

Amos

AMOS (ay' mahs) Personal name meaning, "a load."

1. A prophet from Judah who ministered in Israel about 750 B.C.

"Burden bearer"

One might graphically describe the prophet Amos as a "burden bearer." He carried a heavy burden for his people. Or, from another perspective, his people were a burden he carried.

"Minor Prophets"

As a prophet, Amos was a primary figure among the series of courageous men known as the "Minor Prophets." Neither they nor their inspired messages were minor, and they are called "minor" only because their books are far shorter than "Major Prophets" such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. So brief were their writings that all twelve were written on a single scroll. Hence, those writings were commonly known as the Book of the Twelve or the Minor Prophets.

"Layperson," not a professional prophet

Amos was a layperson who disclaimed professional status as a prophet: "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel' " (7:14-15 RSV). Because of God's call, Amos assumed his prophetic responsibilities as a lonely voice prophesying from both the desert and the villages. He indicted both Judah and Israel, challenging the superficial qualities of religious institutions. For Amos, his call and his continuing ministry rested in God's initiative and in His sustaining power: "The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (3:8 RSV).

Time of relative peace

Amos lived in a time of relative peace on the international political scene. Both Egypt and Assyria were in a period of decline, although Assyria was beginning to expand its power. Syria had become ineffective, but the reduction of this buffer state between Israel and Assyria was to have serious repercussions in the generation following Amos.

Stable internal political structures

Internally, the political structures of both Israel and Judah were stable. Beginning his prophetic activity during the reign of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Amos lived during an era that rivaled Solomon's generation in its stability and economic prosperity (2 Kings 14:23-27).

Social, moral, and religious problems attending that prosperity

Yet, it was precisely the social, moral, and religious problems attending that prosperity that became the focus for Amos' voice of judgment. In the Southern Kingdom of Judah, the noble king Uzziah reigned (Amos

Amos

1:1). Amos probably began his ministry with God's call in 765 B.C., "two years before the earthquake" (1:1).

Misdirected prosperity, corrupt religion

Morally, Israel and Judah were suffering under the corruption generated as a by-product of Canaanite and Tyrian Baalism, as well as infidelity to the Lord's covenant. Israelite society had experienced the inevitable decay which characterizes misdirected prosperity. It may appear strange that the corruption of Israelite society could be traced to its contemporary religious structures and to the material prosperity which Israelites so often interpreted as a sign of divine favor. Despite the contradictory nature of those circumstances, the debauched moral condition of the land was the product of both corrupt religion and perverted material prosperity. Rampant luxury and self-indulgence were clearly manifest (1:6ff; 4:1ff; 5:10ff; 6:1ff; 8:4ff).

Opposition to religious evils

Exploitation of the poor occurred throughout the land (2:6; 3:10; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4-6). Justice was distorted. The dynamism of personal religious experience gave way to the superficiality of institutional religion as demonstrated in the conflict between Amos and Amaziah, the priest of Bethel (7:10ff).

Primary Theme: "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream"

Amos' opposition to those moral and religious evils led him to emphasize the primary theme of the book: "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream" (5:24 RSV).

Book of Amos has three sections

One may divide the book of Amos into three sections.

The Sermons (divided into eight subsections)

Chapters one and two are a basic section, divided into subsections which begin with a common literary introduction (1:3,6,9,11,13; 2:1,4,6).

The Judgement oracles

The second section of the book consists of judgment oracles directed against Israel (3:1-6:14).

The Visions

The third section contains the visions of Amos (7-9), which may have been the earliest revelations through the prophet. The visions were central to his call experience. Aware of the awesome reality of human sin and divine judgment, these visions shaped his prophetic messages (7:1-3,4-6,7-9; 8:1-3; 9:1-4).

Central theme stresses sin and judgement

The words of Amos address various issues, but the central theme stresses sin and judgment. Whether in addressing other nations, Israel, or Judah, the prophet condemned those who sin against a universal conscience (1:1-2:3), the revealed law (2:4-5), or God's redeeming love

Amos

(2:6-16). Amos challenged people to live by covenant standards and condemned them for their failure to reflect the covenant in daily life. He was concerned about people who "do not know how to do right" (3:10 RSV). His word of judgment was severe for the "first ladies of Samaria" who encouraged the injustice and violence of their husbands "who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, 'Bring, that we may drink!' " (4:1 RSV). Because of such injustice and the failure to bind authentic religious experience with a social conscience, Amos claimed that the nation was already dead. One could sing Israel's funeral lament: "Fallen, no more to rise, is the virgin Israel" (5:1 RSV). For individuals who were superficially and confidently "at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria" (6:1 RSV), their only hope rested in the renewal of authentic religious experience leading to a life of justice and righteousness which overflow the land (5:24). For those who rejected that way, only judgment remained: "prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (4:12).

2. An ancestor of Jesus (Luke 3:25).

Outline

I. The Sermons: God Confronts His People's Sin (1:1-6:14).

Amos

A. God's Word is revealed in human words (1:1-2).

Amos

B. God identifies and condemns all human sin (1:3-2:16).

1. Acts against common human decency are sinful
(1:3-2:3).

2. The rejection of God's law by substituting one's own wisdom is sin
(2:4-5).

3. Rejecting God's love is sin
(2:6-16).

Amos

C. God condemns empty religion (3:1-15).

1. The privilege of being loved by God brings responsibility
(3:1-2).

2. God reveals His purposes to His people
(3:3-8).

3. God uses historical agents in His judgment
(3:9-12).

*4. Centers of empty religion and ill-gotten prosperity will all
fall*
(3:13-15).

Amos

D. God's love confronts His disobedient people in judgment (4:1-13).

***1. Insatiable desire leads to sin
(4:1-3).***

***2. Empty and meaningless worship is sin
(4:4-5).***

***3. Temporal judgment is intended to lead God's people to
repentance
(4:6-11).***

***4. God's rebellious people face an ultimate confrontation
with Him
(4:12-13).***

Amos

E. God calls His people to practice justice and righteousness (5:1-27).

***1. God sees the end of His sinful people
(5:1-3).***

***2. God's rebellious people are invited to seek Him
(5:4-9,14-15).***

***3. God's inescapable judgment is on His people
(5:10-13,16-20).***

***4. Practical righteousness is God's ultimate demand of His
people
(5:21-27).***

Amos

**F. False security in national strength leads to ultimate downfall
(6:1-14).**

Amos

II. The Visions: Seeing God Properly Reveals Both His Judgment and His Mercy

(7:1-9:15).

A. God extends mercy in response to serious intercession

(7:1-6).

Amos

**B. Ultimate confrontation with God can never be escaped
(7:7-9).**

Amos

**C. A proper view of God brings everything else into perspective
(7:10-17).**

***1. A false view of the nature of God's message leads to
wrong decisions***

(7:10-13).

***2. A person transformed by a vision of God sees people and
things as they really are***

(7:14-17).

Amos

D. The final consequences of sin offers judgment without hope (8:1-9:4).

*1. An overripe, rotten religion is worthless
(8:1-3).*

*2. The empty observance of meaningless ritual leaves our
morality unaffected
(8:4-6).*

*3. God's final judgment is a horrible sight
(8:7-9:4).*

Amos

E. God's mercy can be seen beyond His judgment (9:5-15).

1. God is Sovereign over all the universe
(9:5-6).

2. God's mercy still offers hope beyond temporal judgment
(9:7-10).

3. God's ultimate purpose of good for His people will be fulfilled
(9:11-15).