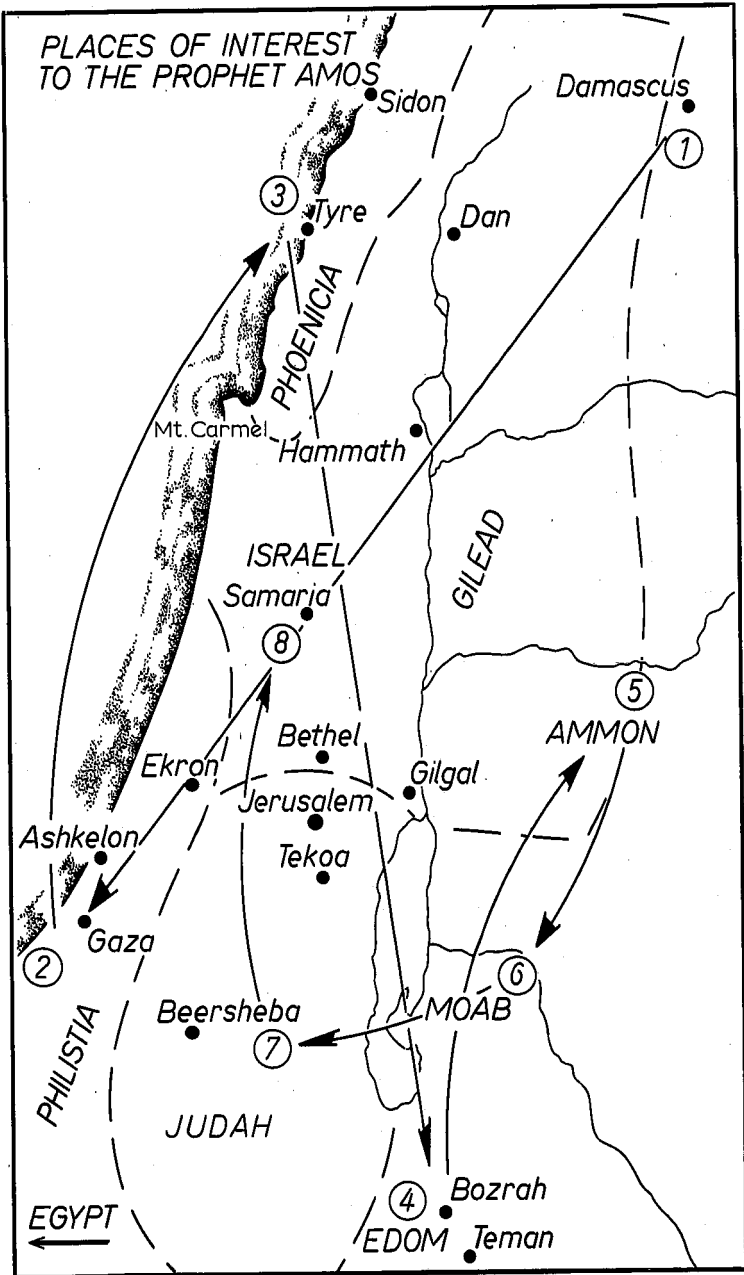


MINOR PROPHETS



AMOS

INTRODUCTION

Author: The name Amos, *hamos*, means literally, *Bearer, Burden* or *Heavy*. This may indeed be providential inasmuch as Amos bore a heavy burden for the Lord. Amos was a herdsman of an ugly, stunted, fine-wooled sheep called *noked* in Hebrew, but highly esteemed on account of their wool. He was a farmer. Certain seasons out of the year he migrated either into the coastal plain or to the Jordan valley to tend sycamore trees which in Palestine produce a sort of fruit that must be pierced to ripen. He lived in or near Tekoa. Tekoa is in a desolate region, too dry in the summer for raising grain. It is 2700 feet above sea level, and only 18 miles from that great "hole" known as the Dead Sea basin. Tekoa was a town which belonged to the tribe of Judah (cf. II Sam. 14:2; II Chron. 11:6; 20:20; Jer. 6:1). He would have lived a kind of life in practically the same region as the young David. Close to nature, out breathing the fresh clean air of the desert, where wild beasts lurked, often studying the wonders of God's creation by day and the stars by night. His occupation naturally carried him to the wool markets of the northern cities. There he would become acquainted with the life and religion of the people of his day. G. L. Robinson, in *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, says, ". . . he was both the product and representative of his age. Stern, fearless, self-contained, a man of granite-make, he possessed a powerful well-knit mind and a vivid imagination, and is one of the most arresting figures ever on the stage of Hebrew history." One only has to become familiar with Amos' writing to agree with that evaluation. Because his father's name is nowhere mentioned, it is inferred that he probably was from a poor and obscure family. Amos had no special profession (Ezekiel was a priest; Isaiah was a statesman and advisor to kings; so was Daniel) or formal preparation to preach, but being a shepherd he was almost a natural-born preacher! Amos did have a direct call from God (Amos 7:14-15) to go to the Northern Kingdom, Israel, and prophesy against Israel. In exactly what manner this call came we are not told. But accordingly, he went to Bethel, 12 miles north of Jerusalem, and there under the very shadow of the royal palace lifted up his voice in a vigorous and impassioned cry for justice.

