

AMOS

STUDY GUIDE

AUTHOR & DATE

Amos is an interesting guy! He tells us in the first verse he is from Tekoa, a town about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. He was a herdsman and grew sycamore figs for a living (7:14), but his literary style and use of metaphor demonstrates he was an educated man. In fact, he is one of the first of the “writing prophets.” Though he grew up in Judah, he was called to preach to the northern kingdom of Israel. His travels took him only about 22 miles north, to Bethel. Once known for a meeting place with God, Bethel had become a center of idolatry and devised worship established by King Jeroboam II after Judah and Israel divided.

Amos’ name translates to “Burden-bearer,” which is significant considering he was bringing a message of judgment to a people who thought they were reaping the benefits of God’s blessings. Israel and Judah were both in the midst of great prosperity and political peace, therefore the people thought God was blessing them, however, the Lord had strong indictments Israel and surrounding nations.

Amos was on the scene about ten years prior to Hosea, perhaps overlapping a bit. Amos’ preaching was short – only about two years – and focused more on Israel’s corruption and injustice, where Hosea directed his attention on Israel’s spiritual adultery. At the book’s introduction, we learn which kings were ruling Judah and Israel, along with an interesting time reference of “two years before the earthquake.” Because of this information, we can rather easily pinpoint the time of Amos to be around **760-750 B.C.**

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EARTHQUAKE

The earthquake mentioned in Amos is significant for a few reasons. The prophet Zechariah refers back to the earthquake (Zeph. 14:5) and many prophets following Amos’ time use the imagery of earthquakes for God’s judgment. A few years following the earthquake, Isaiah describes the “day of the Lord” as a shaking of the earth. The author of Hebrews also describes the “coming day” when the earth and heavens will be shaken, but the unshaken kingdom of God remains (Heb. 12:26-28).

The “Amos’ Earthquake,” became a historical reference – similar to how we would use, “Remember 9/11” or “when Kennedy was shot.” There is extensive scientific evidence proving this great day of destruction took place about 750 B.C. Several separate excavations all show similarly dated earthquake damage: inclined pillars, city walls displaced several inches from their foundations, tilted walls all going the same direction which demonstrate a sudden fall, and collapsed houses. The earthquake’s epicenter is believed to have been in Lebanon and would have registered an 8.2 magnitude, causing significant damage for more than 170 miles, and general damage as far south as Judah! This is largest event on the Dead Sea transform fault in the last 4,000 years.

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Amos writes that his words to Israel came “two years before the earthquake” (Amos 1:1), leaving two possibilities: 1) Amos was a true prophet foretelling the event, especially in light of metaphors in Amos 9:1-4, or 2) Amos’ words were spoken prior to the earthquake, recalled, and later written down.

OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION



Literary Finesse – Amos demonstrates literary finesse in two ways:

- Geographical/Psychological: The outline of judgments upon nations starts in surrounding areas, crossing Israel and Judah before honing in on Israel. Use the map to the left as a guide when reading two chapters of Amos.
- Graduated numbers/Numerical parallelism: Amos chapter 1 uses a repeated phrase to emphasize his point (“for three transgressions of ___ and for four...”). (NOTE: NLT uses the phrase “again and again.”) Usually this phrase communicates three (fullness) and four (overflowing). But, Amos does it in a way which would catch his audience by surprise. He doesn’t list three transgressions or follow with a fourth. Look for yourself in chapter 1 to see what he does! He also doesn’t end the list of judged nations at seven; he adds Israel as an eighth, which further emphasizes their offense.

- Parody: In Amos 4:4-5, there is a parody of the priests’ summons to pilgrims, which is normally “come into the sanctuary to worship.” Here, with biting sarcasm, Amos exhorts Israel to go to Bethel and Gilgal in order to sin. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

Two Nations

In Amos 3:9, two nations are called to gather and look upon Israel. The Philistine city, Ashdod, became familiar with God’s power when they stole the ark of God and placed it before their god, Dagon, who the next morning was discovered crumbled to the ground (1 Samuel 5:1-5). Despite this, Philistines continued to be problematic to Israel for years to come. Similarly, Egypt knew of God’s choosing of and protection over the Hebrews by a series of plagues affecting Egypt and the eventual deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt’s slave hold and oppression (Exodus 7-14). Yet now, in a major show of irony, these very nations are being called upon to witness Israel’s apostasy and injustice toward others.

