheba (4:4; 5:5; 8:3, 10), offered their sacrifices (4:5; 5:21-23), and believed that their relationship to God would protect them from disaster (5:14, 18-20; 6:1-3; 9:10).

In the words of Dickens, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

Purpose:

The purpose of Amos is fairly transparent. The prophet seeks to warn his recipients of impending judgments in light of their flagrant violations of covenant.

Contributions:

The contributions of Amos appear to be at least threefold. First, perhaps more than any other prophet, Amos is concerned about social justice. Second, Amos illustrates that laymen can be used in significant ways for God. Third, Amos was apparently the first, or one of the first writing prophets to use symbolic images in prophetic utterances.¹¹ Along these lines, Hubbard suggests that both Isaiah and Jeremiah were familiar with and influenced by the writings of Amos.¹²

Amos and the New Testament:

There are two explicit quotations of Amos in the New Testament (both in the Book of Acts).¹³ Both of the quotations occur in significant speeches at significant points in Acts.

QUOTATIONS OF AMOS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT			
Amos Passage	Acts Passage	Speaker	Significance
5:25-27	7:42-43	Stephen	(Those who reject Christ are like) The Isarelites disobeyed God in the past
9:11-12	15:16-17	James	The Old Testament prophets affirmed that God would seek a people from among the Gentiles

Literary Features:

Amos’ literary artistry is widely recognized. He employs a diverse number of literary forms. As Stuart observes, “While no technique is absolutely unique, some are used in a way that produces a finished product without parallel in other OT prophecy. If Amos was not a professionally trained prophet, this certainly did not detract from his ability to deliver powerful,

¹¹ Stanley Ellisen, *Knowing God’s Word* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 232.

¹² David Allan Hubbard, *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wisemen (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 116-17.

¹³ There may also be several allusions to Amos in the New Testament (Amos 3:7 = Rev 10:7, 11:18; Amos 3:13 (LXX) = Rev 1:8; Amos 9:1 = Rev 8:3). See Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 117-18.

moving oracles whose impact cut to the very heart of a wayward nation's responsibilities before God."¹⁴

LITERARY FORMS ¹⁵		
EXAMPLES OF MAJOR FORMS	EXAMPLES OF OTHER FORMS	EXAMPLES OF LITERARY DEVICES
Judgment speeches Vision reports Biographical narrative Salvation promise	Disputation questions Instructions to herald Legal proof saying Admonitions Oaths Woes Hymn Reports of God's past judgment Dirge or lamentation	Repetition Calls to attention Quotations Responses to verbal opposition Punning Gestures

Structure:

BASIC OUTLINE
I. Prologue (1:1–2)
II. Prosecution of the Nations (1:3–2:16)
III. Purposes of Israel's Judgment (3:1–6:14)
IV. Pictures of Judgment (7:1–9:10)
V. Promise of Restoration (9:11–15)
CHIASTIC OUTLINE ¹⁶
A Judgment of the Land (1:2)
B. Judgment of the Nations (1:3–2:3)
C Judgment of Judah and Israel (2:4–9:10)
C' Restoration of Judah and Israel (9:11)
B' Restoration of the Nations (9:12)
A' Restoration of the Land (9:13–15)

¹⁴ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 285.

¹⁵ Allan Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 102-107.

¹⁶ Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 121.

SYNTHETIC CHART OF AMOS

Prologue (1:1-2)	Prosecution of The Nations (1:3-2:16)	Purposes of Israel's Judgment (3:1-6:14)		Pictures of Judgment (7:1-9:10)		Promise of Restoration (9:11-15)
T i t l e (1:1)	Damasca (1:3-5)	Judgment Speeches	Woe Oracles	Judgments Turned Aside	Judgments Not Turned Aside	Reconstruction (v. 11)
	Gaza (1:6-8)	Forgetting the Covenant Relationship (3:1-15)	Misunderstanding the Day of the Lord (5:18-27)	Vision of Locusts (7:1-3)	Vision of a Plumb Line (7:7-17)	Reconquest (v. 12)
(1:2)	Tyre (1:9-10)	Failing to Repent at God's Warning (4:1-13)	Misplaced Confidence in Material Riches (6:1-14)	Vision of Fire (7:4-6)	Vision of Summer Fruit (8:1-14)	Riches in Agriculture (v. 13)
	Edom (1:11-12)	Forgoing True Worship and Social Justice (5:1-17)			Vision of the Lord Above the Altar (9:1-10)	Restoration, Rebuilding, and Replanting (v. 14)
	Ammon (1:13-15)					Reestablished Forever (v. 15)
	Moab (2:1-3)					
	Judah (2:4-5)					
	Israel (2:6-16)					
	Eight Pronouncements	Three Judgment Speeches and Two Woe Oracles		Five Visions		Five Promises
	1:3	3:1	6:14	7:1	9:10	9:11 9:15
J U D G M E N T S						
HOPE						

I. PROLOGUE (1:1–2)

- A. The Title (v. 1)
- B. The Theme (v. 2)

II. PROSECUTION OF THE NATIONS (1:3–2:16)

- A. Prosecution of Damascus (1:3–5)
- B. Prosecution of Gaza (1:6–8)
- C. Prosecution of Tyre (1:9–10)
- D. Prosecution of Edom (1:11–12)
- E. Prosecution of Ammon (1:13–15)
- F. Prosecution of Moab (2:1–3)
- G. Prosecution of Judah (2:4–5)
- H. Prosecution of Israel (2:6–16)

