

Amos

Authorship

Amos is signified as the author, whose name means “burden-bearer.” He was not a prophet by training but was a shepherd when God commissioned him to deliver this message of judgment (7:15). Amos’s background has been given much attention by scholars; however, his authority for ministry was derived from the source of his message—God.¹

Date

The overlap of Uzziah’s reign in Judah (790-739 B.C.) and Jeroboam’s reign in Israel (793-755 B.C.) yields 790-755 B.C. as the range for dating Amos’s ministry. The earthquake mentioned in 1:1 may have taken place about 760-755 B.C.² This is a reasonable suggestion for the date, placing the prophecy about thirty-five years before the Assyrian captivity.

Historical Setting

With the rise of Assyria and defeat of Syria, both Israel and Judah were enjoying increased prosperity and security during this time. However, this was not to be taken as signs of stability since the increased wealth had resulted in the abuse of the poor by the rich, a clear violation of the provisions of the Mosaic Covenant. It is this moral and social situation that Amos preaches against and pronounces impending judgment upon. God’s

¹ For a discussion of authorship issues and the man Amos see C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 55-58.

² Charles Dyer and Gene Merrill, *The Old Testament Explorer* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), 746.

evaluative standards for the health of the nation was the righteousness of the people not the amount of their holdings or the extent of their territories.³

Original Readers / Occasion

Amos's words of condemnation were directed toward Israel during its revival under the reign of Jeroboam II. Many of his audience would experience the Assyrian incursions that culminated in Samaria's destruction in 722 B.C., ending the northern kingdom. The message could be considered a warning to repent (cf. 3:7–8; 5:5–6, 14–15) though judgment is guaranteed to a large extent.

Message

Because Israel had failed in their responsibilities to each other and to God, they would face certain judgment.

Outline

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| I. | Setting of Message of Judgment: Amos receives God's word for Israel. | 1:1–2 |
| II. | Amos pronounces judgment on the nations for their many transgressions. | 1:3—2:16 |
| | A. Syria will be judged for cruelty to Gilead and go into captivity. | 1:3–5 |
| | B. Philistia will be judged for selling slaves to Edom. | 1:6–8 |
| | C. Tyre will be judged for slaving and breaking a covenant of brotherhood. | 1:9–10 |
| | D. Edom will be judged for striking and remaining angry at his brother. | 1:11–12 |
| | E. Ammon will be judged for brutality to the pregnant of Gilead. | 1:13–15 |
| | F. Moab will be judged for desecrating the dead of Edom. | 2:1–3 |
| | G. Judah will be judged for a deceitful disregard of the covenant. | 2:4–5 |
| | H. Israel will be judged for personal unrighteousness before Yahweh. | 2:6–16 |
| | 1. They were corrupt in their relationships. | 2:6–12 |
| | a. There was injustice and oppression. | 2:6–7a |
| | b. There was sexual immorality. | 2:7b |
| | c. There was spiritual adultery. | 2:8 |

³ Bullock observes that “no prophet before Amos, with the exception of Moses, had linked the welfare and survival of the nation to the moral obedience of the people. Moses had in fact warned the fledgling nation that national welfare and moral or covenantal faithfulness were vitally linked (Deut. 28). Amos applied that theological principle to the Northern Kingdom and set a standard for his successors.” (Bullock, *Prophetic Books*, 55).

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| | 2. | They were unmindful of the Lord's goodness. | 2:9–12 |
| | 3. | They would be struck by the Lord. | 2:13–16 |
| III. | | Amos delivers messages of judgment against Israel. | 3:1—6:14 |
| | A. | Israel had violated their covenant privilege before Yahweh. | 3:1–15 |
| | 1. | They had not acted according to their exalted position. | 3:1–10 |
| | 2. | They will be destroyed by an adversary. | 3:11–15 |
| | B. | Israel had not responded to the correction given by Yahweh. | 4:1–13 |
| | 1. | They had failed to recognize God in their abundance. | 4:1–5 |
| | 2. | They had refused to respond to God in his correction. | 4:6–11 |
| | 3. | They would be meet God in judgment. | 4:12–13 |
| | C. | A lamentation is taken up against Israel over its demise. | 5:1—6:14 |
| | 1. | The lamentation is stated: Israel has fallen. | 5:1–3 |
| | 2. | A call to repentance is issued. | 5:4–15 |
| | 3. | Woes are pronounced. | 5:16—6:14 |
| | a. | On those who wrongly appraise the Day of the Lord. | 5:18–27 |
| | b. | On those who repose in prideful luxury. | 6:1–14 |
| IV. | | Amos pictures the judgment of Israel. | 7:1—9:15 |
| | A. | Vision of the locusts: judgment begun but stopped. | 7:1–3 |
| | B. | Vision of the fire: judgment begun but stopped. | 7:4–6 |
| | C. | Vision of the plumb line: judgment is guaranteed. | 7:7–17 |
| | 1. | Israel will not escape destruction. | 7:7–9 |
| | 2. | Israel will go into captivity. | 7:10–17 |
| | D. | Vision of the summer fruit: judgment is certain. | 8:1–14 |
| | E. | Vision of Yahweh by the altar: the Lord is present to judge | 9:1–15 |
| | 1. | Judgment is inescapable. | 9:1–6 |
| | 2. | Judgment will not be complete and final. | 9:7–15 |
| | a. | Some of Israel will be scattered rather than destroyed. | 9:7–10 |
| | b. | Israel will be restored and their kingdom established. | 9:11–15 |

