

AMOS – SHORT VERSION

Introduction. With Amos, we are introduced to the first of the “*writings prophets.*” They did not only preach but also wrote down their sermons. Preaching prophets like Elijah and Elisha did not write down their sermons. In some books of the Bible, Amos and his contemporaries (Hosea, Isaiah, etc.), are sometimes called the “Latter Prophets” to distinguish them from the “Former Prophets” (Joshua, Samuel, Nathan, etc.).

Historical Context. One of the problems we encounter when dealing with the so-called “Latter Prophets” is the lack of historical context for their ministry. Since little or nothing is written in the historical books about any of the prophets, with the exception of Isaiah, scholars have depended on the text of each prophetic book to ascertain the historical background of each of the prophets. Some of the books provide very little historical information while others give no clues at all.

From the book that bears his name, we do know that Amos is a shepherd from Tekoa, a small town south of Bethlehem. He is from the southern kingdom, but he preaches in the northern kingdom at the Shrine of Bethel during the reign of King Jeroboam (786-746BC). It is a period of great prosperity in the northern kingdom when Amos arrives in Samaria, the capital. Amos is shocked and outraged on what he sees: the rich living in luxury and becoming richer on the backs of the poor. Amos’ ministry involves railing against the great injustices he witnesses in the northern kingdom. Hence, he is often called the prophet of social justice or the prophet of divine judgment.

The social evils in Israel are compounded by the hypocritical veneer of religion with which the perpetrators of social injustice seek to veil their actions. Thus we find in the Book of Amos not only a critique of social injustice, but also a scathing assault on formal religion that has lost its heart and become little more than a shell of hypocrisy.

Amidst widespread social injustice and shallow worship, Amos becomes a prophet of divine judgment on the nation of Israel and on her neighbors as well. His message is often seen as one of gloom and doom. But the real gloom lies *not* in the proclamation of Amos’ judgment, but rather in the social evils that demand such judgment.

Style. Amos’ preaching style is blunt, confrontational and insulting. He calls the rich ladies at the local country club in Samaria “cows of Basham” (4:1). With an agricultural background, he uses symbols he has experienced on the land: laden wagons, roaring lions, flocks plundered by wild beasts.

DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

PART ONE is a collection of oracles against surrounding pagan nations. These oracles imply that God’s moral law applies not only to his chosen ones but to all nations. In this series of condemnations, Judah and Israel are not excluded (chs 1-2).

PART TWO is a collection of words and woes against the people of Israel. In each instance, Amos points out the multiple ways by which Israel has violated God’s laws (chs 3-6).

PART THREE deals with five symbolic visions pertaining to threats and promises (chs 7:1-9:8).

EPILOGUE contains words of hope and promise of restoration (9:9-15).

Suggested texts to read

Amos is not an easy read. As stated above he is blunt and harsh in his condemnation of the rich and the powerful who take advantage of the poor. Some samples: 2:6-7, 4:1-2, 5:21-24 (worship devoid of care for the poor is hateful to the Lord) 8:4-6.