
BOOK OF AMOS

Approximate date: 760-750 B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate); 587-539 B.C.E. (Left)

Time period: judgment upon Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom during a time of intense prosperity and opulence

Author: Amos and/or a close associate (Right, conservative-moderate); Amos and anonymous others (Left)

Location of prophet/author(s): Bethel (Right, conservative-moderate); somewhere in the Land of Israel (Left)

Target audience and location: primarily Northern Kingdom Israelites, but also Southern Kingdom Israelites

People:

Amos, Amaziah, Jeroboam II

People mentioned:

Israel (primarily the Northern Kingdom), Uzziah, Jeroboam (son of Jehoash), House of Hazael (king of Damascus), Aram(eans), king of Ashdod, Philistines, king of Ammon (*or*, Molech),¹ king of Edom, Amorites, Nazirites (from Israel), Joseph (Northern Kingdom), David, Jacob (all Israel), Cushites

Places:

Tekoa, Judah (Southern Kingdom), Israel (Northern Kingdom), Jerusalem, Samaria, Bethel, Bashan, Gilgal, Beersheba

Places mentioned:

Damascus, Gilead, fortresses of Ben-Hadad (son of Hazael), Valley of Aven, Beth Eden, Kir, Gaza, Edom, Ashkelon, Ekron, Tyre, Teman, Bozrah, Ammon, Gilead, Rabbah, Moab, Kerioth, Egypt, Ashdod, Harmon, Sodom, Gomorrah, Gath, Philistia, Lo Debar, Karnaim, Lebo Hamath, Arabah, Nile, Carmel, Caphtor

Key Themes and Events:

Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa, receives visions from God / God declares judgment against Israel's neighbors (Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab) / God declares judgment against the Southern Kingdom of Judah / God declares judgment against the Northern Kingdom of Israel / God summons testimony against all Israel, both the

¹ Heb. *mal'kam* (מַלְכָּם).

Northern and Southern Kingdoms, to validate His judgment against them / God details how the people of Israel have failed to turn to Him, despite their lack of food and rain, and the agricultural pestilence / God issues another plea for Israel (Northern Kingdom) to turn back to Him / God decrees that great anguish will befall the Northern Kingdom / Amos describes the Day of the LORD / God decrees judgment upon the rich of both Zion and Samaria / God specifically says that the House of Israel will be judged by an external nation / Amaziah reports to Jeroboam about Amos' prophecies / Amos rebukes Amaziah / God declares a thorough judgment upon the Northern Kingdom, and the complete downfall of it as an independent state / God says some of Israel will survive, being shaken into the nations / David's tabernacle (or tent) is promised to be restored

Key Scriptures: Amos 2:6-8; 3:2-3, 7; 4:1-3; 5:7-15, 18, 24; 6:3-8; 7:14-17; 8:7-9; 9:7-13 / **Announcement of judgment** (1:1-2:16); **Reasons for judgment** (3:1-6:14); **Visions of judgment** (7:1-9:15)

Theological Summary: Even though Amos (Heb. *Amos*, אַמּוֹס) is listed in the Hebrew book order as the third of the Twelve Prophets, he was likely the first chronologically. Amos was from Tekoa (1:1), a small town just south of Bethlehem. He was not from a priestly family, but instead earned his living from the flock and a sycamore fig-grove (1:1; 7:14-15). It is unknown whether he was the owner or just a worker,² and today some scholarship leans toward Amos being some kind of a civil servant involved in their maintenance.³ Regardless of which he was, he certainly witnessed the hardships of many such workers.

Amos was certainly not an ignorant peasant, given his skilled words that indicate he was well informed of the issues of his day,⁴ notably the great prosperity of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.⁵ Amos probably did the bulk of his prophesying in Bethel (7:10-13; cf. 1 Kings 12:28-30), at the location of one of the Northern Kingdom's primary worship centers. Consequently, most of Amos' prophecies concern the Northern Kingdom, although there are warnings issued to the Southern Kingdom.

