

## Amos: A Special Man For A Difficult Task

### Introduction

1. Whether you are seeking to warn unbelievers or brethren of the consequences of their sin, it is no easy or pleasant task, and, more often than not, your admonitions and appeals will be met with denials and opposition. The sins of Israel in the days of Amos are the same sins that prevail today (because the nature of man does not change) and, therefore, the admonitions and appeals of Amos are relevant for today.
2. Amos prophesied during the last days of the reign of Jeroboam II (760-750 B.C.). This was about twenty-five years before the northern captivity (720 B.C.). Jeroboam II reigned over what historians refer to as Israel's "Indian summer" (a deceptive period of warm weather just before harsh and bitter cold).
3. Israel was enjoying material prosperity and, to the people, things never looked better; the future never looked brighter, but Amos saw a very different picture!



### 1. The Man Amos

"From the obscurity of a shepherd's role Amos stepped out for a few brief moments upon the stage of history, to go down in its annals as one of its first and greatest reformers. Having served the purpose for which he was called, he stepped back into that same obscurity from which he had come" (Homer Hailey).

- a. He was a herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees from the village of Tekoa (**Amos 1:1; 7:14**), which was located six miles south of Bethlehem and twelve miles south of Jerusalem.
- b. Despite his humble occupation and not being known as a prophet, the Lord called this southerner to go and preach to the northern kingdom, Israel (**Amos 7:15**). His name, Amos, means "burden-bearer". Indeed, Yahweh laid upon him the task of declaring His divine oracles to apostate Israel; he bore the burden and fulfilled his mission. He also bore the burden of rejection and ridicule.
- c. The prophet's background is clearly reflected in his preaching: "One hears the roar of the lion and of the young lions and sees the spring of a snare or gin as a bird is caught in it (**Amos 3:4-5**). As a shepherd he knows what it is to rescue two legs (shin-bones) and a piece of an ear of a beloved sheep from the lion that has slain it (**Amos 3:12**). At night he has studied the constellations, Pleiades and Orion, in their heavenly glory, and has watched the night turn to day as the morning dawns (**Amos 5:8**). He has seen 'the sun go down in the clear day' as an eclipse swallowed the sun. He makes us feel with him the despair of one who flees from the lion only to be met by a bear, and having escaped the bear, leans on the wall in the house to be bitten by a serpent (**Amos 5:19**). The folly of horses running on rocks, or of oxen plowing there (8:9), the sight of the wady<sup>1</sup> as a ragging torrent in the rainy season (**Amos 9:5**), and the separating of wheat from chaff (**Amos 9:9**) – all these were principles and scenes familiar to this man of the country" (Homer Hailey).
- d. Amos and Hosea - a fascinating contrast. Coming from the south he was able to view Israel's situation more objectively than local residents or a local prophet. Amos was a stern prophet of justice and righteousness. In contrast to the spirit of Amos, Hosea was the prophet of sympathy, love, and compassion, speaking as one with a broken heart for those close to him.

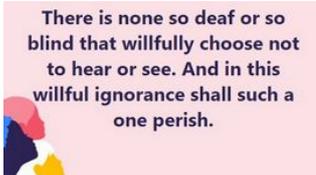
### 2. The Difficult Conditions Amos Faced

The three major sins for which the nation is condemned are its excessive, luxurious lifestyle, moral and political corruption, and religious corruption.

- a. Material prosperity (**Amos 3:15; 6:1-6**).
  - 1) It was during Amos' ministry, that the two kingdoms - under the strong leadership of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (783-741), and Uzziah, king of Judah (783-742) - cooperated to achieve a period of prosperity, tranquility, and imperial sway unequalled since Solomon's reign.

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<sup>1</sup> "A ravine through which a brook flows; the channel of a watercourse, which is dry except in the rainy season" (Your Dictionary).

