



AMOS

Survey of the Old Testament: The Prophets

Fall 2005

Introduction

Background

Name & Author: The book is named after the prophet and author of the book, Amos.

Date: Amos prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). This would put the events of the book in the middle of the 8th century BC.

Audience: Most likely the people of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II. Under Jeroboam, Israel achieved its most prosperous time since Solomon, regaining territory lost to the Arameans under King Jehu and regaining economic prosperity as well.

Structure

Oracles Against the Nations	Oracles Against Israel	Visions of Amos
1	2 3	6 7 9

Purpose

The prophecies of Amos are a warning to the people of Israel that their corrupt religion and disregard for the poor would result in the destruction of the nation. It is a call for Israel to repent or face judgment.

Theme

God is more concerned about justice and compassion than he is about religious ceremony.

The Man

His Occupation & Location

Unlike most of the Old Testament prophets, Amos reveals his primary occupation. Right from the first verse of the book we learn that Amos is a herdsman from Tekoa. He also tended sycamore trees. Tekoa is a small village about 10 miles south of Jerusalem in the Judean highlands.

The Complaint

Amos faced opposition from the religious establishment in Bethel. The priest Amaziah criticized Amos for his prophecy, claiming it was politically motivated and part of a Judean conspiracy to overthrow Jeroboam.

(Amos 7:12-13 NASB) "Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah, and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! [13] "But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence.""

Amaziah saw Amos' proclamations against the false religion of Bethel as a threat to the king. This was not an unreasonable assumption. The golden calf worship was instituted by the Jeroboam I so as to discourage the Israelites from making pilgrimages to Jerusalem. The northern kingdom was in continual fear that the worship of Yahweh in the capital of Judea would cause the people to turn their sympathies to the southern kingdom.

His Call

Amos' responds by restating his occupation and making a point of the fact he was not a professional prophet, but was only following God's call. Professional prophets were common throughout the history of Israel. They would proclaim oracles from God for prophet, or attempt to divine the future for a fee. Most were false prophets who only proclaimed what the people wanted to hear (Jeremiah 6:13-14). Not only was Amos not a professional, but he was not even a student (or "son of a prophet") of a prophet.

Instead, Amos was given a special call by God. This is a repeated theme in the Old Testament prophets. God selects the prophets. He gives them a very specific call and a very specific message to share. Amos shares his calling in Amos 7:15:

(Amos 7:15 NASB) "'But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.'"

Amos, like most of the prophets, did not chose to be God's agent. He had his own responsibilities back in Judah. But he responded to God's call, at great personal sacrifice and became willing to proclaim God's word to a hostile audience.

The concept of God's call did not end with the prophets. God still asks us to proclaim his message, and calls us to specific situations. We, very likely, don't receive this calling through visions and revealed oracles. But through the scriptures and the prompting of the Holy Spirit God does call us to proclaim His message.

The Structure

The Oracles Against the Nations (Chapters 1-2)

The books starts with a serious of oracles from God proclaiming the sins and punishments of various nations. The oracles follow a very specific pattern (see page 6). But as interesting as what is part of the formula is what is *not* part of the formula. As has been discussed before, prophetic judgments nearly always include a call for repentance. The purpose of prophecy is always to move people to change their ways to avoid punishment. But these judgments on the nations do not make a call for repentance.

For that reason, many Biblical scholars believe this is because these messages were not actually spoken to the various nations. Rather, this is part of Amos' message to Israel¹. The structure and message of the book would tend to support this belief. The nations chosen are all the nations surrounding Israel. The primary sin mentioned for each of the nations is their inhuman treatment of people. In each case, punishment was inevitable and irrevocable.

The Israelites would have been drawn in to these prophecies, agreeing with Amos' conclusions and welcoming the punishment. When Amos completes this set with the condemnation of Israel, his listeners would be forced to make the same conclusion: they had sinned in their treatment of people and that punishment would be inevitable and irrevocable. These are the major themes of the book.

The Word Against Israel (Chapter 3-6)

Amos then elaborates on this condemnation of Israel in the succeeding chapters. He proclaims God's Word against Israel, detailing their sins and detailing their impending punishment in chapters

¹ C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Book*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 66.

3, 4, the last half of 5, and chapter 6. We will discuss in more detail these “Words from the LORD” below.

In the middle of this, in Chapter 5, verses 1-15, Amos takes shares a lament for Israel’s destruction, and then calls the people to repent. The lamentation (verses 2-3) follow a specific Hebrew poetic form called the *elegiac measure*.² This form is used in dirges and other laments, and follows a pattern of beats in each line which require a slow and deliberate reading.

Then Amos gives his invitation to repentance. This is his only invitation in the book, and is placed strategically in the center of the book. The call is to Seek the LORD and live (5:4, 6, 14). Punishment may be imminent and inevitable. But here Amos states that by seeking God and forsaking the pursuit of false religion, the punishment may be revocable.

The Visions (Chapters 7-9)

The book finishes with a series of five visions revealed to Amos. After the first two visions (locusts and fire), God relents after Amos’ plea for mercy. In the second two visions (plumb line & summer fruit), Amos does not make a plea, nor does God relent. The people are off the plumb line and now the LORD refuses to relent. The final vision, that of the Lord himself at the alter, proclaims their destruction, and then finishes with the hope of restoration.

The Message

The Sins of Israel

Oppression of the Poor

(Amos 4:1 NASB) "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria, Who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, Who say to your husbands, "Bring now, that we may drink!""

(Amos 5:11-12 NASB) "Therefore, because you impose heavy rent on the poor And exact a tribute of grain from them, Though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, Yet you will not live in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. [12] For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, You who distress the righteous and accept bribes, And turn aside the poor in the gate."

(Amos 8:4-6 NASB) "Hear this, you who trample the needy, to do away with the humble of the land, [5] saying, "When will the new moon be over, So that we may sell grain, And the Sabbath, that we may open the wheat market, To make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger, And to cheat with dishonest scales, [6] So as to buy the helpless for money And the needy for a pair of sandals, And that we may sell the refuse of the wheat?""

Israel was greedy, and taxed, oppressed, and exploited the poor of the land. The rich even used their money to bribe judges and political officials, to the disadvantage of the poor.

² Richard S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos*. (London:S.P.C.K., 1969), 32-33.

False Religion

(Amos 4:4-5 NASB) ""Enter Bethel and transgress; In Gilgal multiply transgression! Bring your sacrifices every morning, Your tithes every three days. [5] "Offer a thank offering also from that which is leavened, And proclaim freewill offerings, make them known. For so you love to do, you sons of Israel," Declares the Lord GOD."

(Amos 5:21-24 NASB) ""I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. [22] "Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. [23] "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. [24] "But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

The Israelite religion was a perversion of the true worship of Yahweh. While the name and traditions in their worship might have been similar, the priests were not from the Levitical line, and the temples were located in Bethel and Gilgal rather than in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Golden Calf was lifted up as the image of God himself.

But worse than this perversion was the hearts of the people. Their sacrifices were not acceptable not just because they were in Bethel rather than Jerusalem. God condemns their sacrifices because of their oppression of the poor and their disregard for justice and righteousness.

Punishment is Imminent

As we discussed above, Israel was in a time of military strength and prosperity which lulled them into feeling of security. Because of their well being, they did not believe that God's punishment was imminent nor inevitable. As shown in the oracles against the nations, the consequences of sin are indeed inevitable. The repeated phrase used in this section of the book is "I will not turn away its punishment."

In chapter 3 Amos directly relates this concept to Israel:

(Amos 3:2 NASB) ""You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.""

Amos then gives a series of illustrations of things which do not happen in isolation: lions do not roar without having prey, birds do not get caught without a trap, a trumpet results in fear. He concludes by stating that His word, as spoken by the prophets, will be fulfilled. God has spoken, and Israel will be destroyed. Amos is warning them: God does not bluff. His punishment is certain.

In Amos 4:2, Yahweh swears that He will punish Israel. In Amos 4:6-11, God recounts his past punishment, yet the people did not return. The next day of the LORD will be far worse than what they have heretofore seen (5:16-20).

The visions show how God has relented in the past. But the final three visions show that God will not revoke his punishment. In the final vision, God has a special word for those who don't believe in his coming judgment:

(Amos 9:10 NASB) ""All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, Those who say, 'The calamity will not overtake or confront us.'"

The message to Israel is clear. Don't let the prosperity of the times fool you. God's judgment is sure, and his punishment will come.

Repentance and Restoration

Relative to the other prophets, Amos' call for repentance is fairly short in relation to the proclamations of judgment and destruction. Nonetheless, the purpose of these proclamations is to encourage the people to seek after God.

Likewise, Amos' prophecies of Israel's future restoration are relatively short. But, following in the pattern of the other prophets, Amos concludes the book with the hope of a time when Israel does repent, and the Lord brings back the people, restores the land, and establishes them.

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Structure of Amos 1:3-2:5

	Introduction	List of Grievances	Punishment on the Nation	Punishment on the Leader
Damascus 1:3-5	Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its <i>punishment</i>	Because they threshed Gilead with <i>implements</i> of sharp iron.	So I will send fire upon the house of Hazeal And it will consume the citadels of Ben-hadad.	"I will also break the <i>gate</i> bar of Damascus, And cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven, And him who holds the scepter, from Beth-eden; So the people of Aram will go exiled to Kir," Says the LORD.
Gaza 1:6-8	Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Gaza and for four I will not revoke its <i>punishment</i>	Because they deported an entire population To deliver <i>it</i> up to Edom.	So I will send fire upon the wall of Gaza And it will consume her citadels.	"I will also cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, And him who holds the scepter, from Ashkelon; I will even unleash My power upon Ekron, And the remnant of the Philistines will perish," Says the Lord GOD.
Tyre 1:9-10	Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Tyre and for four I will not revoke its <i>punishment</i> ,	Because they delivered up an entire population to Edom And did not remember <i>the</i> covenant of brotherhood.	"So I will send fire upon the wall of Tyre And it will consume her citadels."	
Edom 1:11-12	Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Edom and for four I will not revoke its <i>punishment</i>	Because he pursued his brother with the sword, While he stifled his compassion; His anger also tore continually, And he maintained his fury forever.	So I will send fire upon Teman And it will consume the citadels of Bozrah."	
Ammon 1:13-15	Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of the sons of Ammon and for four I will not revoke its <i>punishment</i> ,	Because they ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead In order to enlarge their borders.	So I will kindle a fire on the wall of Rabbah And it will consume her citadels	Amid war cries on the day of battle, And a storm on the day of tempest. "Their king will go into exile, He and his princes together," says the LORD
Moab 2:1-3	Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Moab and for four I will not revoke its <i>punishment</i> ,	Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime.	So I will send fire upon Moab And it will consume the citadels of Kerioth; And Moab will die amid tumult, With war cries and the sound of a trumpet.	I will also cut off the judge from her midst And slay all her princes with him," says the LORD.
Judah 2:4-5	Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Judah and for four I will not revoke its <i>punishment</i> ,	Because they rejected the law of the LORD And have not kept His statutes; Their lies also have led them astray, Those after which their fathers walked.	So I will send fire upon Judah And it will consume the citadels of Jerusalem."	