Questions are asked as to whether or not Amos was a writing poet, or whether his prophecies were later collected and written down by those who followed his ministry. Conservative theologians generally favor Amos writing the text,⁶ or some of his close followers composing the text.⁷ Amos' initial composition is often dated to some time in the Eighth Century B.C.E., perhaps around 760.⁸ Perhaps the only parts of Amos that were likely appended by someone other than himself are the superscription (1:1) and biographical section (7:10-17), probably by his disciples.

² J. Robertson and C. Amerding, "Amos," in *ISBE*, 1:114.

³ Bruce E. Willoughby, "Amos, Book of," in *ABD*, 1:203-204; Dillard and Longman, 376.

⁴ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 886-887.

⁵ J.D. Smart "Amos," in *IDB*, 1:117; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 884-885; R.K. Harrison, "Amos," in *NIDB*, 43; Robertson and Amerding, "Amos," in *ISBE*, 1:114-115; Willoughby, "Amos, Book of," in *ABD*, 1:205-206.

⁶ Thomas Edward McComiskey, "Amos," in *EXP*, 7:269.

⁷ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 890.

⁸ J.A. Motyer, "Amos," in *NBCR*, 726; Robertson and Amerding, "Amos," in *ISBE*, 1:115; McComiskey, "Amos," in *EXP*, 7:275.

Liberal theologians have tended to favor the Book of Amos being some kind of anthology of prophetic oracles, some of which are authentic to Amos, but not all. They have frequently argued that the text of Amos must post-date the Babylonian exile, and also commonly claim that the oracles delivered against the Southern Kingdom of Judah (9:11-12) must have been added at a later date, as it implies the fall of the monarchy—which liberals assert has already occurred.⁹

Many liberals have also doubted whether Amos even considered himself a prophet, on the basis of his words “I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs” (7:14). It should be noted, though, that this may be a response to Amos being a prophet outside of the “mainline” prophetic guild of his time,¹⁰ which often incurred monies for its prophesying. Some also suggest that “I am not a prophet” is just a common response of Amos to God’s call upon him.¹¹

Fortunately, it does appear that more critical scholars, on the basis of some linguistic and historical grounds, are beginning to lean more toward Amos’ authenticity.¹²

The authorized Hebrew text of Amos probably emerged some time during the Babylonian exile, or the immediate post-exilic period. The current MT is in fairly good condition, with few minor variants when compared to the Greek LXX.¹³

Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah (792-740 B.C.E.) and Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 B.C.E.),¹⁴ and his words affect both the Northern Kingdom and its subsequent judgment via Assyria, as well as the Southern Kingdom. Amos addresses the prosperity of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, as well as their religious disobedience. Likewise, Amos delivers rebukes against eight different external powers. The Book of Amos can be largely divided into three sections: (1) oracles against the nations (chs. 1-2), (2) a series of judgments against Israel (chs. 3-6), and (3) a group of visions culminating in ultimate salvation (chs. 7-9).¹⁵ In Amos, one sees that God is sovereign over the affairs of the universe.¹⁶

The Book of Amos contains a very strong message of social justice (5:24).¹⁷ While there are similarities between the message of Amos when compared to Hosea, Amos is more concerned about the social conditions inflicted upon the poor of the Northern Kingdom,¹⁸ listing them as a major reason for the coming judgment. God’s Torah is upheld as a standard of proper conduct for His people. Those who were rich and opulent (3:15), having earned

⁹ Smart “Amos,” in *IDB*, 1:118.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:116.

¹¹ Willoughby, “Amos, Book of,” in *ABD*, 1:204; Dillard and Longman, 377.

¹² M. Daniel Carroll R., “Amos,” in *ECB*, 690.

¹³ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 897; Willoughby, “Amos, Book of,” in *ABD*, 1:211.

¹⁴ Smart “Amos,” in *IDB*, 1:118; McComiskey, “Amos,” in *EXP*, 7:269-270; Dillard and Longman, 375.

¹⁵ Cf. Dillard and Longman, 379; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 887-890.

¹⁶ Dillard and Longman, 382.