Cows of Bashan

In chapter 4, Amos addresses the “cows of Bashan” which may have a few different meanings.

- Elite women living in luxury who have a larger girth (considered beautiful in many parts of the world), though the Hebrew writing also includes elements pertaining to the men.
- Comparison to well-fed cattle of the Bashan region, an area of lush grass and fertile ground.
- Worship of a cattle god by women in the region, thus addressing themselves as “cows.”

Prophetic Guilds

There is much uncertainty about how the training and prophets started in the Bible, but we can know a few things:

- Some lived in shared houses or communities (2 Kgs 6:1-2), while some married prophets lived in separate houses (2 Kgs 4:1).
- A lead prophet disciplined and instructed, in essence spiritually fathering (1 Sam. 19:20) This is why many are referred to as “sons.”
- Financial support came both through personal means and payment for services (2 Kgs. 5:15).
- Prophets often served in sanctuaries as God’s messengers pertaining to national and religious life (2 Kgs. 9:1).

LITERARY STRUCTURE

- I. Judgment Upon the Nations (1:1-2:16)
- II. Specific Judgment on Israel (3:1-6:14)
- III. Visions of Coming Judgment (7:1-9:10)
- IV. Restoration of Israel (9:11-15)

AMOS

JUDGMENT							REASONS				RESULTS			RESTORATION						
DAMASCUS	GAZA	TYRE	EDOM	AMMON	MOAB	JUDAH	ISRAEL	GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE	HYPOCRISY	GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY	NO REPENTANCE	COMPLACEMENT	LOCUSTS	FIRE	PLUMBLINE	RIPE FRUIT	JUDGMENT	OF ISRAEL	OF ALL NATIONS	PERMANENTLY

Source: Bible.org, "Amos"

OBSERVATION WORDS

Be on the lookout for the following words used throughout the book. Don't just mark them, but note what you learn about them.

- **God / Lord** (any other names, references of God, character traits, etc.)
- **Jesus** (prophecies, foreshadowing, types, etc.)
- **Holy Spirit** (specific mentions, miracles/wonders, fulfilled prophecy, symbols, etc.)
- **"For three sins...even for four"** (NLT: "sinned again and again")
- **Hear / Listen**
- **"I will... / I will not..." / "He has... / He will..."**
- **"Have not returned" / "Would not return"**
- **Day of the Lord**

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SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What is the biggest lesson you learned from this book? How will you apply that lesson in your own life?

- What do you learn about God and His character/nature through this book? What comforts you most from what you learn?

- Where do you see Jesus represented in the book? What do you learn about Him?

- How did you see the Holy Spirit in this book? What did you learn?

- List each nation, the sin, and its judgment featured in chapters 1-2. Add additional sins of Israel as you read.

- Read Numbers 6:1-8. How does this compare to Amos 2:11-12? Why is God upset?

- Look up the following passages and notice similarities to what Amos is saying.
 - Leviticus 26:14-39
 - Deuteronomy 28:15-46
 - 1 Kings 8:35-40

- What instructions are given to Israel in chapter 5?

- Based on this book and the Bible (***no cheating*** by looking up elsewhere!), how would you define:
 - Righteousness
 - Justice
 - How are they similar and how are they different?
 - How do you live out biblical righteousness and justice in societies where those terms are defined differently?

- Compare Amos 6:4-6 and Ezekiel 34:2-3. Note that Ezekiel preaches nearly 160 years after Amos, but to the remaining tribe of Judah.

- What do you learn about the “day of the Lord?” How is it described? What happens? How does it compare to other natural disasters and calamities?

- What are the three visions Amos had in chapter 7? What is Amos’ response and what is the Lord’s response? What do you notice about the 3rd vision compared to the other two? Why is it different?

- How do you think Amos’ response to Amaziah helped to validate or disqualify his role as a prophet? What is your response to those who come against your words of God?

- Make note of the “I will / I will not...” statements. What will God do or not do? What can you learn from these statements? *(Use a separate sheet if needed.)*

- Amos ends the book by demonstrating how injustices mentioned earlier in the book are corrected “in that day.” Look up the following verses in Amos and write what you notice.
 - 9:1 vs. 9:11

 - 1:3-2:3 vs. 9:12

 - 4:6-11 vs. 9:13-15

- What traps do you see in Amos that are similar in your own life or in our society? How do you respond as a believer in light of what Amos teaches?

KEY WORD:

KEY VERSE:

KEY CHAPTER:

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