

## General Comments on Amos

The text is dated (cf. 1:1) to [Jeroboam II king of Israel and Uzziah king of Judah](#), who were reigning at the time. Amos' ministry was ~780-750 B.C.E. during the Northern Ten tribe's peak of power, wealth, and glory. Jeroboam II, king of Israel, successfully took advantage of Assyria's and Syria's relative weakness to capture territory and establish Israel as a commercial and political power. On the contrary, from a religious perspective, the kingdom of Northern Israel was not doing well at all, as is evidenced by Hosea's ministry, who was Amos' contemporary.

From the opening colophon (cf. 1:1) we know Amos was a shepherd living southeast of Jerusalem when called to the ministry. Amos moved to Northern Israel and was apparently living in Bethel (cf. 7:12-13), the religious center of Northern Israel. Amos was clearly well-versed in the Law of Moses and literate. But, being a shepherd was clearly a humble profession among the wealthy elite of Northern Israel whom he castigates for their failed leadership. While Amos was an outsider, Hosea was very much a local. Amos' criticism of Judah (cf. 2:4-5) along with all of the other neighbors would have served to mitigate accusations of bias against him.

Both Hosea and Amos preceded Isaiah's ministry by a relatively short time, so when reading their writings we can see the literary environment Isaiah grew up.

The book of Amos is in two sections, first the curses on Northern Israel's neighbors and then on Northern Israel (ch. 1-6). The second section is Amos' visions (ch. 7-9) where the pattern of "three transgressions...and for four" established in the first section is then employed against Northern Israel in condemning the corrupt priests (ch. 7), merchants (ch. 8) and politicians (9).

The breakdown follows:

Curses (ch. 1-6)

Israel's neighbors cursed (1:1-2:5)

Syria (1:3-5) [Northeast]  
Philistia (1:6-8) [Southwest]  
Phoenicia (1:9-10) [Northwest]  
Edom (1:11-12) [South-southeast]  
Ammon (1:13-15) [East]

Moab (2:1-3) [Southeast]  
Judah (2:4-5) [South-southwest]

Israel cursed (2:6-6:14)

Visions (ch. 7-9)

First vision (7:1-3), Amos intercedes against locusts  
Second vision (7:4-6), Amos intercedes against drought  
Third vision (7:7-9), Amos witness to coming invasion

Confrontation with Amaziah (7:10-7:17) priest of  
Bethel who fails to be intercessor and witness,  
his fourth transgression is to reject Lord's  
prophet

Fourth vision, harvest of corrupt merchants of Israel  
(8:1-6), pervasive destruction like a flood (8:7-  
8:10), days are coming...survivors scattered  
(8:11-14)

Fifth vision, destruction of corrupt rulers of Israel  
(9:1-4), pervasive destruction like a flood (9:5-  
6), Jacob, no better than Gentiles, to be sieved  
for good (9:7-10), days are coming...gathering of  
scattered Israel and restoration of united Israel  
under David's throne (9:11-15)

The first half, the curses are against all of Israel's neighbors, saying all of them have sinned profusely (the "three transgressions...and for four" play on the triple repeat superlative of the Hebrew language, the fourth infraction exceeds the "most" superlative), so their political power (palaces/citadels) will be broken. But, for Northern Israel, the curses aimed at them are straight out the Law of Moses from Lev. 26 and Deut. 28, particularly note 4:6-13 is a condensed restatement of Lev. 26:14-46. Northern Israel is held to a higher standard and the accounting is presented as such.

The second half is a series of visions, interrupted by a confrontation with the high priest of Bethel. The first three visions are Amos acting in Amaziah's place, being an intercessor for Northern Israel (cf. 7:1-6), but ultimately witnessing the Lord's final Judgement against them in deciding to send foreign invaders (cf. 7:7-9). This is while Amaziah is telling Amos to shut up and go away (cf. 7:10-17). This is a repetition of the "for three transgressions...and for four" formula used in ch. 1-2. The judgement is then given in the fourth and fifth visions (ch. 8 and 9).

Amaziah's utter failure to do his job is symptomatic of their religious state, and the result is they will be invaded and scattered (the subject of the Fourth vision, cf. 8:1-14) and recovered at a future date (the Fifth vision, cf. ch. 9). Visions four and five are an expansion on the third vision, where the specific subjects being addressed shift from the chief priest to merchants (ch. 8) and politicians (ch. 9) to show all of Northern Israel's leaders are completely corrupt, and they are dragging their people down into destruction.