Argument

I. Setting of Message of Judgment: Amos receives God's word for Israel (1:1–2).

Amos's prophecy against the northern kingdom of Israel comes at the height of their material prosperity (that is, "in the days of Jeroboam"). It is a message of judgment that includes not only Israel but its neighboring nations including Judah. Since Amos precedes Hosea's prophecy it can be read as a warning designed to evoke repentance, at least to some extent.

II. Amos pronounces judgment on the nations for their many transgressions (1:3—2:16).

Amos first pronounces judgment on various nations surrounding Israel, beginning with Syria and moving geographically in an ever tightening spiral until arriving at his primary object of judgment, Israel (1:3—2:16). This was a psychological technique designed to prepare the northern kingdom to receive and respond to God's word.

Whereas the neighboring nations are judged for their treatment of other peoples, Judah and Israel are held accountable for failing to live up to the demands of their covenant with Yahweh (2:6–16). Theirs is the more serious violation.

III. Amos delivers messages of judgment against Israel (3:1—6:14).

The opening summary of pronouncements of judgment are followed by three messages of judgment that amplify and develop Israel's culpability before the Lord, each introduced by the phrase "Hear this word . . ." (3:1; 4:1; 5:1). The last is really a funeral dirge that contains a call to repentance.

A. Israel had violated their covenant privilege before Yahweh (3:1–15).

The first message gives the basis for Israel's judgment—violation of their unique role as Yahweh's priest-nation (3:1–2; cf. Exod 19:5–6). Though only the kingdom of Judah continued to be ruled by the Davidic monarchy Israel was still responsible for keeping covenant and would have received God's blessing had they done so. Their abject failure meant that they would be destroyed according to its provisions (3:11–15; cf. Deut 28:15–68).

B. Israel had not responded to the correction given by Yahweh (4:1–13).

The blessings and curses provisions of the covenant relationship (Deut 28) had been experienced by Israel but they had failed to attribute their abundance to God

and thank Him for it (4:1–5) and they had refused to respond to his corrective discipline when given (4:6–11). As a result they would experience the ultimate discipline, destruction and removal from the land, which will be developed in the following messages.

C. A lamentation is taken up against Israel over its demise (5:1—6:14).

The third message is actually in the form of a funeral dirge: “The virgin of Israel has fallen; She will rise no more . . .” (5:1–2). The unique thing about this dirge is that it contains a call to repentance (5:4–15). Though it seems that judgment had been determined as certain (cf. 7:7–17) there were those within Israel that could still seek God and avoid the ultimate fate of the nation. This remnant would continue as God’s witness on earth (cf. 5:14–15). The lamentation also contains two woes. The first is on those who think that the Day of the Lord will bring their elevation and ease when actually it will mean their death (5:18–27). The second woe is on those who boast in their abundance and ease instead of grieving over the nation’s sorry state (6:1–14).

IV. Amos pictures the judgment of Israel (7:1—9:15).

Having pronounced judgment (1:3—2:16) and developed the rationale for it (3:1—6:14) Amos relates a series of visions that he received depicting the process and nature of the judgment itself. The first two visions (locusts and fire) really say the same thing: judgment had commenced but then been stopped through a righteous intercessor (7:1–6). However, the next vision, of the plumb line, indicated that judgment was inescapable (7:7–9). Though priest and king might object, Israel was going into captivity (7:10–17). They had been measured and found unacceptable to continue as a kingdom representing the name of Yahweh. The vision of the summer fruit reinforces the certainty of Israel’s coming judgment (8:1–14). The final vision reveals God himself standing by

the altar and giving the word to strike its house (9:1) declaring that no one will be able to escape Him in judgment (9:2–6). However, he vows not to destroy Israel completely (9:8–9) because His covenant promises demand that Israel be restored in order to inhabit an eternal kingdom (9:11–15). So then the prophecy ends in hope for the nation because God’s ultimate purposes will be accomplished but woe to the generation that violates His covenant.

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