

AMOS

Introduction

Author. Amos was from Tekoa (1:1), a small town about 6 miles south of Bethlehem and 11 miles south of Jerusalem. By his own words (1:1; 7:14-15), Amos earned his living as a "herdsman" (of sheep) and from "sycamore figs". Whether he owned the flocks and groves or simply worked as a hired hand is not clear. The relevant truth is that he was not a member of the prophetic rank by vocation and was chosen by God for his task of prophesying to Israel (7:15). His writing shows that he is a man of breadth and understanding, not an untutored rustic.

Though his home was in Judah, Amos was sent north to announce God's judgment upon Israel. He probably ministered mainly at Bethel (7:10-13), where the upper echelons of Israel worshipped. Bethel was established as the main center of worship in the northern kingdom by Jeroboam I as a substitute for the Temple in Jerusalem, in violation of Deuteronomic commands for one central sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12:13-14).

Date. The first verse indicates that Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah over Judah (767-740 B.C.) and Jeroboam II over Israel (782-753). The main part of his ministry probably occurred between 760-750.

Historical Background. Both kingdoms enjoyed abundant prosperity at this point although Judah was actually under the control of Israel. It was a time of idolatry, immorality, luxurious living, oppression of the poor and corrupt judicial processes. The nation was politically secure but spiritually sick.

Only 40 years earlier Elisha had prophesied the resurgence of Israel's power (2 Kings 13:17-19), not to mention Jonah who prophesied her restoration to a glory similar to the days of Solomon (2 Kings 14:25). With such promises and evident prosperity the nation felt sure that she was in God's good graces. God's past chastisement for unfaithfulness were forgotten and a spiritual callousness had gripped the nation.

Structure.

Major Divisions. Amos is not a difficult book to outline. Literary markers are prevalent throughout the book. The major divisions consist of: 1) eight oracles against the nations, 1:3--2:16
2) five proclamations against Israel, 3:1--6:14 and 3) five visions of judgment, 7:1--9:15.

Eight Oracles. The first eight oracles in chapters one and two are uniform consisting of:

- 1) a heading,
- 2) an indictment,
- 3) a specific indictment,
- 4) a general judgment,
- 5) a concluding judgment and
- 6) a final statement on source.

Some of the elements are missing from individual oracles but they are undoubtedly a homogeneous unit. The impact from this section is to be found in the unusual character of the last oracle against Israel.

Proclamations against Israel. The middle section is composed of three oracles beginning with the distinctive "Hear this word . . ." (3:1-15; 4:1-13, and 5:1-17) and two "Woes" (5:18-27 and 6:1-14).

Visions. The final section is composed of five visions (and three appendices) divided in to three sections. The first two visions (7:1-3 and 7:4-6) are composed of:

- 1) introductory formula,
- 2) optical content,
- 3) the prophet's intercession,
- 4) Yahweh's response.

The third and fourth visions (7:7-9 and 8:1-3) form a unit with the following identical form:

- 1) introductory formula
- 2) optical content
- 3) dialogue
- 4) interpretation
- 5) irrevocable verdict
- 6) concluding judgment

Finally, the last vision (9:1-4) has its own unique form:

- 1) introductory formula
- 2) Yahweh's command
- 3) Yahweh's judgment
- 4) concluding verdict

Message Statement. Although the book of Amos no doubt includes material drawn from various periods of his oral ministry to Israel it has been collected into a highly structured and organized written unit. The book clearly breaks down into three major sections: oracles of judgment (1:1--2:16), sermons of Amos (3:1--6:14), and the visions of Amos (7:1--9:15). At the risk of oversimplification, the first major division introduces the theme of judgment, the second expounds on the theme and the third visualizes that judgment. The message may best be stated as: *Israel's privileged position with God should be an incentive for obedience rather than an excuse for disobedience.*

Argument

- 1A INTRODUCTION 1:1-2
The introduction dates the book in a time of material prosperity second only to the time of Solomon. Amos' authority is established at the outset of the book in two ways: the first was the divine source of his words (God) and the second was the divine vindication of his words (the earthquake).
- 2A ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS: INTRODUCTION OF THEME 1:3--2:16
These oracles of Amos which predict judgment against eight nations are all highly structured (cf. outline). By constructing his messages in this way, Amos avails himself of at least two advantages: first these eight messages are easily identifiable as a unit and second, any deviation from the established structure becomes readily apparent. Amos' message in the first two chapters then can be easily understood. First, Amos is saying that Judah and Israel are deserving of judgment just as her surrounding pagan neighbors and second, due to the extended nature of the oracle against Israel, she is apparently even more culpable than her neighbors.