### **General Comments on Amos 1-2**

Amos 1:2-2:3 are set up as a series of curses on Israel's neighbors. Six non-Israelite nations are addressed in turn, and each receives a similar judgement and subsequent curse: fire upon the walls that consumes the palaces (cf. 1:4, 1:7, 1:10, 1:12, 1:14, 2:2). Then from 2:4-6:4 Judah and Israel are addressed and the judgements and curses laid upon them are much worse than those laid out on the foreign nations. Judah's sin against the Law of Moses is explicitly mentioned, but they aren't the primary subject of Amos' ministry, as Northern Israel is.

The point of 1:2-2:3 is to show the Lord will punish the various nations for their wickedness. But, Judah and Israel will bear a much heavier burden of punishment because they are equally as wicked as the nations around them, but, to make matters worse, they are deliberately rebelling against the Lord as well. Note Judah get the same fire the nations get in 2:5, but then the curses go on for several more verses. Northern Israel, the primary subject gets much more discussion.

### **Comments on Amos 1**

1 The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen 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.<sup>2</sup> And he said, The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.

v1-2 The author identifies himself and the time of his ministry (v. 1). He states that when the Lord speaks it is powerful, it is from Jerusalem, and everyone from the desert fields with the shepherds to the rich and powerful on the garden heights will lament and shrink before Him (v. 2).

v1 "Amos", the name means "burden" or "bearer of a burden". In this case, the name is apt, given his calling.

"among the herdmen of Tekoa", a province of Judah, approximately 12 miles south of Jerusalem.

"two years before the earthquake", compare Zech. 14:5. This earthquake was sufficiently large that it affected everyone in the entire area, becoming a point in time people started reckoning from. See [Josephus' Antiquities, 9:10.4](#).

v2 "The Lord will roar from Zion", the imagery of the Lord as a roaring lion is used here and is used similarly in 3:4, 3:8, 3:12, 5:19. King Jeroboam II apparently [used a roaring lion as a symbol](#) of [himself or his kingdom](#) as well. This could be Amos poking fun at Jeroboam's use of the image, saying it is the Lord Himself who is genuinely powerful, not Jeroboam.

"Carmel shall wither", cp. 9:3, apparently the resort of the politically powerful among Northern Israel. The Hebrew term employed here translates to "garden", and given the ambiguity of such a name, there are likely at least two different places named "Carmel" in the OT (the one in Northern Israel is referred to in 1 Kings 18, 2 Kings 4:24-37, Isa. 33:9, Jer. 50:19; the one in Judah is referred to in Josh. 15:55, 1 Sam. 25, 1 Sam. 27:3, 2 Chron. 26:10). It is also possible Amos here intends this to be a reference to a generic garden, not a specific place.

<sup>3</sup> Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron: <sup>4</sup> But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Benhadad. <sup>5</sup> I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden: and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir, saith the LORD.

v3-5 The Lord will strike the capital and leaders of Syria for the atrocities committed at Gilead (cf. 2 Kings 10:32-33, 2 Kings 13:3-7). Their capital will be razed (v. 4), and they will go into captivity (v. 5).

<sup>6</sup> Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they carried away captive the whole captivity, to deliver them up to Edom: <sup>7</sup> But I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, which shall devour the palaces thereof: <sup>8</sup> And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him that holdeth the sceptre from Ashkelon, and I will turn mine hand against Ekron: and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord God.

v6-8 The Lord will strike the capital of the Philistines for invading Judah and taking captives and selling them to Edom (v. 6, cf. 2 Chron. 28:18). The Lord will destroy their capital (v. 7) and annihilate them (v. 8).

<sup>9</sup> Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant: <sup>10</sup> But I will send a fire on the wall of Tyrus, which shall devour the palaces thereof. <sup>11</sup> Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever: <sup>12</sup> But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah.

v9-12 The Lord will strike the Phoenicians for invading Israel and taking captives and selling them to Edom, ignoring the prior diplomatic pacts made between them (v. 9, cf. 2 Sam. 5:11, 1 Kings 5:12). The exact events being referenced are lost to history. Their capital will be razed (v. 12).

<sup>13</sup> Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border: <sup>14</sup> But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour the palaces thereof, with shouting in the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind: <sup>15</sup> And their king shall go into captivity, he and his princes together, saith the LORD.

v13-15 The Lord will strike the Ammonites, descendants of Lot (cf. Gen. 19:38), for waging a war of annihilation against Judah so they can take their land (v. 13, cf. 2 Kings 8:12, 2 Kings 15:16). Their capital will be razed (v. 14), and they will go into captivity (v. 15).

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