



Amos

The book of Amos is a collection, largely of prophecies, delivered by the prophet Amos to the Northern Kingdom of Israel and its king in the 8th century bc. In addition to the prophecies there are a few fragments of Psalms and a description of a particular encounter between Amos, Amaziah the priest and Jeroboam the king. While most of Amos' prophecies are word based, there are also a few striking visions as well. In his prophecies Amos' great concern is the way in which the rich were oppressing the poor while worshipping God and believing that their sacrifices were all God wanted.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 25 mins
Short of time? Just read 1.1-15; 7.1-17; 9.11-15



Genre

Prophecy



Anything tricky?

As with many of the prophetic books, God's anger can feel hard to deal with. It can help to remember that this is a last ditch plea to get people to listen and change their ways.



Inspiring quotes

²¹ I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. ²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. ²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
(Amos 5.21-24)

The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.
(Amos 8.11)

¹³ The time is surely coming, says the LORD, when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. ¹⁴ I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.
(Amos 9.13-14)



About the Author

As with many of the prophetic books these are thought to be the words of Amos, though they may have been collected and written down by someone else.

What do we know about him?

Amos was not a prophet in the formal sense – he said so in 7.14. He was, instead a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees (sycamore trees are otherwise known as mulberry figs; a dresser of sycamore trees punctured the fruit

before harvesting to help the fruit ripen). He was not paid to be a prophet but was sent by God with a clear message for Jeroboam, from the southern kingdom of Judah, where he was born to the northern kingdom of Israel. This probably happened around 750 bc. The time in which he prophesied was a time of peace and prosperity in which the rich had become so complacent that they thought simply sacrificing to God was all that was required of them. Amos' message was simple – God requires justice as well as worship.



About the times

Most of the 8th century bc had been a time of great peace and prosperity. By the end of it, however, it is thought that the prosperity was beginning tail off. This might explain the problem of oppression that we see in the book of Amos. When there is less wealth than there has been, it is often the case that the rich hold onto this at the expense of the poor.

What were people feeling?

The book of Amos suggests that the rich were feeling complacent and the poor desperate.

Other books set around this time

Isaiah, Hosea, Micah



What kind of Book is it?

Prophecy. Amos is a collection of Amos' prophecies, which also contains a biographical account of conflict between Amos and Jeroboam, the king of Israel at the times, and a few fragments of Psalms.



How is it structured?

1.1-2	Opening introduction
1.3-2.16	Judgements against nations surrounding Israel
3.1-6.14	Judgements against Israel
7.1-9.10	Five visions of judgement including a confrontation between Amos and Jeroboam
9.11-15	Hope for the future



Look out for...

Amos prophesied not just against Israel but against the many different nations that surrounded Israel (including Judah). Look out for the variety of judgments pronounced and reflect on what this says about what was happening in that region at the time.

The book of Amos also contains a number of visions, reflect on these as you read and see how effective you think they are as a means of communication.

Amos' particular concern was the belief that worshipping God was all that people needed to do to be in relationship with him. Look out for the linking of worship with justice in what Amos said.



What could this mean for me?

Amos' particular concern was how the rich treated the poor. If we were to apply what Amos said to the 21st century, what practices in particular do you think he might criticize?



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- What did you think about Amos' prophecies? Were they inspiring or off putting? How do you think we might react if someone prophesied in a similar way today?
- Imagine that Amos was observing Christian church today what might he say to us about worship and about justice?
- There were a few practices of his day that particularly struck Amos as being unjust (you will have noticed a few as you read), what modern practices do you think would deserve a similar kind of criticism today? And what should we do about them?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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