

Pre-Exilic Prophet: AMOS

INTRODUCTION

Amos was a fig tree farmer and a shepherd whom God called to be a prophet. Amos lived in the southern kingdom of Judah during the reign of Uzziah, and during the reign of Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel. The events in Amos likely took place around 760 B.C. While Amos was from Judah, the message he received from the Lord was primarily delivered to Israel.

Two truths are prevalent in the book of Amos:

1. God is perfectly righteous and, therefore, must confront and address unrighteousness and injustice in the world (including those committed by his people Israel).
2. God longs for his people to return to him and be restored to true worship, which brings about righteousness and justice as a response.

Amos begins by proclaiming God's judgment upon various nations for their sins, including Israel's neighbors like Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, and Edom. He then turns his attention to Israel, condemning their social injustices, idolatry, and hypocrisy. Amos warns of impending doom, citing visions of destruction and devastation. Despite Israel's prosperity, Amos declares that their wealth and luxury have come at the expense of the poor and needy. He calls for repentance and a return to God's ways, urging Israel to seek justice and righteousness. The book concludes with a message of hope, promising restoration and renewal for the faithful remnant who turn back to God, and a prophecy of a coming Messiah in the line of David.

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

Amos uses an analogy of a plumb line in chapter 7. A plumb line is a simple tool consisting of a weight attached to a string or cord, used primarily in construction and carpentry to ensure that structures are built vertically straight. Its purpose is to establish a true vertical reference line, allowing builders to gauge whether walls, posts, or other architectural elements are perpendicular to the ground. Metaphorically, in the context of the book of Amos, the plumb line symbolizes God's standard of righteousness and justice by which He measures the moral integrity of His people. It serves as a metaphor for divine judgment, indicating whether the actions and behaviors of the nation of Israel align with God's expectations and standards. We know that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and that we, like Israel, fall short of the plumb line test, without the justification of a Savior.

BOOK ORGANIZATION¹

Chapters 1-2:3: Judgments against the nations

Chapters 2:4-6: Judgments against Israel

Chapters 7-9:10: Visions of God's Coming Judgments

Chapters 9:11-15: God's Promise of Restoration

JESUS IN THE BOOK OF AMOS

- Amos ends in chapter 9 with a prophecy, that the Lord “will raise up the booth of David that is fallen” and “will restore the fortunes of my people Israel” (Amos 9:11-15). God in His mercy would raise up a Messiah to redeem and restore His people.
- The Lion in Amos 3 seems to represent God's judgment against sin. Because of God's great mercy, we know that the Lion of Judah (Jesus Christ, Revelation 5:5 and John 5:22) is a propitiation for our sins.

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW WE SHOULD READ THE BOOK OF AMOS

OBSERVATION

- Consider the significance of the numerical progression throughout the first few chapters of Amos. The rhetorical strategy of “for three transgressions...and for four” emphasizes the continuous nature of people's sin. How should this inform the way we understand both God's judgment and promised restoration in the remainder of the book?
- Compare Amos' poetic condemnations of the surrounding nations to Israel's own sin. How are their sins and judgments similar? In what ways does Israel stand out?
- Pay attention to repeated key words like “Thus says the Lord” and “This is what the Lord showed me...”. How does this repetition of God's words and actions contribute to the purpose of the book of Amos?
- Be sure to stay on track with the shifts between poetry, dialogue and other descriptions in Amos's writing. Noticing the changing language helps elicit emotion and supports us in understanding the story and severity that Amos intends to proclaim.

INTERPRETATION

- Literary Context: The book of Amos is a mixture of poetry and narrative. The book is both prophecy and judgment oracles. Amos used vivid imagery, metaphors, and repetition to make his points. His address is also considered a covenant lawsuit, where the prophet accuses the people of breaking their covenant with God and calling them to account for their wrongdoing.
- Narrative Context: God condemned a multitude of nations for violence and wrongdoing, but God's judgment against Israel was specifically that “they have rejected the law of the Lord, and have not kept His statutes” (Amos 2:4). God expected Israel to have known

¹ <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-amos/>

better since they were His covenant people and enjoyed a special relationship with Him; their actions showed that they had walked away from Him and had transgressed against the covenant (Amos 2:6).

- Historical Context: Around the time of Amos, King Jeroboam II restored the border of Israel and saw military success, while King Uzziah found success in Judah as he built fortified cities and maintained a powerful army with advanced weaponry. Despite these military successes, Israel's sin still ran rampant, and their inevitable destruction served as a reminder that the ultimate sovereignty belongs to the Lord. Reading Amos in partnership with 1 Kings 14 and 2 Chronicles 26 will help frame the story for you.
- Cultural Context: Amos starts the book with judgments against other nations. As Amos mentions neighboring nations like Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah, it becomes clear that he's drawing a circle around Israel on the map. When he speaks about Israel, his accusations are harsher and more extensive, focusing on the wealthy's exploitation of the poor, reminiscent of their oppression in Egypt. Amos' irony is that Israel is treating their own vulnerable the same way they were treated in Egypt.

APPLICATION

- God called out Israel for their hypocrisy: they knew His law and His ways and yet chose not to walk in them. Consider whether there are areas in your life (big or small) where you are not fully walking in His way.
- God also called out Israel for their idolatry. What people, things, or ideas have you elevated (or are at risk of elevating) to the status of an idol in your life that you need to repent from?
- Where do you see yourself in the story of Israel? Are there parts of your story that are reminiscent of Israel's rebellion and disobedience? What sin has the mercy of Jesus saved you from?

PRAYER

- Thank God for His promise of redemption and restoration through Jesus Christ, for those who believe in Him, despite sin that is worthy of judgment.
- Pray for those you know who have hardened their hearts against the Lord and pray for them to turn or return to the Lord (Amos 3).

CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF AMOS

"It is however agreed that this passage of the Prophet cannot be otherwise explained than of the Messiah: for the restitution of David's family was not to be expected before his time; and this may easily be learnt from the testimonies of other Prophets. As then the Prophet here declares, that a Redeemer would come, who would renew the whole state of the kingdom, we see that the faith of the Fathers was ever fixed on Christ; for in the whole world it is he alone who has reconciled us to God: so also, the fallen Church could not have been restored otherwise than under one head, as we have already often stated. If then at this day we desire to raise up our minds to God, Christ must immediately become a Mediator between us; for when he is taken away, despair will ever

overwhelm us, nor can we attain any sure hope. We may indeed be raised up by some wind or another; but our empty confidence will shortly come to nothing, except we have a confidence founded on Christ alone.²” – John Calvin

“God's promises are not exhausted when they are fulfilled, for when once performed they stand just as good as they did before, and we may await a second accomplishment of them. Man's promises even at the best, are like a cistern which holds but a temporary supply; but God's promises are as a fountain, never emptied, ever overflowing, so that you may draw from hem the whole of that which the apparently contain, and they shall be still as full as ever.³” – John Spurgeon



² <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/amos/9.htm>

³ <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/spe/amos-9.html>