- 2) True, it is not wrong to be prosperous and to have nice things, but these people lived in extravagant splendor and excess while others were living in poverty and want. This reminds us of the rich man and Lazarus: “There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores” (Luke 16:19-21).
  - 3) The leaders of the nation wallowed in luxury and were quite complacent, and had no fear of a coming judgment. “The affliction of Joseph” (Amos 6:6) was of no concern to them. ““The affliction of Joseph’ is probably a proverbial expression derived from the narratives in Genesis 37:25, etc; and Genesis 40:14; 40:23; cp. 42:21” (Believers Bible Commentary).
- b. Moral decline and political corruption (Amos 2:6-8; 5:10-12).
- 1) It was Israel’s departure from God that inevitably led to injustice, hardness of hearts, and immorality. The wickedness of the nation exceeds all boundaries: covetousness, injustice, immorality, and a general contempt for things holy.
  - 2) Clark enumerates the charges against the oppressors:
    - a) Their judges were mercenary and corrupt. They took bribes to condemn the righteous; and even for articles of clothing, such as a pair of shoes, they condemned the poor man, and delivered him into the hands of his adversary.
    - b) They were unmerciful to the poor generally. They pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor; or, to put it on the head of the poor; or, they bruise the head of the poor against the dust of the earth. Howsoever the clause is understood, it shows them to have been general oppressors of the poor, showing them neither justice nor mercy.
    - c) They turn aside the way of the meek. They are peculiarly oppressive to the weak and afflicted.
    - d) They were licentious to the uttermost abomination; for in their idol feasts, where young women prostituted themselves publicly in honor of Astarte, the father and son entered into impure connections with the same female.
    - e) They were cruel in their oppressions of the poor; for the garments or beds which the poor had pledged they retained contrary to the law, Exodus 22:7-26, which required that such things should be restored before the setting of the sun.
    - f) They punished the people by unjust and oppressive fines, and served their tables with wine bought by such fines (or it may be understood of their appropriating to themselves that wine which was allowed to criminals to mitigate their sufferings in the article of death; which was the excess of inhumanity and cruelty).
  - 3) Further instances of corruption are resounded in Amos 5:10-12: the man who would judge fairly is hated by the rulers; therefore, only the corrupt are appointed. In such a state the poor receive no justice.
- c. Continuous religious apostasy (Amos 5:21-23). God does not want a worship which becomes a meaningless ritual (Matthew 15:8; Ezekiel 33:31). Apostasy occurs when one’s heart departs from the Lord (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8).
- “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols” (Amos 5:21-23).
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There is none so deaf or so blind that willfully choose not to hear or see. And in this willful ignorance shall such a one perish.
- d. A prideful and arrogant attitude (Amos 5:18-20). Despite all their lawlessness, injustice, oppression, etc., they were longing for “The Day of Yahweh” because they supposed it would be a day when the heathen would be judged, all the enemies of Israel defeated, and Israel herself would be exalted to the highest pitch of prosperity and dominion. They were indeed arrogant and deluded.

### 3. The Judgment Of Jehovah

Despite their excessiveness, moral decline, political corruptness, and religious apostasy, they supposed the Day of the Lord would be a judgment against the heathen nations and a blessing and exaltation of themselves. Amos diligently sought to break their delusion, but in vain.

#### a. Israel's Judgment is deserved:

- 1) The vision of the plumb line<sup>2</sup> (Amos 7:7-9). Israel had been formed by God's plumb line, His law, and the principles of right by which He had sought to build the nation. God is again using His plumb line to see how far out of line is, i.e., how far it is from being upright, and how crooked and unbalanced it has become. This will prove them to be deserving of punishment.
- 2) The vision of the basket of summer fruit (Amos 8:1-6). The basket of summer fruit indicates that the harvest is past and the fruit is ripe. In the same way Israel is ripe for destruction. The oppression of the poor, religious hypocrisy and fraudulent practices are some of the things that made them ripe for destruction.
- 3) The judgment is certain for the Lord has sworn by "the excellency of Jacob" (Amos 8:7a). The excellency of Jacob is God Himself; thus God swears by Himself that "I will never forget any of their works" (Amos 8:7b). That God would not forget their works is to say He would not leave them unpunished.

