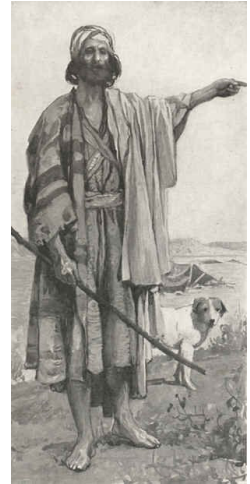


# Amos

by Ross Callaghan

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**Author** The prophet Amos, *one of the shepherds of Tekoa*. 1:1. Tekoa was a village about 15km south of Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Amos was not a 'professional' prophet. He was a shepherd and keeper of sycamore figs who the Lord gave specific prophecies to share with the surrounding nations. Amos was probably a contemporary of Hosea.

**Written to** Even though Amos lived in Judah most of his prophecies were for the Northern Kingdom, Israel. There are also smaller prophecies for other nations.

**Date** Amos prophesied when *Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel*. 1:1 This means he prophesied around 750 BC.

**Purpose**

- to show how God deals with sin.
- to warn Israel (and other nations) of coming judgment and encourage them to repent of their sins.
- to predict the scattering of Israel among the nations, and to reveal her final restoration, forgiveness and eternal blessing under Messiah.

## Occasion

The people of the Northern Kingdom had rejected the Lord and had become greedy and worldly. They were following false gods, the rich were exploiting the poor, and the nation had lost important values like justice, keeping of the Law, and following of the Lord.

God spoke to Amos and told him to go to Samaria, the capital of the Northern kingdom. Through Amos, God told His people that He is going to use a foreign nation to judge them for their sins. The day of the Lord would be a day when justice prevailed and God's people were judged for their sins.

Israel didn't repent of her sins and was taken into captivity in Babylon along with the Southern Kingdom, Judah.

Amos was a shepherd and keeper of sycamore trees. He wasn't a prophet, a priest or a great leader but God still used him mightily. Because Amos obeyed God he became a powerful voice for change. Sometimes we think we are unimportant and God can't use us. But if we are available and have our heart's right God *can* use us. In fact God can use anyone. All through the Bible God used ordinary people and spoke through them. He can use YOU!

## Key verses

*This is what the Lord says: 'For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed.* 2:4

*Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets.* 3:7

*Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say He is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.* 5:14,15

*I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit.* 9:14

## Overview

### Chapters 1-2 Judgment on the nations

The prophecy begins with a powerful statement: *The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.* 1:2. God is about to declare His judgments!

*This is what the Lord says* 1:3 leads into a series of prophecies in which God pronounces judgment on the nations. The prophecies begin with the nations round about: Damascus (Syria) 1:3-5, Gaza (the Philistines) 1:6-8, Tyre (the Phoenicians) 1:9-10, the Edomites 1:11,12, the Ammonites 1:13-15, and the Moabites 2:1-3. They then focus on the Southern Kingdom, Judah, and finally on the Northern Kingdom, Israel.

All of the nations must stand before God and receive His sentence of judgment: *For three sins, even for four I will not turn back my wrath.*

### Chapters 3-6 Judgment on Israel

Even though God specially chose Israel He will punish her for her sins. *You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.* 3:2. The Lord won't do anything without first revealing His plan through His prophets (3:7) so Amos is told that *an enemy will overrun the land; he will pull down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses.* 3:11. This is because Israel has not returned to the Lord. She has oppressed the poor and crushed the needy (4:1) and boasted about her rituals (4:4,5). God withheld rain, sent blight, mildew, locusts, plagues and fire but *yet you have not returned to Me, declares the Lord.* 4:11.

Israel must prepare to meet her God! She must seek Him if she is to live (5:4). God knows *how many are your offences and how great are your sins.* 6:12. *Seek good and not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say He is. Hate evil; love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.* 5:14-16.

There will be great anguish when the Lord judges His people. He asks: *Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light.* 5:18. *pitch dark, without a ray of brightness.* 5:20. God can't stand their religious observances: He wants justice and righteousness!

