The Book of Amos

Zanesville, OH | Sunday AM Bible Study

**Introduction**

* **Characters:** The book of Amos is titled after the prophetic figure in the story. His name means *“burden or burden-bearer.”* The main character is God.
* **Date:** The contents of this minor prophet can be dated somewhere between 760-750 BC. The book promptly mentions that Amos prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753) and Uzziah of Judah (792-740). It falls under the same time period of Jonah since he prophesied of the expansion of the Kingdom of Israel in **2 Kings 14:25.**
* **Place of Origin:** Amos was from a village about 12 miles south of Jerusalem near Bethlehem and 18 miles west of the Dead Sea called *“Tekoa”* (2 Sam. 14:2; 2 Chron. 11:6, 20:20; Jer. 6:1). Amos was from Judah but is called to prophesy to Israel.
* **Political Climate:** Jonah prophesied of the expansion of the Kingdom of Israel in 2 Kings 14:25 during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah. We read of Jeroboam II reigning in 2 Kings 14:23-29. We read of Uzziah’s reign in 2 Kings 15:1-7 and 2 Chron. 26. This expansion is the one of the major instigators for Israel’s sins in the book of Amos. This was a prosperous time in Israel and Judah because they controlled more territory than at any time in the “Divided Kingdom” period. This was largely due to the fact that it was a time of Assyrian and Egyptian weakness as recorded by some. “The comparatively weak Assyrian kings left Israel and Judah alone for over the next half-century. Egypt’s kings were weak and did not trouble Israel or Judah” (Smith).
* Concerning the prosperity enjoyed by the Israelites during this time: “This was the golden age of North Israel, the high-water mark of their national prosperity” (Robinson). In their strength and prosperity, they had lost sight of the only thing that mattered: **Serving God!** Instead the rich sought to get richer by oppressing the poor and the needy. Justice and righteousness was nowhere to be found and Israel reveled in their sin of idolatry and immorality. This prosperity was *“followed by an almost unprecedented degree of social corruption.”*
* Aram was the primary oppressor of Israel during this time given the Assyrian and Egyptian weakness. We read of this in 2 Kings 13 during the life of Elisha and the reign of Jehoahaz.
* **Key Passage: Amos 5:14-15–** *“Seek good and not evil, that you may live; And thus may the LORD God of hosts be with you, Just as you have said! Hate evil, love good, And establish justice in the gate! Perhaps the LORD God of hosts May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.”*
* **Key Message:** Seek God, hate evil, do good, practice justice and righteousness!

**Outline of the book of Amos**

1. Judgement on the Nations Declared (1:1–2:16)
2. The Heathen Nations (1:1–2:3)
   1. The Lion Roars (1:1-2)
   2. Damascus (1:3-5)
   3. Gaza (1:6-8)
   4. Tyre (1:9-10)
   5. Edom (1:11-12)
   6. Ammon (1:13-15)
   7. Moab (2:1-3)
3. The Covenant Nations
   1. Judah (2:4-5)
   2. Israel (2:6-16)
4. Oracles of Judgment against Israel (3:1–6:14)
5. God will punish His chosen people (3:1-8)
6. Heathens are called to witness Israel’s sin (3:9-10)
7. God will judge Israel for their violence (3:11-15)
8. God’s Holiness demands action (4:1-5)
9. “Yet you have not returned to Me” (4:6-13)
10. “Seek Me that you may live” (5:1-15)
11. Descriptions of Judgment (5:16-27)
12. Those that are at ease will experience calamity (6:1-14)
13. Visions of the Divine Retribution (7:1–9:10)
14. Vision of Locusts (7:1-3)
15. Vision of Fire (7:4-6)
16. Vision of Plumb-line (7:7-9)
17. Amaziah’s Rebellion and Judgment (7:10-17)
18. Vision of Summer Fruit and subsequent pronunciation of Judgment (8:1-14)
19. Vision of the Lord by the Altar: Judgment Unavoidable (9:1-10)
20. Restoration (9:11-15)
21. God restores Israel after judgment (9:11-15)