A SURVEY OF AMOS 1:3-2:16

Reference	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
Initial Messenger Formula	Thus says the LORD	Thus says the LORD	Thus says the LORD	Thus says the LORD	Thus says the LORD	Thus says the LORD	Thus says the LORD	Thus says the LORD
Iterative Formula	For three transgressions ... and for four	For three transgressions ... and for four	For three transgressions ... and for four	For three transgressions ... and for four	For three transgressions ... and for four	For three transgressions ... and for four	For three transgressions ... and for four	For three transgressions ... and for four
Irrevocable Judgment	I will not revoke its punishment	I will not revoke its punishment	I will not revoke its punishment	I will not revoke its punishment	I will not revoke its punishment	I will not revoke its punishment	I will not revoke its punishment	I will not revoke its punishment
Indictment of Particular Sins	Threshed Gilead	Deported an entire population	Delivered an entire population to Edom	Pursued his brother with a sword	Ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead	Burned the bones of the king of Edom	Rejected the law of the LORD	Sold the righteous for money, abuse of women and the poor
Identification of the Judgment	So I will send fire...	So I will send fire...	So I will send fire...	So I will send fire...	So I will kindle a fire...	So I will send fire...	So I will send fire...	
Concluding Messenger Formula	Says the LORD	Says the Lord GOD			Says the LORD	Says the LORD		Declares the LORD

III. PINPOINTING ISRAEL'S FAILURES (3:1–6:14)

TYPES OF JUDGMENT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drought (1:2; 4:6–8) • Mourning (1:2; 5:16–17; 8:3, 8, 10; 9:5) • Fire (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5; 4:11; 5:6; 7:4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultic desecration (3:14; 7:9; 9:1) • Exile (1:5, 15; 3:12; 4:2–3; 5:5, 27; 6:7; 7:4, 11, 17; 9:9, 14) • Death (1:5, 8; 2:2–3; 4:10–11; 6:9–10; 7:11, 17; 8:3; 9:1, 4, 10)
<p>These judgments are <i>certain</i> (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6, 14–16; 4:12; 5:10; 7:8; 8:2; 9:2–4)</p>	

A. Forgetting the Covenant Relationship (3:1–15)

1. The summons to Israel (3:1–8)
2. The summons of Ashdod and Egypt (3:9–10)
3. The sentencing of Israel (3:11–15)

B. Failing to Repent at God's Warning (4:1–13)

1. A searing condemnation of the women (4:1–3)
2. A sarcastic call to worship (4:4–5)
3. A strong confirmation of woe (4:6–13)

C. Forgoing True Worship and Social Justice (5:1–17)

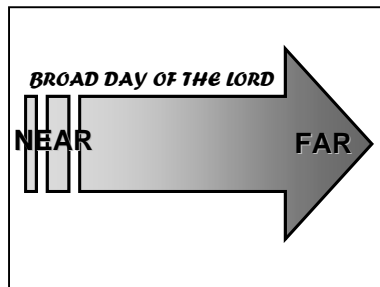
1. A dirge for Israel (5:1–3)
2. A directive for Israel (5:4–6)
3. A declaration of inequity (5:7)
4. A description of God (5:8–10)
5. A declaration of inequity (5:11–13)
6. A directive to Israel (5:14–15)

7. A dirge for Israel (5:16–17)

A CHIASTIC CONSTRUCTION FOR AMOS 5:1–17¹⁷
<p>Lament for Israel (5:1–3) Seek God and live–i.e. avoid destruction (5:4–6) Warning to sinners (5:7) The power of God to create (5:8a) The LORD is His name (5:8b) The power of God to punish (5:9) Warning to sinners and the righteous (5:10–13) Seek God and live–i.e. obtain mercy (5:14–15) Lament for Israel (5:16–17)</p>

D. Misunderstanding Concerning the Day of the Lord (5:18–27)

1. Confusion concerning the Day of the LORD (5:18–20)
2. Condemnation concerning defective worship (5:21–24)
3. Confirmation concerning divine judgment (5:25–27)



E. Misplaced Confidence in Material Riches (6:1–14)

1. Delusion #1: Our prestige will spare us (6:1–3)
2. Delusion #2: Our possessions will spare us (6:4–7)

¹⁷ This is a modification of a chiasm suggested by Jan DeWaard and William A. Smalley, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Amos* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1979), 192. DeWaard and Smalley also believe that Amos 5:1-17 is the center of a larger chiastic structure which incorporates the whole book.

3. Delusion #3: Our power will spare us (6:8–14)

IV. PICTURES OF JUDGMENT (7:1–9:10)

- A. Vision of Locusts (7:1–3)
- B. Vision of Fire (7:4–6)
- C. Vision of a Plumb Line (7:7–17)
- D. Vision of Summer Fruit (8:1–14)
- E. Vision of the Lord Above the Altar (9:1–10)

V. PROMISE OF RESTORATION (9:11–15)

- A. Reconstruction (9:11)
- B. Reconquest (9:12)
- C. Riches in Agriculture (9:13)
- D. Restoration, Rebuilding, and Replanting (9:14)
- E. Reestablished Forever (9:15)