It should be noticed also that Amos' goal in prophesying against these nations is not to turn them to repentance. These messages are not addressed in the second person as though Amos expected these nations to benefit from his words nor is there any call for repentance. Rather his purpose was aimed solely at Israel. These first six pronouncements of judgment serve to introduce the theme of judgment. They are brief and to the point. They have an arresting psychological force about them prompting agreement from the audience. And once they have done their job in winning over the audience to the prophet's assessment of their neighbors, then Amos turns the finger of judgment to Israel and judges them by the same standards. "It was a trap door and once inside, the door closed hopelessly behind them."⁴

Among the briefest of the oracles is that concerning Judah (2:4-5). The purpose of the inclusion of Judah then is probably not primarily for judgment but rather to serve as a transition from the gentile nations to the Jewish Israel. Whereas the gentile nations are condemned for war time atrocities (sins which should be repulsive even to those without the benefit of special revelation),

⁴Bullock, p 65.

Israel is condemned for more specific sins related to her special relationship to Yahweh. In light of this privileged position Israel is found to be not less but more culpable and thus more deserving of judgment than other nations.

- 3A ORACLES AGAINST ISRAEL: THE REASONS FOR JUDGMENT 3:1--6:14
 The second major division expounds on the guilt of Israel. Her sins are detailed in five sections: three beginning with "Hear this word" and two marked off by the word "Woe" (cf. outline). The theme of this division is stated immediately in 3:1-2: greater privilege demands greater obedience. It is followed by a defense of Amos' authority to announce judgment (3:3-8). The message of judgment proper (3:9-15) of the first woe begins with the prediction of an enemy invader and concludes with the destruction of the great and small house (a figure for excessive prosperity). The last portion (6:8-12) of the fifth section (6:1-14) reverses this order, predicting the destruction of the small and great houses (6:11) and concluding with another mention of the invading nation (6:14). This inclusio suggests that this second division is in fact both well structured and unified in its message.
- 1B Hear This Word, People of Israel 3:1-12
 The first message is addressed generally to the entire house of Israel. It is indicted for both idol worship and financial extravagance.
- 2B Hear This Word, Cows of Bashan 4:1-13
 The second message is addressed to the well fed women of Israel. Their sins are described as oppression of the poor (4:1-3), religious ritualism (4:4-5) and a rejection of God's discipline (4:6-11).
- 3B Hear This Word, House of Israel 5:1-17
 The center of this section seems to be the indictment levelled against the people for economic injustice (5:10-13). It is sandwiched on either side by the chiasmic arrangement of a promise of judgment (5:1-3 and 16-17) and a call to repentance (5:4-9 and 14-15).
- 4B Woe to Impenitent Israel: Exile 5:18-27
 The fact that the final two sections (5:18-27 and 6:1-14) begin with the words "woe" suggest a progression in the theme of judgment.
- 1C Misconceptions concerning the DOL corrected 5:18-20
 Although many considered the DOL to be a day of deliverance for Israel Amos informs them that it holds judgment for sinners whether they be Gentile or Jew.
- 2C Misconceptions concerning righteous living corrected 5:21-26
 Many considered the sacrificial system to be a substitute for righteous living. Amos' words are not a repudiation of the cultus but rather a commentary on priority.
- 3C Conclusion 5:27
 The ultimate penalty for unrighteous living is exile.
- 5B Woe to impenitent Israel: exile and affliction 6:1-14
 Once again Israel's attitude of complacency due to her position among the nations is challenged (6:2). Her luxurious indulgence is condemned (6:4-7) and this oracle (6:1-14) and this division (3:1-6:14) conclude with a relatively extensive description of judgment (6:8-14) which answers to the description of judgment (3:9-16) which introduced this division in an inclusio fashion. This basically concludes the explanation of why judgment is to come. The next division progresses to the visualization of judgment.

