

## LESSON 1 ~ AMOS

The book of Amos addresses the excessive pursuit of luxury, self-indulgence, and oppression of the poor which characterized the period of prosperity and success in the Northern Kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam II. Amos's message of doom seemed incongruent with the elaborate trappings of that era. But with divinely given insight, he saw the corruption beneath the brilliantly colored exterior and announced that the nation was rotten to the core. The book stands as an eloquent witness against those who subordinate human need and dignity to the pursuit of wealth and pleasure.

The name "Amos" is derived from the Hebrew terms meaning "lift a burden." Thus, the name means "Burden" or "Burden-bearer." Amos lived up to the meaning of his name by bearing up under his divinely given burden of declaring judgment to rebellious Israel.

### Author

Amos was not a "professional" prophet (7:14) like the more numerous institutional or cultic prophets of his day. From his rustic background at Tekoa, six miles south of Bethlehem in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Amos was called by God to go to the Northern Kingdom to be His spokesman (7:15).

The prophet was a common man whose occupation was herding sheep, with supplementary income from tending sycamore fruit (7:14). His moral sensibilities were shocked by the perversions of Israel's worship that he observed at Bethel, one of the great national shrines.

### Date

According to 1:1, Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah (767–739 B.C.), and Jeroboam, king of Israel (782–753 B.C.), thus leaving a possible time-frame from 767 to 753 B.C. The prophecy of 7:9–11 seems to indicate a time late in the reign of Jeroboam and a probable date of writing is 760–753 B.C.

Amos ministered after the time of Joel and Jonah, and just before Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah. At this time Uzziah reigned over a prosperous and militarily successful Judah. In the north, Israel was ruled by the capable king Jeroboam II. Economic and military circumstances were almost ideal, but prosperity only increased the materialism, immorality, and injustice of the people. During these years, Assyria, Babylon, Syria, and Egypt were relatively weak. Thus, the people of Israel found it hard to imagine the coming disaster predicted by Amos—a disaster that occurred barely three decades later.

### Themes and Literary Structure

Although Amos highlights his rustic roots and his lack of professional status as a prophet, the vivid style and literary character of the book suggests that he was educated. The book of Amos may be conveniently divided into four sections of eight prophecies (chs. 1; 2), three sermons (chs. 3–6), five visions (7:1–9:10), and five promises (9:11–15).

The book of Amos is basically a message of judgment: prophecies of judgment on the nations, oracles and visions of divine judgment against Israel. Amos begins with a series of indictments against the seven neighbors of Israel, including Judah, and upon Israel herself (chs. 1; 2). Each foreign nation is to be punished for specific offenses either against Israel or some other nation. This judgment on the nations teaches that God is a universal monarch and all nations must answer to Him for their mistreatment of other nations and peoples.

The preaching of Amos stresses the righteousness and justice of God and His requirement that the human relationships of His people be characterized by righteousness and justice as well. The rich are condemned because of their oppression of the poor and for their religious hypocrisy. Religion is more than observing feast days and holding sacred assemblies; true religion demands righteous living, and the way people treat their neighbors reveals their relationship with God. Amos ends the book on a note of consolation. After exile and judgment, God will restore His people to the land and bless them.

## Outline of Amos

- I. Introduction to Amos 1:1, 2**
- II. The Eight Judgments 1:3–2:16**
  - A. Judgment on Damascus 1:3–5
  - B. Judgment on Gaza 1:6–8
  - C. Judgment on Tyre 1:9, 10
  - D. Judgment on Edom 1:11, 12
  - E. Judgment on Ammon 1:13–15
  - F. Judgment on Moab 2:1–3
  - G. Judgment on Judah 2:4, 5
  - H. Judgment on Israel 2:6–16
- III. The Three Sermons of Judgment 3:1–6:14**
  - A. The First Sermon: Israel's Present 3:1–15
  - B. The Second Sermon: Israel's Past 4:1–13
  - C. The Third Sermon: Israel's Future 5:1–6:14
- IV. The Five Visions of Judgment 7:1–9:10**
  - A. Vision of the Locusts 7:1–3
  - B. Vision of the Fire 7:4–6
  - C. Vision of the Plumb Line 7:7–9
  - D. Opposition of Amaziah (Historical Parenthesis) 7:10–17
  - E. Vision of the Summer Fruit 8:1–14
  - F. Vision of the Stricken Doorposts 9:1–10
- V. The Five Promises of the Restoration of Israel 9:11–15**

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## Understand The Background

1. Judah and Israel are prosperous and mighty in war but they trust in themselves and don't care for the needy. See 6:1-8.
2. Read the background for this period. 2Kings 14:23-29; 15:1-7; 2Chron 26.
3. Read the quotes of Amos in the NT. Acts 7:42-43 (Amos 5:25-27); Acts 15:16-17 (Amos 9:11-12).

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<sup>1</sup>*Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts : Old and New Testaments.* electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996.

**Study Questions For Amos Chapter 1**

1. Name the kings of Judah and Israel during the time Amos prophesied.
  
2. Why was Damascus (capital of Syria) going to be punished?
3. When and by whom would the Syrians be taken away captive?
  
4. Why were the Philistines going to be punished?
  
5. Why were the Phoenicians (Tyre) going to be punished?
  
6. Why were the Edomites going to be punished?
  
7. Why were the Ammonites going to be punished?
  
8. Explain the meaning of “For three transgressions..., and for four,”
  
9. Research: Locate each of the cities and regions on a map.