Date: Amos settles the question of date with as much exactness as any book of the Old Testament. The book itself names Jeroboam II as the king under whom Amos prophesied in Bethel. Jeroboam was 14 years contemporary with Amaziah and 27 years contemporary with Uzziah, both kings of Judah. Another chronological peg is "two years before

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the earthquake" (1:1). However the date of this earthquake is uncertain. It is undoubtedly the same earthquake alluded to by Zechariah (Zech. 14:5). Josephus informs us (Ant. 9.10.4) that this earthquake took place in connection with Uzziah's trespass (reported in II Chron. 26:18-21). A total eclipse of the sun was supposed to have accompanied this quake (supposed to be referred to by Amos in 8:9), which astronomers have calculated as having taken place June 15, 763 B.C. This would fix the date of Amos' prophecy somewhere around 760 B.C. Jeroboam ruled 786-746 B.C.; Uzziah ruled 783-742 B.C. Amos was somewhere within those three decades—most likely 760 B.C. He prophesied somewhat earlier than Hosea, but still Hosea was a young contemporary of Amos. Amos was later than Joel. Both Amos and Hosea were older contemporaries of Isaiah.

Background: Robinson says, "This was the golden age of North Israel, the high water mark of their national prosperity." Unfortunately, though there was much prosperity, there was little wisdom and righteousness. Gluttonous feasting took the place of religious service. Greed permeated the whole society. Corruption of justice was a commonly accepted rule of life. Might became right! Land-grabbing became an everyday crime. The rich owners had bribed the legal machinery until they controlled it. The rich became richer and the poor became destitute. Men lived in haughty indifference to God and were "at ease in Zion. (6:1)" The love of luxury and indulgence prevailed much like it did in the decadent days of the Roman Empire. Religion lost all its vitality and became ritualistic, syncretistic, paganistic and had no bearing on morals or life at all. Insincerity and dishonesty, corruption and licentiousness, criminal extravagance and blind assurance took such a firm hold of the wealthy, arrogant upper-class that they became heathen in everything but name. No wonder the shepherd farmer prophet was outraged and shocked at the profligacy he saw—no wonder that the God of all holiness and righteousness spoke through him so bluntly and angrily! We need Amoses today by the hundreds to speak the warnings and promises of God in the New Testament to a profligate society which is world-wide!