#### b. Israel's Judgment would be unchangeable and severe (Amos 3:11-12; 4:2, 6-12).

- 1) The Lord had chastised Israel several times: (i) famine, (ii) drought, (iii) smiting with blasting and mildew, (iv) pestilence, (v) the overthrow and burning of cities – possible the result of an earthquake or of wars. Yet none of these visitations accomplished the desired effect.
- 2) Despite these chastisements Israel did not repent. Therefore they must now "prepare to meet your God" (Amos 6:12), i.e., prepare to meet your God in a more severe judgment.

Despite all the efforts of the prophet to warn them of their imminent destruction, they said, **"Calamities shall certainly not draw near, nor come upon us"** (Amos 9:10).

#### c. Judgment was unexpected. Because they had never been bothered by a far distant world empire, they had felt secure. However, Amos warns that they would go into captivity "beyond Damascus" (Amos 5:27; 6:3; 9:10).

### Conclusion

1. Israel had become morally, socially, politically, and religiously corrupt, and the Lord sent Amos to convict them of their sin and the imminent, severe judgment to come upon them. Yet still they said, "Calamities shall certainly not draw near, nor come upon us" (Amos 9:10). Here is a brief list of Israel's sin (Amos 5:12; 7:7-8; 9:8):

- No regard for the poor (Amos 2:6-7; 4:1; 5:11-12; 8:4).
- An insatiable appetite for riches (Amos 3:12, 15; 5:11; 6:1-3).
- Ungrateful toward God for His acts of care and mercy toward them (Amos 2:9).
- Exercised disrespect for God's prophets and the Nazirite who illustrated a desire to follow God (Amos 2:11-12).
- God had given them His divine revelation yet they turned to their own ways (Amos 3:1-2).
- Did not have a knowledge of God and His laws (Amos 3:10).
- Idolatry (Amos 3:14).
- Unlawful and un-thoughtful worship (Amos 4:4-5; 5:21ff; 8:4-6).
- Refused to repent even after God exercised His divine chastening upon them (Amos 4:6-11).
- Israel hated and mistreated the righteous and just (Amos 5:7, 10).

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<sup>2</sup> A plumb line is used to determine the vertical perfection of a wall. Another line may be stretched horizontally with the base to determine its straightness.

- Israel was deluded in that they considered that God was with them while they conducted themselves in unlawful ways (cf. Amos 5:14, 18 / “as ye say” compare to Jeremiah 2:35; 8:8; 13:22; 16:10).
  - Pride (Amos 6:8).
  - Dependant upon their own strength (Amos 6:13).
  - Cheaters and swindlers (Amos 8:5-6).
2. Now they must learn that Yahweh is a God of holiness and righteousness, and that insulting such must result in a stern expression of justice. Indeed, the nation would suffer a severe judgment and be taken into captivity “beyond Damascus” (Amos 5:27).
3. The message of Amos transcends time and still has clear and important lessons that we must heed. Five permanent lessons<sup>3</sup>:
- Justice between man and man is one of the divine foundations of society.
  - Privilege implies responsibility. Israel had enjoyed special privileges; therefore, she had been given special responsibilities.
  - Failure to recognize and accept responsibility is sure to bring punishment.
  - Nations – and by analogy, individuals – are obliged to live up to the light and knowledge granted to them.
  - The most elaborate worship is but an insult to God when offered by those who have no mind to conform to His commands. “The distinguishing characteristic of heathenism is the stress which it lays upon ceremonial” (G. A. Smith).

“And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

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The general outline of this lesson is based on a sermon outline by David J. Riggs.  
<https://oakridgechurch.com/riggs/amos.htm>

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<sup>3</sup> The following five lessons are taken from “A Commentary On The Minor Prophets” by Homer Hailey.