The verses in Chapter 5:21-24 are relevant for the modern church if we become programme-focused, rather than being focused on the Lord: *"I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream".*

*Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord whose name is God Almighty.* 5:27. The people had become complacent and proud. *I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and everything in it.* 6:8. The Lord will *stir up a nation against you, O house of Israel, that will oppress you all the way from Lebo Hamath to the valley of the Arabah.* 6:14. This was fulfilled soon after when the people were taken into captivity in Babylon.

### Chapters 7-9 Visions concerning Israel

Amos receives three visions for Israel. The first two are for a swarm of locusts and a big fire. In each case he asks the Lord to stop because Israel would not survive. The Lord relents and says *"This will not happen"*. 7:3,6. The Lord then gives vision of a plumb-line and says *"I will spare them no longer"*. 7:8.

Amaziah the priest didn't like the messages that Amos was bringing so attacked the messenger, telling him to leave and not to prophesy any more. Amos replied: *I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'. Now then, hear the word of the Lord.... The land will be measured and divided up.... Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land.* 7:14-16. Amos was not intimidated by the opposition because he knew that God had called him to prophesy.

The next vision was of a basket of ripe fruit.

The Lord said: *The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.* 8:2. God will not forget all the evil they have done so there will be a time of great darkness.



*"The days are coming" declares the Sovereign Lord, "when I will send a famine through the land – not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it". 8:11,12*

'A famine for hearing the words of the Lord'. Doesn't that sound like today?

How much we need to hear from God in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century!

Israel will be destroyed. *None will get away, none will escape. I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good. 9:1,4.* The Israelites judgment will be no different from that of other sinful nations..... *yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob, declares the Lord. 9:8.* More than that, God will restore the nation to Himself, give them back their land (see Genesis 17:8), and will bless them again.

*"In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name," declares the Lord, who will do these things. "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the Lord your God.*

This is a very specific prophecy regarding the future of Israel. It has all been accurately fulfilled!

After the 70 year captivity in Babylon the Israelites were restored to their land and rebuilt the nation. In AD 70 they were defeated by the Romans and were scattered among the nations for nearly two centuries. During a number of aliyah (immigrations) Jews returned to the Land in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and in 1948 Israel was again recognized as a sovereign state. Since then there has been an amazing re-birth of the nation and restoration of the fruitfulness of the Land. There has also been much opposition from neighbouring states, but God said He *would plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them.* Israel continues in her Land to this day!

So Amos finishes with a declaration of God's faithfulness to His chosen people. He will judge them for their sins, but He will restore them back to Himself as well. What a wonderful, just and faithful God!

## Themes

- God is righteous and will not tolerate sin, especially idolatry, injustice, neglect of God's Word, greed, corrupt leadership and oppression of the poor..
- God will judge the nations because of their sin. Israel is not exempt from this.
- Religious observances displease the Lord if the hearts of His people are not right before Him.
- Israel has a special responsibility to live in God's ways and bring His purposes to pass.
- Because she has sinned against the Lord Israel will be defeated, evicted from her land and sent into captivity. Later she will be restored to her land and will become fruitful again.

## Discussion questions

1. Through Amos God pronounced severe judgment on Israel and on some of the surrounding nations. This was because of their sin. Does God still judge sinful nations today? If so, how does He judge whether or not a nation is sinful and deserving of judgment? How does He pronounce His judgment? How will a nation know it is under God's judgment? What can we do (as Christians and as a nation) to pre-empt God's judgment on our nation?
2. The Book of Amos is directed at the Northern Kingdom, Israel (rather than at the Southern Kingdom, Judah). Why do you think this is so when both Kingdoms were taken into captivity in Babylon? What happened to the Northern Kingdom after the captivity? How does this relate to the prophecies in Amos?
3. Amos predicted the downfall, scattering among the nations, restoration and ultimate blessing of Israel. How has this been worked out through to the present day in the State of Israel, and in her Land?