**Chapter 1**

* **1:1-2– The Lion Roars**
* The book begins by telling the audience who is God’s forth teller of His messages. Amos was a sheepherder from Tekoa (2 Sam. 14:2; 2 Chron. 11:6, 20:20; Jer. 6:1). Amos was not born a prophet nor the son of a prophet (Amos 7:14). God often uses “unimportant figures” to deliver important messages (See: 1 Cor. 1:18-31, 1 Cor. 2:1-5).
* In v.1, it clearly states that Amos received his messages from God through visions (Amos 1:1, Ch. 7-9). This was one of the common means by which the prophets received their messages from God (See: Num. 12:1-7).
* The messages were largely pertaining to the nation of Israel (v.1) particularly in the days of Uzziah and Jeroboam II (Prosperous time; See above for more details).
* In v.1c we are told about an earthquake. We do not know much about this event, but it is also recorded in Zech. 14:5. It seems to be an act of judgment by God on the Israelites that they did not soon forget about after its occurrence. It’s placement here at the start of this book gives it a somewhat menacing, dark tone as it perhaps foreshadows the messages to follow.
* In v.2 Amos says: *“The LORD roars from Zion and from Jerusalem He utters His voice…”* (See also: Joel 3:16) The Lion of Judah (Gen. 49:8-9) is often associated in the Old Testament as a messianic prophecy referring to Jesus. It is often used as imagery to reflect on God Himself as pictured here in this text.
* It is a scene of terror that Amos seeks to paint as this Lion roars. To those who are on the side of the Lion they have reason for comfort but to those who are His enemies they should tremble with fear at the sound of His roar. On this particular occasion, the people are not on the Lion’s side; therefore, this should spark absolute fear. The roar of a Lion is often a warning that he is about to consume his prey. Sets us up for judgments to come.
* The Lion roars from *“Zion.”* The word Zion first occurs in the Old Testament in 2 Sam. 5:6-9 and in the context it is a city David has captured from the Jebusites and it is thence called the “City of David.” Zion is synonymous with Jerusalem as signified here by the use of parallelism and other passages including: (Psa. 48:2, 11-12; 87:2-3). Mount Zion is a high hill on which David built a citadel and it is located of the southeast side of Jerusalem. The word Zion may mean fortification, strength or power.
* The word was also used to refer to God’s people figuratively in the Old Testament and the New testament (See: Isa. 33:14; 34:8; 60:14; Zech. 9:13; Heb. 12:22; 1 Pet. 2:6).
* It’s use here in Amos seems to emphasize God roars from Jerusalem i.e. the city of God, His holy temple, His dwelling place. It is also a re-iteration of where God’s presence is found. It is not in Dan, Gilgal or Bethel (1 Kings 12:25-33) but in Jerusalem!
* In v.2b Amos continues by speaking of drought concerning the summit of Carmel and the pasture grounds. *“Ground mourns”* and *“Summit of Carmel Dries up”* is figurative language to indicate judgment of drought.
* Carmel means *“garden”* or *“garden-land.”* God’s judgments were often the reverse of the blessings given to the people (See: Deuteronomy 28).
* **1:3-5– Judgment on Damascus**
* There is a repeating pattern of judgment that occurs for each of the nation’s spoken against in chapters 1&2. The pattern is as follows:

**1.** **Thus says the LORD**– vv. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6

**2. For 3 transgressions and for 4**– vv. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6

**3. I will not revoke its punishment**– vv. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6

**4**. **Because… (description of sin)**– vv. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6

**5**. **I will send fire**– vv. 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5

* There is a total of 8 nations that are addressed in within these 2 chapters. This entire section stresses the sovereignty of God. 7 of them occur before judgment is pronounced upon Israel. 6 of them are what the Israelites would consider to be *“heathen nations”* and the other two are the *“covenant nations.”*
* Geographically speaking, there seems to be a crisscross pattern pictured in terms of the order the nations appear in the first two chapters. This pattern may be a way of starting with all the nations around Israel before it climaxes by pronouncing judgment on Israel itself. Israel would have been overjoyed to learn of the judgment their enemies would experience but little did they know their time was coming.
* In. v.3 Amos pronounces judgment against Damascus. “For 3 transgressions and for 4” signifies there is more than enough evidence for their conviction (sin upon sin). It is a Hebrew idiom denoting fullness (See: Job 5:19; Prov. 6:16-19).
* Damascus was a prominent city in the region of Aram in central Syria (Isa. 7:8). The Arameans were one of Israel’s main enemies during this time as previously mentioned above.
* God will not revoke their punishment because they *“threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron”* (v.3). Gilead was a region east of the Jordan in Israel given to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh in Numbers 32:29-40. The Arameans were known for their cruelty to the Israelites (2 Kings 10:32-33) and it seems this is the reference in the verse. Most of their acts were considered inhumane and utterly violent.
* Fire will come upon Hazael and the citadels of Ben-Hadad. Fire was commonly associated with God’s wrath (Gen. 19:24; Num. 11:1-3). Ben-Hadad (2 Kings 6:24) was previously the King of Aram before Hazael his servant (2 Kings 8:7-15) murdered him and seized the throne. Citadels were places of safety. Even in their safe places they would not be safe from God.
* God’s judgment will penetrate the city’s best defenses *(“break the gate bar”)* and He will slaughter the people who have thrived in wickedness and love evil *(“cut off the inhabitant”*). *“Aven”* literally means wickedness. *Beth-Eden* means “house of pleasure”. Those that live in pleasure and rile in pleasure will be cut-off.
* Aram will go back to where they came from. As Egypt was Israel’s place of bondage so is Kir to Aram. In Amos 9:7, God had brought them from captivity and he is sending them back to captivity because they have done wickedly in His sight.
* **1:6-8– Judgment on Gaza**
* Gaza was the southernmost city of the nation of Philistia. Given that several other important Philistine cities are mentioned (Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron) it seems to denote that Gaza was the most prominent city probably because it was *“a port city dominating trading routes”* (Barnes). The Philistines are pictured several times throughout the scriptures as enemies of God’s people (1 Sam. 17; 2 Sam. 5:17-25; Judges 14-16).
* Gaza’s punishment is not revoked because they delivered a nation to Edom the text states in v.6. We do not know who these people were for sure, but this seemed to be a common practice of the Philistines. *“Philistines captured whole cities and areas of Hebrew people and sold them to Edomites and to the Phoenicians”* (Butler).
* Fire will come upon the walls of Gaza and consume its citadels (v.7). God’s wrath will be revealed, and their defenses and safe places will not help them in that day (See: Jer. 47).
* The people will be slaughtered (cut off inhabitant) from Ashdod, Ashkelon and even upon Ekron (v.8). Any remnants that would be left behind will also perish. No one will escape the wrath and judgment of God (v.8b).
* **1:9-10– Judgment on Tyre**
* Tyre was the capital of Phoenicia and it was a major city on the Mediterranean coast. It was located north of Mount Carmel and south of Sidon, the other major Phoenician city. In their prime, these cities were considered to be the New York and Boston of our day. They were major port cities (Ezek. 26-28) that exported several different things including men and women being sold into slavery.
* Amos seems to be addressing this sin as it probably is in conjunction with the previous judgment against the Philistines. People captured by the Philistines and the Syrians were handed over to Tyre for exportation elsewhere.
* Their judgment is not revoked in v.9 because they delivered people to Edom (v.6). Tyre had made a treaty with David and Solomon (2 Sam. 5:11-12; 1 Kings 5:1-12; 9:10-13) and it seems here in v.9 they had broken (forgotten) that treaty and delivered them to Edom.
* Fire will consume the walls of Tyre and its citadels in v.10.
* **1:11-12– Judgment on Edom**
* Edom was nation descending from the man Esau, brother of Jacob. Although Jacob and Esau were brothers, their descendants were bitter enemies. This may be alluded to in Gen. 25:19-34. They forbid the Israelites to pass through their territory on the way to the promised land in Num. 20:14-21. Saul fought against the Israelites (1 Sam. 14:47) and David conquered them (2 Sam. 8:14). Amaziah handed them a great defeat in 2 Kings 14:7.
* *“Edom became the relentless enemy of Israel constantly cultivating an implacable, mortal hatred towards the Israelites, which broke out into acts of cruelty at every possible opportunity. The Edomites were always busy raiding the cities and villages of Palestine, taking captives and using or selling them for slaves”* (Butler).
* It doesn’t come as a surprise then that their judgment is not revoked because of their *“stifled compassion”* and *“constant pursuit of its brother with the sword”* (v.11). Their anger and fury continued without fail.
* Fire will come upon Teman and it will consume the citadels of Bozran. These were extreme north and south cities of Edom. Judgment is all encompassing.
* **1:13-15– Judgment on Ammon**
* Ammon was a nation descending from Ben-Ammi (Gen. 19:37-38) brother of Moab and son of Lot. The Ammonites were continually seeking to expand their borders because they lived in small territory.
* *“They were a fierce people by nature, rebellious against Israel and idolatrous in their religious practices. They thrust out the right eye of all in Jabesh Gilead (I Sam. 11:2). They were given to cruel atrocities (Jer. 40:14; 41:5-7; Amos 1:14). Though related to Israel, they refused to help them when asked (Deut. 23:4) and they joined with Moab in securing Balaam to curse them (Deut. 23:3-4). Later on in Israel’s history they united with Sanballat to oppose the work of Nehemiah in restoring the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:10-19)”* (Butler).
* Their punishment is not revoked because of their cruel atrocities (ripping open pregnant women) in v.13. The god of the Ammonites, *Milcom,* was known for appeasement with the sacrifices of children.
* Fire will come upon Rabbah and its citadels amid war cries and a storm (v.14). Rabbah was a strong city in Ammon known for its strong citadels. They will already be experiencing judgment and God’s wrath when they are completely consumed.
* In v.15 the rulers will go into exile and experience judgment and calamity on account of their evil and wicked deeds.