Purpose and Theme: Amos has been called, "God's Angry Man." Lange says, ". . . we have a prophetic writing in nine chapters, containing chiefly threatenings against the kingdom of Israel . . . it begins with threats upon the surrounding heathen, and then, like a genuine prophetic book, concludes with the promise of a new deliverance for Israel . . ." We believe the best statement of the theme of Amos is "The Sovereignty of God Over All." This universal sovereignty of Jehovah—the responsi-

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bility of all men everywhere and all nations to morality and justice—is Amos' central doctrine. "The condemnation of the heathen nations implies that even the heathen possessed some knowledge of right, which carried with it a corresponding degree of moral responsibility," says Kirkpatrick. With the covenant people of both nations Amos goes to the root of the matter and deals with the attitude of the people's heart and will towards Jehovah. He wants them to know that their worship is vain—an abomination to the Lord—because their hands are stained by sin and their hearts are indifferent to the Law of God and the common dictates of social justice and morality. He has been called "The Prophet of Justice" and "The Prophet of Repentance and Judgement." Amos shows himself to be a true preacher proclaiming the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man! The book of Amos is one of the most helpful of the prophetic books. It is a practical work, for it points out sin clearly and exalts at the same time the purity of God. He shows that God is no respecter of persons. If Israelites sin against Him, He will condemn them as readily as other nations. He shows that God hates hypocrisy. He shows that there can never be a divorce between doctrine on the one hand and ethics on the other. The eschatology of Amos is of the simplest character. The picture of Israel's future which he draws in the concluding verses of the book is, like that of Joel (cf. Amos 9:13 with Joel 3:18), a picture of purely temporal blessing while the New Testament interpretation of it (Acts 15:12-21) shows it was intended to be ultimately fulfilled in a spiritual kingdom. Amos has no prediction of a personal Messiah, but he does connect the hope of the future for the covenant people with the house of David.

Sermonic outline of the book of Amos:

Theme: The Sovereignty of God & Responsibility of Man

- I Punishment Promised, Chapters 1-2
 - A The Heathen nations, 1:1—2:3
 - 1. Damascus 1:1-5
 - 2. Gaza and Tyre 1:6-10
 - 3. Edom and Ammon 1:11-15
 - 4. Moab 2:1-3
 - B. The covenant nations, 2:4—2:16
 - 1. Judah 2:4-5
 - 2. Israel 2:6-8
 - 3. Israel 2:9-12
 - 4. Israel 2:13-16

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II Penitence Promoted, Chapters 3-6

- A. Reason should call for repentance, 3:1—4:11
 - 1. The Lord does not roar vengeance without a cause, 3:1-8
 - 2. Their sins astonish even the heathen, 3:9-15
 - 3. The holiness of the Lord demands punishment for evil, 4:1-5
 - 4. Their past chastenings should make them think, 4:6-11
- B. Revelation should call for repentance, 4:12—5:13
 - 1. God has revealed His character and will, 4:12-13
 - 2. Hear God's word against you, 5:1-5
 - 3. The omnipotence and omniscience of God, 5:6-13
- C. Righteousness demands repentance, 5:14—6:14
 - 1. Hate evil and love good, 5:14-20
 - 2. Rid your religion of its hypocrisy, 5:21-27
 - 3. Luxury and ease leads to indolence, 5:1-8
 - 4. False pride turns righteousness to bitterness, 6:9-14

III Prophecies Presented, Chapters 7-9

- A. Causes of Judgment Prophesied, 7:1—8:6
 - 1. Out of line with God's standard (the plumbline) 7:1-9
 - 2. Corrupt Religious Leaders (Amaziah) 7:10-17
 - 3. God's Longsuffering Has Expired (basket of summer fruit) 8:1-6
- B. Description of Judgments Prophesied, 8:7—9:10
 - 1. A time of bitter mourning, 8:7-10
 - 2. A time of spiritual famine, 8:11-14
 - 3. Thorough and Inescapable 9:1-6
 - 4. A time of disruption and dispersion, 9:7-10
- C. Results of Judgment Prophesied, 9:11-15
 - 1. David's throne and dominion restored, 9:11-12
 - 2. Fruitfulness and prosperity restored, 9:13-14
 - 3. Security, peace and protection restored, 9:15

PUNISHMENT PROMISED, THE HEATHEN NATIONS—DAMASCUS

TEXT: 1:1-5

1. The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.