

The Bible's Big Story



Amos

Amos, considered by many the first of the writing prophets, follows the pattern set in Joel: warning the northern kingdom of Israel of coming judgment, calling the people to repent, and offering hope of eventual restoration.

Introductory Information

Title: The book is named for the prophet Amos, whose name means something like “burden bearer.”

Authorship: Amos identifies himself as a shepherd (likely a herdsman/breeder of sheep) and a tender of sycamore fig trees, suggesting he was a businessman involved in both industries. He was from Tekoa, a fortified city of Judah about ten miles south of Jerusalem. Though a citizen of the southern kingdom, Amos directed his preaching at the northern kingdom, whose sin was especially great and which would be the first to face exile.

Date: Based on the overlapping reigns of Uzziah of Judah (792–740 B.C.) and Jeroboam II of Israel (793–753 B.C.), along with Amos’ prophecy against Amaziah and the historical earthquake he references (also noted later by Zechariah and confirmed by archaeological evidence), the prophecy can be dated to roughly 760–755 B.C.

Theme & Purpose: Amos confronts the northern kingdom’s spiritual complacency, seen in the oppression of the poor by the wealthy and powerful. Despite a season of unusual prosperity (aided by Assyria’s weakened influence and Jeroboam’s territorial expansion), the people wrongly assumed this prosperity signaled God’s blessing despite their sin. Amos warns that judgment is inevitable, though repentance still offers a way of escape.

Theme Summary: Amos, a prophet from Judah, delivers God’s message of judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel, confronting their idolatry and moral corruption. He condemns the wealthy for oppressing the poor, calls for repentance, and warns of divine punishment through exile, while holding out hope for future restoration.

Redemption Revealed In Amos

Amos warns against outward religious practice divorced from true covenant faithfulness, exposing the need for the heart-transformation the New Covenant provides.

Israel maintained the outward forms of Mosaic worship while blending them with idolatry, wrongly trusting these practices to secure God’s favor. God declares He despises their feasts and offerings apart from justice and righteousness. Amos’ call is not for greater religious effort but for the people to “seek me and live,” a genuine covenant relationship rather than works of the law. This exposes a need for precisely what the New Covenant provides: a new heart that loves and desires God.

Amos prophesies the restoration of David’s fallen tent, anticipating Christ’s resurrection and reign and the inclusion of Gentiles in the New Covenant.

Amos’ promise that God will raise up “the Booth of David which has fallen” (9:11–12) is directly interpreted by the Apostle James at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13–18) as pointing to Christ’s death and resurrection and the full inclusion of the Gentiles into the new covenant people of God. The description of a future restoration at the close of Amos parallels that in Joel 3:18, using imagery that is echoed by John in Revelation 21–22, pointing forward to the coming age when God will dwell with His people in a renewed land forever.

Conclusion

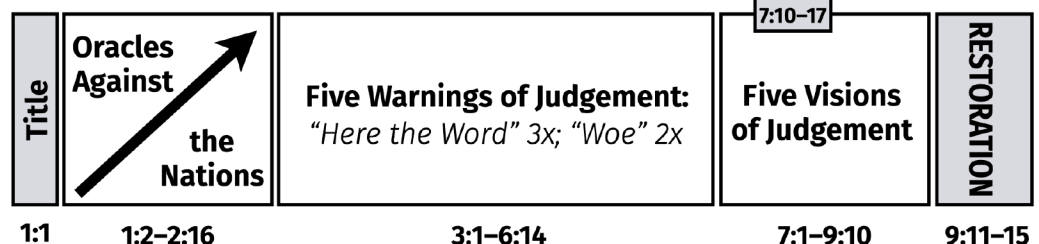
Amos prophesied against those who merely performed the motions of religion while clinging to idols and oppressing their neighbors. They possessed God’s law but rejected it. The same Apostle James who cited Amos in Acts 15 later calls believers, in his epistle, to be doers of the word, showing that true religion cares for the poor and pursues holiness.

The Structure of Amos

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Notes:



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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Amos' oracle against Israel is far longer than his oracles against the surrounding nations. What does this tell you about how God holds His own people accountable compared to those outside the covenant, and how might that apply to your own expectations of God's grace?
2. Israel maintained the outward forms of worship while their hearts remained far from God. Where might you be tempted to rely on religious activity or routine rather than genuine covenant faithfulness that comes from a changed heart?
3. Amaziah the priest, who should have held Israel accountable to God's Word, instead tried to silence Amos and protect his own position. What does this warn you about the danger of prioritizing comfort or status over faithfulness to God's truth?
4. James interprets Amos' promise of David's restored "booth" as fulfilled in Christ's resurrection and the inclusion of the Gentiles. How does seeing this fulfillment change the way you read Amos' message of judgment, and what hope does it give you for God's ultimate purposes even in the midst of warnings of judgment?