- 4A THE VISUALIZATION OF JUDGMENT 7:1--9:15
This division is composed of five visions which can be divided by form into three sections with various appendices.
- 1B Judgment Temporarily Postponed 7:1-6
The first two visions, locusts and fire, are identical in form and message: God temporarily relents of the great judgment he has planned.
- 2B Judgment Determined 7:7--8:14
The second section consists of two visions again identical in form. Both involve dialogue and have an appendix attached.
- 1C The plumbline and appendix A: the priest 7:7-17
In contrast to the message of the first set of visions, the message here is that the period of grace will come to an end and judgment will fall. An historical incident involving Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, is appended perhaps to confirm the necessity of judgment. The reaction of the priest to Amos' message is representative of the reaction of the nation. His rejection of Amos is clear in spite of the obvious reliability of Amos' message. Amos then repeats the message of the vision in prose form (7:16-17) despite the rejection by men.
- 2C The basket of fruit and appendix B 8:1-14
- 1D The basket: inevitability of judgment 8:1-3
The basket of fruit again emphasizes the inevitability of judgment.
- 2D Appendix B: four oracles: results of judgment 8:4-14
As a development over the previous vision and appendix, this appendix goes beyond the explanation for the necessity of judgment and describes four aspects of the judgment to come: earthquake, darkness, absence of revelation and thirst. This appendix begins with the familiar words "hear this" and is subdivided into four subsections by the words "in that day" (8:9), "days are coming" (8:11), and "in that day" (8:13).
- 3B Judgment and Blessing Determined 9:1-15
- 1C The Lord by the altar 9:1-4
The final vision is somewhat distinct from the others. Amos has no intercession or dialogue here. God's word is seen as final and without redress. This vision is also the most graphic and represents a climax of the visualization of judgment.
- 2C Appendix C: future blessing 9:5-15
The final appendix offers hope to the nation. After a hymn of praise to God, God declares that He will preserve a remnant of the faithful (9:7-10). The final section of this appendix declares the restoration of the nation (9:11-15). It is divided further into two sections by the words "in that day" (9:11) and "days are coming" (9:13): the first dealing with the restoration of the Davidic king and the second, the land and people.

Outline

1A	INTRODUCTION	1:1-2
1B	<u>The Author</u>	1:1
2B	<u>The Theme</u>	1:2
2A	ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS: INTRODUCTION OF THEME	1:3--2:16
1B	<u>The Introduction and Background</u>	1:3--2:5
1C	Judgment concerning Damascus	1:3-5
1D	Heading	1:3a
2D	Indictment formula	1:3b
3D	Specific indictment	1:3c
4D	General judgment	1:4-5a
5D	Concluding judgment	1:5b
6D	Final statement on source	1:5c
2C	Judgment concerning Philistia	1:6-8
1D	Heading	1:6a
2D	Indictment formula	1:6b
3D	Specific indictment	1:6c
4D	General judgment	1:7-8a
5D	Concluding judgment	1:8b
6D	Final statement on source	1:8c
3C	Judgment concerning Tyre	1:9-10
1D	Heading	1:9a
2D	Indictment formula	1:9b
3D	Specific indictment	1:9c
4D	General judgment	1:10
4C	Judgment concerning Edom	1:11-12
1D	Heading	1:11a
2D	Indictment formula	1:11b
3D	Specific indictment	1:11c
4D	General judgment	1:12
5C	Judgment concerning Ammon	1:13-15
1D	Heading	1:13a
2D	Indictment formula	1:13b
3D	Specific indictment	1:13c
4D	General judgment	1:14
1E	The statement	1:14a
2E	The circumstances	1:14b
5D	Concluding judgment	1:15a
6D	Final statement on source	1:15b
6C	Judgment concerning Moab	2:1-3
1D	Heading	2:1a
2D	Indictment formula	2:1b