¹⁷ Smart “Amos,” in *IDB*, 1:120-121; Motyer, “Amos,” in *NBCR*, 727; Robertson and Amerding, “Amos,” in *ISBE*, 1:116; Willoughby, “Amos, Book of,” in *ABD*, 1:206; Dillard and Longman, pp 382-383.

¹⁸ Harrison, “Amos,” in *NIDB*, 43.

their luxurious wares through cheating and extorting the poor, were to be judged severely by God.¹⁹

The answer to the Northern Kingdom's severe sin would be swift, national destruction (4:6-11). Throughout Amos, we see that God will use outside powers to judge Israel (6:14), being the King of the whole world (4:13; 5:8; 9:5-6). Amos also criticized "prophets" who only spoke what the people hearing them wanted to hear (cf. 7:14-15).

Throughout the Book of Amos, one should see that the responsibility of Israel is intensified because they have had God's Law and should have known better (3:2),²⁰ especially compared to other nations who did not have the Torah. Amos does have a concern for the religious life of the people, every bit as much as he does their conduct regarding the oppressed.²¹ In spite of the judgment that was coming, there would be a remnant that could repent (5:15), and in due time the whole House of Israel would be restored as it was during the life of David (9:11-15).

Amos emphasizes what many would consider the "weightier matters" of the Torah, particularly the ethics of Deuteronomy.²² The themes of Amos are undoubtedly seen throughout the Apostolic Scriptures, and form a considerable part of the mission of the Apostles. There is no reason to discriminate between rich and poor in the assembly (1 Corinthians 11:22; James 2:1-10). The poor need care (James 1:27; 5:1-6). Luke's Gospel itself notices the plight of the destitute.²³ Amos is quoted by Paul where the evil of Ancient Israel is to be considered (5:15; cf. Romans 12:9). And, the most significant quotation of Amos (9:11-12, LXX) appears in Acts 15:16-18 when James places the expanse of the gospel among the nations as a major part of the restoration of all Israel.²⁴

The Book of Amos is an extremely important text today for both Jewish and Christian social activists, especially as it concerns the destitute and those who cannot help themselves (2:6-7; 5:10-12; 6:3-7, 12; 8:4-6). Of course, these are some of the major concerns of the Torah that Amos insisted his audience remember. Interestingly enough, the Labor movement in the early State of Israel took many of the themes of Amos very seriously.²⁵ Likewise, the current trend of Christian "liberation theology" in Latin America and other parts of the third world appropriates a great deal of Amos.

There is presently not a great deal of Messianic examination regarding Amos, except for some of the promises relating to Israel's restoration. The Book of Amos has a difficult social message for today's Messianic community, much of which tends to isolate itself from the world at large, rather than being involved in the welfare of the larger community (or global community). Amos asks us some questions that on the whole, we are largely unprepared to answer today.

¹⁹ Motyer, "Amos," in *NBCR*, 726.

²⁰ Robertson and Amerding, "Amos," in *ISBE*, 1:114.

²¹ Smart "Amos," in *IDB*, 1:120; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 886; J.M. Ward, "Amos," in *IDBSup*, 22; Robertson and Amerding, "Amos," in *ISBE*, 1:117.

²² Robertson and Amerding, "Amos," in *ISBE*, 1:117.

²³ Dillard and Longman, 384.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Ehud ben Zvi, "Amos," in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1176.

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON AMOS:

- 1. How might our understanding of God's judgment be enhanced, if we took a careful look at the historical figures and places involved in Amos' prophecies?**

- 2. What are some of the reasons declared by Amos as to why God must judge all of Israel (both kingdoms)? What reason do you find to be most severe?**

- 3. Why is more of Amos' prophecy directed toward the Northern Kingdom, versus the Southern Kingdom?**

- 4. What do we learn about the concept of "the Day of the LORD" (5:18) from Amos' prophecy?**

- 5. How does James the Just apply Amos' word about Israel being restored (9:11-12, LXX) to the salvation of the nations in Acts 15:16-18?**

- 6. Do you believe that today's Messianic community takes the message and themes of Amos seriously? Why or why not?**

REFLECTION ON AMOS' PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Book of Amos: