

Book of Amos

Title:

As with each of the Minor Prophets, the title comes from the name of the prophet to whom God gave His message (1:1).

Amos' name means "burden" or "burden-bearer".

He is not to be confused with Amoz ("stout, strong"), the father of Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1).

Author - Date:

The author of the prophecy is identified as Amos, a shepherd of Tekoa (1:1), a small village 10 miles south of Jerusalem.

He was the only prophet to give his occupation before declaring his divine commission.

The prophecy is Amos's great burden from the LORD concerning the national sin of God's chosen people, as well as the judgment that must fall upon them unless they repent.

No better testimony could be given concerning Amos than his own (7:14-15): "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son.

But I was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit and the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."

From his testimony we learn that Amos was not a graduate of the school of the prophets, nor had he any formal religious training or academic preparation for the mission to which God called him.

Rather, he was a simple shepherd who also gathered sycamore fruit, and who in obedience to God was used mightily to deliver God's message of judgment against Israel, the northern kingdom.

The date of writing is mid-eighth century B.C., during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah (ca. 790 – 739 B.C.), and Jeroboam II, king of Israel (ca. 793 – 753 B.C.), two years before a memorable earthquake (1:1; compare Zech. 14:5).

Historical Setting:

Amos provides the historical key for his ministry: the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake” (1:1).

Uzziah’s independent reign took place in 767-740 B.C., and the sole reign of Jeroboam II in about 782-753 B.C.

Amos was a contemporary of Hosea, Isaiah, and Jonah.

Amos and Hosea were co-workers and may even have gone on preaching tours through the land together, although Hosea continued his work after Amos passed from the scene.

Isaiah and Micah followed Amos’s ministry and may have heard him preach when they were lads.

We see from 7:10 that Amos’s prophecy was issued primarily at Beth-el, the seat of idolatry in the northern kingdom.

He attacks Satan’s stronghold, Bethel, and when he is opposed by the idolatrous priest, Amaziah, he becomes even bolder in his preaching.

Throughout, the prophecy is filled with references to rural life, indicating Amos’s background as a shepherd.

The prophet never put on pretenses.

He was what he was, God’s messenger for this hour to call the nation Israel to awaken to her responsibility and accountability for the national sins she had committed against God.

In the process he shows himself to be an oratorical giant, in spite of the fact that he had no formal training.

Background – Setting:

Amos was a Judean prophet called to deliver a message primarily to the northern tribes of Israel (7:15).

Politically, it was a time of prosperity under the long and secure reign of Jeroboam II who, following the example of his father Joash (2 Kings 13:25), and significantly “restored the border of Israel” (2 Kings 14:25).

It was also a time of peace with both Judah (5:5), and her more distant neighbors.

The ever-present menace of Assyria was subdued, possibly because of Nineveh’s repentance at the preaching of Jonah (Jonah 3:10).

Spiritually however, it was a time of rampant corruption and moral decay (4:1; 5:10-13; 2 Kings 14:24).

The purpose of Amos's prophecy is to awaken Israel and its surrounding nations to the fact that the nation is both responsible and accountable for its sins.

His theme then, is national accountability for national sins.

The prophecy of Amos is characterized by great boldness coupled with great tact.

The prophet gains the attention of his audience by pronouncing judgment on Israel's enemies before delivering the main burden of judgment against Israel herself.

In the delivery of his prophecy he is very courageous while being unusually stern and severe.

Historical – Theological Themes: Amos addresses Israel's two primary sins"

- (1) An absence of true worship, and
- (2) A lack of justice.

In the midst of their ritualistic performance of worship, they were not pursuing the LORD with their hearts (4:4-5; 5:4-6), nor following His standard of justice with their neighbors (5:10-13; 6:12).

This apostasy, evidenced by continual, willful rejection of the prophetic message of Amos, is promised divine judgment.

Because of His covenant, however, the LORD will not abandon Israel altogether, but will bring future restoration to the righteous remnant (9:7-15).