	3D	Specific indictment	2:1c
	4D	General judgment	2:2-3a
	1E	The first statement	2:2a
	2E	The circumstances	2:2b
	3E	The second statement	2:3a
	5D	Final statement on source	2:3b
	7C	Judgment concerning Judah	2:4-5
	1D	Heading	2:4a
	2D	Indictment formula	2:4b
	3D	Specific indictment	2:4c
	4D	General judgment	2:5
2B		<u>The Message: Judgment Concerning Israel</u>	2:6-16
	1C	Heading	2:6a
	2C	Indictment formula	2:6b
	3C	First specific indictment	2:6c-8
	1D	Economic sins	2:6c-7a
	2D	Religious sins	2:7b-8
	4C	Special privileges	2:9-11
	1D	Preparation of the land	2:9
	2D	Preparation of the people	2:10
	3D	Preparation for faithfulness	2:11
	5C	Second specific indictment	2:12
	6C	General judgment	2:13
	7C	Concluding judgment	2:14-16a
	8C	Final statement on source	2:16b
3A		ORACLES AGAINST ISRAEL: THE REASONS FOR JUDGMENT	3:1--6:14
	1B	<u>Hear This Word, People of Israel</u>	3:1-15
	1C	The responsibility of the people	3:1-2
	2C	The cause of Amos' message	3:3-8
	3C	The summons to witnesses	3:9-10
	4C	The sentence of punishment	
	2B	<u>Hear This Word, Cows of Bashan</u>	4:1-13
	1C	The need for repentance	4:1-11
	1D	Economic oppression	4:1-3
	2D	Religious ritualism	4:4-5
	3D	Rejection of God's discipline	4:6-11

2C	The call to repentance	4:12-13
1D	on the basis of the promised judgment	4:12
2D	on the basis of the person of God	4:13
3B	<u>Hear This Word, House of Israel</u>	5:1-17
1C	Promise of judgment	5:1-3
2C	Call to repentance	5:4-9
3C	Indictment	5:10-13
4C	Call to repentance	5:14-15
5C	Promise of Judgment	5:16-17
4B	<u>Woe to Impenitent Israel: Exile</u>	5:18-27
1C	Misconceptions concerning the DOL corrected	5:18-20
2C	Misconceptions concerning righteous living corrected	5:21-26
1D	Ritualism without righteousness rejected	5:21-24
2D	Ritualism with idolatry rejected	5:25-26
3C	Conclusion	5:27
5B	<u>Woe to Impenitent Israel: Affliction</u>	6:1-14
1C	Their boastful complacency	6:1-3
2C	Their luxurious indulgence	6:4-7
3C	Their complete devastation	6:8-14
4A	THE VISUALIZATION OF JUDGMENT	7:1--9:15
1B	<u>Judgment Temporarily Postponed</u>	7:1-6
1C	Devouring locusts	7:1-3
1D	Introductory formula	7:1a
2D	Optical content	7:1b
3D	Prophet's intercession	7:2
4D	Yahweh's response	7:3
2C	Fire	7:4-6
1D	Introductory formula	7:4a
2D	Optical content	7:4b
3D	Prophet's intercession	7:5
4D	Yahweh's response	7:6
2B	<u>Judgment Determined</u>	7:7--8:14
1C	The plumbline and appendix A: the priest	7:7-17

1D	The plumbline: inevitability of judgment	7:7-9
1E	Introductory formula	7:7a
2E	Optical content	7:7b
3E	Dialogue	7:8a
4E	Interpretation	7:8b
5E	Irrevocable verdict	7:8c
6E	Concluding judgment	7:9
2D	Appendix A: the priest: necessity of judgment	7:10-17
1E	The rejection of Amos' message	7:10-13
2E	The reliability of Amos' message	7:14-17
1F	because of the divine call	7:14-15
2F	because of fulfilled prophecy	7:16-17
2C	The basket of fruit and appendix B	8:1-14
1D	The basket: inevitability of judgment	8:1-3
1E	Introductory formula	8:1a
2E	Optical content	8:1b
3E	Dialogue	8:2a
4E	Interpretation	8:2b
5E	Irrevocable verdict	8:2c
6E	Concluding judgment	8:3
2D	Appendix B: four oracles: results of judgment	8:4-14
1E	Earthquake	8:4-8
2E	Darkness	8:9-10
3E	Absence of revelation	8:11-12
4E	Thirst	8:13-14
3B	<u>Judgment and Blessing Determined</u>	9:1-15
1C	The Lord by the altar	9:1-4
1D	Introductory formula	9:1a
2D	Yahweh's command	9:1b
3D	Yahweh's judgment	9:1c-4a
4D	Concluding verdict	9:4b
2C	Appendix C: future blessing	9:5-15
1D	The basis of blessing: the power of God	9:5-6
2D	The means of blessing: preservation of a remnant	9:7-10
3D	The essence of blessing: restoration of the nation	9:11-15
1E	of the King	9:11-12
2E	of the land and people	9:13-15