

I. Background

The nation of Israel overflowed with optimism. The time was about 760 BC and Israel was at the height of her economic, political and military strength. Business was flourishing, their boundaries were expanding, and material wealth abounded. It was a peaceful period of time and there was nothing to fear from other nations. All was well and they were complacent and smug about it.

Spiritually, the people were morally corrupt. Israel then was much like America is today. Social injustices and spiritual apostasy abounded. Jeroboam II, the son of Joash reigned as king in Israel and II Kings 14:24 states that *he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*.

II. Author

Amos was a herdsman (nomadic cowboy) and a grower of sycamore figs (farmer) from Tekoa, a small hilltop town overlooking the Dead Sea, about 10-12 miles south of Jerusalem (Amos 1:1; 7:14). He was not of the priestly or prophetic line and he had not gone to the school of the prophets. He was called and commissioned by God to preach His Word (3:8; 7:15). He knew well the Scriptures and had a keen sense of morality and justice. His name means *burden* and he was pressed under by the burden of sin that was in the land (2:13). He wondered how God could forgive such a wicked nation.

III. Purpose

1. To call Israel to repentance.
2. To pronounce judgment against Israel for social injustices, moral degeneracy, and spiritual apostasy.
3. To remind the people of their covenant obligations.
4. To provide a wake-up call and a gracious invitation to get serious about their relationship with God.
5. To teach that sin separates us from God and must be judged before fellowship can be restored (I John 1:9).

IV. Keys To Understanding Amos

1. Key Verse: ***Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel*** (4:12).
2. