

AMOS

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BACKGROUND

The reign of Jeroboam II in Israel's northern kingdom had been the "golden age" of the north, with great military successes and a thriving economy. Spiritually, however, the nation did not do so well. Toward the end of Jeroboam's reign, God called Amos, from the southern kingdom, to head north with a message of exhortation and judgment for Israel. As a southerner, Amos was not very welcome in the north (see [Amos 7:12-13](#)), yet he stood his ground, knowing that God had called him.

Although there is no evidence that the two men ever met, Amos would have been a contemporary of Hosea, another prophet to the northern kingdom.

AUTHOR

Amos, a shepherd ([Amos 1:1](#); [Amos 7:14-15](#)) from Tekoa, a small hilltop town overlooking the Dead Sea, 10 miles south of Jerusalem.

DATE AND LOCATION

[Amos 1:1](#) states that Amos prophesied during the reigns of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) and the southern king Uzziah (Azariah, 790-740), and that God's message came to him "two years before the earthquake." Josephus dates this earthquake at the time of Uzziah's apostasy, c. 750 (see exposition on [§2 Kings 15:1-7](#)).

Amos prophesied at Bethel, where Jeroboam had erected one of his golden calves (see exposition on [§1 Kings 12:25-33](#)). He may have ministered at the north's capital city of Samaria as well. His prophecies were probably compiled and recorded at Bethel, Jerusalem, or Tekoa, perhaps shortly after the earthquake.

RECIPIENTS

Although Amos was concerned about the whole house of Jacob ([Amos 3:1, 13](#)), his message was mainly for the northern kingdom, especially those associated with its idol worship at Bethel ([Amos 7](#)).

PURPOSE

To call Israel to repent of

- outward actions such as violence, social injustice, and idolatry
- inward attitudes such as pride and heartless worship

Amid his denunciations, Amos proclaimed the coming messianic age.

UNIQUE FEATURES

- Amos is the only OT prophet called from one part of the divided kingdom to prophecy in the other part.
- Perhaps more than any other OT prophet, Amos shows that an effective minister of God does not need any prescribed level of education or social status; he or she needs only a call from God ([Amos 7:14-15](#)).

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

See [Joel: Comparison with Other Bible Books](#).

OUTLINE

1. THE BAD NEWS: EIGHT PROPHECIES ([Amos 1-2](#))
2. THE BAD NEWS: THREE SERMONS ([Amos 3-6](#))
 - A. Punishment for iniquity ([Amos 3](#))
 - B. Israel's lack of repentance ([Amos 4](#))
 - C. A lament for Israel ([Amos 5-6](#))
- III. THE BAD NEWS: FIVE VISIONS ([Amos 7:1-9:10](#))
 - A. The locusts, fire, and plumb line ([Amos 7:1-9](#))
 - B. The attack on Amos ([Amos 7:10-17](#))
 - C. The ripe fruit ([Amos 8](#))
 - D. God standing at the altar ([Amos 9:1-10](#))
 - E. THE GOOD NEWS ([Amos 9:11-15](#))

TIMELINE

931 B.C.:	Kingdom divides, Israel, Judah
c. 750 B.C.:	Amos prophesies, mentions earthquake
722 B.C.:	Fall of Israel
586 B.C.:	Fall of Judah
c. 500 B.C.:	Zechariah mentions earthquake of Amos' day

[Amos 1:1-2](#) *"These nations will be judged."* Amos, a shepherd from Judah, introduced his prophecies concerning eight different nations ([Amos 1:3-2:16](#)) by describing God's awesome presence as he called those nations to account. The earthquake (see [Date and Location](#)) was memorable not only to Amos but also to Zechariah, writing more than 200 years later (see [Zech. 14:4-5](#))! Thoughts of the earthquake may also have been natural as Amos thought back on his prophecies of judgment.

[Amos 1:3-5](#) *Syria: Payday for the "threshers."* Syria, represented by Damascus, its capital, was to be judged because of its excessive cruelty in conquering Gilead, the area east of the Jordan occupied by Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. It had apparently used iron implements of war to literally "thresh" the Israelite soldiers. This had taken place during the reign of Jehoahaz (814-798 B.C.; see [2 Kings 10:32-33](#); [2 Kings 13:3-7](#)). Damascus would be conquered and exiled by Assyria some 20 years after Amos's prophecy, in 732 (see [2 Kings 16:9](#)).

[Amos 1:6-8](#) *Philistia: Death to the slave traders.* Philistia had invaded Judah during the reign of Jehoram (853-841 B.C.), about 100 years before Amos, and had taken its people captive (see [2 Chron. 21:16-17](#)). They had sold some prisoners to the Edomites and some to Phoenicians, who in turn sold them to the Greeks (see [Joel 3:4-6](#)). Historically, their death sentence ([Amos 1:8](#)) would be carried out by Assyria from 734 to 701.

[Amos 1:9-10](#) *Phoenicia: Death to the promise breakers.* Phoenicia (Tyre), partner in Philistia's slave trade, had sold Israelite captives to Greece and Edom. Its crime was more heinous than Philistia's because it had broken its "treaty of brotherhood" with Israel (see [1 Kings 5:1-12](#)). Phoenicia's judgment was carried out by Nebuchadnezzar (see exposition on [Ezekiel 26-28](#)).

[Amos 1:11-12](#) *Edom: Punished for pursuing his brother.* The Edomites, descendants of Esau and therefore closely related to Israel, had been "unrelenting in their anger" toward Jacob's descendants (see [2 Chron. 28:17](#); exposition on [Ezekiel 35:1-15](#); Obadiah) and would be judged.

[Amos 1:13-15](#) *Ammon: Burned for their atrocities.* Ammon had committed terrible atrocities against Judah. God promised the fire of complete and inescapable judgment, a judgment that would be carried out a century and a half later by Nebuchadnezzar (see exposition on [Jeremiah 49:1-6](#)).

[Amos 2:1-3](#) *Moab: Extermination for desecration.* The Moabites had shown unreasonable wrath when they desecrated the body of the royal heir of Edom (see [2 Kings 3:26-27](#)). God's judgment on them would be carried out when Nebuchadnezzar swallowed them up and they passed out of existence as a nation (see exposition on [Jeremiah 48:1-47](#)).

[Amos 2:4-5](#) *Judah: No favoritism for his favorites.* Turning to his own people, God declared judgment on Judah for taking his favor for granted. His judgment would be carried out by Babylon in 586 B.C. (see [2 Kings 25](#)).

[Amos 2:6-16](#) *Israel: The "main event."* Having pronounced judgment on all the surrounding nations, including Judah, the Lord confronted the real target of his wrath: the northern kingdom of Israel. Israel had flagrantly violated God's law ([Amos 2:6-8](#)), had taken his favor for granted ([Amos 2:9-12](#)), and therefore must be judged ([Amos 2:13-16](#)). Judgment would be realized in 722 B.C.—just 30 years away—when the people would be carried into a captivity from which they would never return.

[Amos 3:1-8](#) *Much given, much required.* Amos addressed three sermons to Israel, each prefaced by the exhortation to listen ([Amos 3:1](#); see [Amos 4:1](#); [Amos 5:1](#)). The people of Israel had enjoyed a covenant relationship with God unknown by any other nation in history. Because of this unique

privilege, their punishment would be all the greater, for how could God continue to "walk" with them when they were walking in a different direction ([Amos 3:1-3](#))?

The judgment to befall Israel would follow the natural laws of cause and effect ([Amos 3:4-6](#)). The cause was Israel's sins. The effect would be God's judgment. Amos the farmer was merely God's messenger ([Amos 3:7-8](#)).

Judah, as part of Israel's "entire family" ([Amos 3:1](#)), would also be judged—but a century and a half later.

[Amos 3:9-15](#) *Prosecuted before a pagan jury.* God, as prosecuting attorney, invited Philistia and Egypt to form the jury as he presented his case against Israel ([Amos 3:9-10](#)). Neither the people's worship centers nor their ill-gotten possessions ([Amos 3:10, 14-15](#)) would deter God from avenging their oppression of the poor and helpless ([Amos 3:9-11](#)). God's judgment would be severe, but he would spare a remnant ([Amos 3:12](#)), through whom his messianic plans for Israel would be realized. Not even its sin would deter God from his ultimate plans to restore Israel! (See [2 Chron. 30:1-9](#).)

[Amos 4:1-3](#) *Hereded like cattle into captivity.* The wealthy women of Samaria, addressed as "fat cows," maintained their luxury by urging their husbands to oppress the poor. God's judgment would be sudden and severe, fitting their crimes. Bashan, east of Galilee, had lush pastures and was known for its fine cattle.

[Amos 4:4-5](#) *Worship today, judgment tomorrow.* God mockingly invited the people of Israel to worship, though their worship, being insincere and selfish, would only compound their sins. Halfhearted worship salves the conscience but condemns the soul. Bethel and Gilgal were apparently the two most notorious centers of idol worship ([Amos 4:4](#); see [Amos 5:5](#)).

[Amos 4:6-13](#) *"Prepare to meet your God!"* Any one of the many calamities God had brought on Israel should have been enough to produce repentance, yet they had had no such effect ([Amos 4:6-11](#)). Israel must therefore prepare to meet its God, not in salvation or revival, but in judgment ([Amos 4:12-13](#)). Israel would be helpless before him, for he is the sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God. "Cleanness of teeth" ([Amos 4:6](#), KJV) was a euphemism for hunger.

[Amos 5:1-9](#) *The Sovereign you're sinning against.* Because of its sins, Israel was in sad shape, and judgment was imminent ([Amos 5:1-3](#)). Yet judgment could be avoided: Three times God extended a gracious invitation for Israel to repent ([Amos 5:4, 6, 14-15](#)). The gravity of its sin stood in stark contrast to the greatness of the one against whom Israel had sinned—the eternal God, maker and sustainer of heaven and earth, who certainly could bring about sudden and inescapable judgment ([Amos 5:8-9](#)).

[Amos 5:10-15](#) *"Hate the bad, love the good, save your life!"* Israel's leaders had oppressed the poor, and this had not escaped God's notice ([Amos 5:10-13](#)). The oppressors would soon find themselves thrown out of the very houses they had built with their ill-gotten wealth ([Amos 5:11-12](#)). They could avert this judgment, however, if only they would "do what is good and run from evil" ([Amos 5:14-15](#)).

Amos 5:16-20 *From lion to bear (bad to worse!).* Amos's third sermon ended with pronouncements of woe against Israel ([Amos 5:18](#); see [Amos 6:1, 3](#)). Some falsely pious Israelites claimed to long for the future "day of the LORD," not realizing that the judgment to be experienced then will be even worse than the coming judgment by Assyria. One might escape the Assyrians, but none will escape the final judgment. It will be like escaping a lion only to encounter a bear! On the "day of the LORD," see exposition on [§ Amos 9:11-15](#) as well as exposition on [§ Isaiah 2:5-4:1](#) and on [§ Joel 2:1-11](#).

Amos 5:21-27 *"I hate your hypocrisy!"* God expressed utter distaste for Israel's halfhearted worship ([Amos 5:21-23](#)), accompanied as it was by social injustice ([Amos 5:24](#)). Israel had displayed such hypocrisy since its very birth in Egypt. Therefore it would go into captivity.

Amos 6:1-14 *The self-indulgent: First to be enslaved.* A special woe was pronounced against the wealthy of both Judah ("Jerusalem") and Israel ("Samaria"). Both had sunk to gross depths of self-indulgence. Both were due for a great surprise: God's judgment would overtake them. They had been prominent in their sin and self-indulgence; now they would be prominent in the exile, being "the first to be led away as captives" ([Amos 6:7](#)).

In their wealth and pride ([Amos 6:1, 8](#)), God's people had refused to trust him ([Amos 6:2, 12-13](#)). Now judgment would come, to rich and poor alike ([Amos 6:11](#)). Just as sin had covered the entire land, destruction would spread from north to south ([Amos 6:14](#)). So many would die that cremation—a rare practice in Israel—would be necessary to keep disease from spreading ([Amos 6:10](#)).

Amos 7:1-6 *The power of prayer: Stopping locusts and fire!* Amos described some visions concerning Israel. When God showed him a swarm of locusts descending on sinful Israel, Amos realized how hopeless was his people's condition. He pleaded with God to spare them from this disaster, and God relented (see exposition on [§ Joel 2:12-17](#)). A vision of fire brought the same alarm from Amos and the same mercy from God.

Amos 7:7-9 *What the plumb line shows.* God then showed Amos a plumb line, which revealed that, measured against God's law, Israel was way out of line. It had escaped the judgments of locusts and fire ([Amos 7:1-6](#)), but now the time for judgment had come.

Amos 7:10-11 *Amaziah to Jeroboam: "He's saying terrible things!"* Responding perhaps to Amos's vision of the plumb line, Amaziah, a priest of the idolatrous shrine at Bethel, falsely accused Amos of conspiring against Jeroboam, of acting treasonously, and of upsetting an otherwise peaceful land. While the "dynasty of King Jeroboam" (his son Zechariah) died by the sword just as Amos had predicted ([Amos 7:9](#); see [2 Kings 15:8-10](#)), Jeroboam himself died a natural death (see [2 Kings 14:29](#)), unlike Amaziah's misrepresentation of Amos's words ([Amos 7:11](#)).

Amos 7:12-13 *Amaziah to Amos: "Go home!"* Evidently unable to get the king to arrest Amos, Amaziah attacked him himself, ordering him to leave Israel and return to Judah, where he had come from. In so doing he unwittingly spoke the truth about Bethel: Because it had become a center of false worship, it truly was the house of Jeroboam rather than the "house of God," as its name implied.

Amos 7:14-17 *Amos to Amaziah: "I'll say even worse things!"* Ignoring Amaziah's threats, Amos recalled his humble origins and continued to boldly prophesy—against Israel and against Amaziah

personally: Amaziah's wife would become a harlot, his children would be slain, he would die as a captive in Assyria, and the entire nation would be exiled.

Amos 8:1-10 *Sorrow and suffering in the basket.* Amos saw a basket of ripe summer fruit, signifying that Israel was ripe for destruction ([Amos 8:1-3](#)). So many would die that the burial crews would go about their gruesome task in stunned silence ([Amos 8:3](#)). The Lord would not overlook the wrongs heaped on the poor and oppressed by wealthy Israelites ([Amos 8:4-7](#)). The land would be struck by an earthquake ([Amos 8:8](#)), and there would be unusual phenomena in the heavens ([Amos 8:9](#)). Their normal happy festivities would become times of deep mourning, like those of parents mourning the death of an only son ([Amos 8:10](#)).

Amos 8:11-14 *Worse than a famine of food.* Once in captivity, the Israelites would experience a famine worse than any physical privation: For centuries they had shown contempt for God and rejected his prophets; now they would not be able to hear the words of the Lord even if they should want to.

Amos 9:1-10 *No escape—except the righteous few.* Amos then saw God confronting the idolatrous worshipers at Bethel, declaring that none would escape his wrath. God's patience had reached its limit ([Amos 9:1-4](#)). The sovereign God, who governs phenomena such as earthquakes and floods ([Amos 9:5-6](#)), could surely judge a nation like Israel ([Amos 9:7-8](#)). Yet he would not totally destroy it but would "sift" the people into exile, then separate the good from the bad among those exiles ([Amos 9:8-10](#)).

Amos 9:11-15 *But then, glorious restoration!* The dark present of Israel's defection would not deter God from his ultimate plans for Israel. "In that day," at the end of human history ([Amos 9:11](#); see exposition on ^s[Isaiah 2:5-4:1](#)), God will repair the damage done to the nation and make it as good as new! Israel's ultimate restoration will include

- a renewed Davidic dynasty ([Amos 9:11](#); see [Acts 15:16](#))
- exaltation over the nations ([Amos 9:11-12](#))
- conversion of the Gentiles ([Amos 9:12](#); see [Acts 15:17](#))
- agricultural abundance ([Amos 9:13-14](#); see [Joel 3:18](#))
- rebuilding of devastated cities ([Amos 9:14](#))
- return to its own land, never to be captive again ([Amos 9:15](#))

What a glorious future against such a dark background!

AMOS

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM AMOS)

Key Fact: Prophet from Judah to Israel

Occupation: Herdsman, fruit grower, prophet ([Amos 7:14-15](#))

Total Bible References: 7

Key References: [Amos 1-9](#)

Amos Speaks

He first spoke to me on that hillside overlooking Tekoa as I tended my sheep. He instructed me to pay a visit to my northern relatives and denounce their sins as well as the sins of Judah and six pagan nations. All would be severely punished. That in itself was awesome, but those five accompanying visions were almost overwhelming! They seemed to appear without pause, like so many flashes of lightning. ([Amos 1:1-3:3](#))

All five visions dealt with God's judgment. What a relief when the locust plague and that all-consuming fire were both averted because of his grace. But this would not be the case with the remaining three. Of course, the vision that caused the most difficulty for me personally was that of the plumb line. He talked about "testing his people with a plumb line," then went on to say he would "bring the dynasty of King Jeroboam to a sudden end." ([Amos 7:1-9](#))

Needless to say, this kind of talk against Jeroboam infuriated his puppy-dog priest at Bethel. He demanded that I go back home and prophesy in Judah! Well, I quickly responded to this religious phony. I pointed out that although I was not an official prophet, nor even the son of a prophet, I would nevertheless oblige him by a few choice predictions. I warned him that, as a result of his godlessness, his wife would become a harlot, his land would be confiscated, and he himself would die as a captive in a foreign land. What a miserable future he faces! ([Amos 7:12-17](#))

But it will all have a happy ending, as God revealed to me on that little hillside: "I will bring my exiled people of Israel back from distant lands, and they will rebuild their ruined cities and live in them again. . . . Then they will never be uprooted again." ([Amos 9:14-15](#))

Spiritual Lesson from Amos

- God used a theologically untrained "layman" as one of his most effective prophets ([Amos 7:14](#)). Usefulness in God's service has more to do with the condition of the heart than with natural abilities or professional credentials (see [Matthew 11:25](#); [Acts 4:13](#); [1 Cor. 1:27](#)). As far as God is concerned, the two greatest "abilities" are availability and dependability! (See [Isaiah 6:8](#); [1 Cor. 4:1-2](#).)

Key Verse

"Prepare to meet your God as he comes in judgment, you people of Israel!" ([Amos 4:12](#)).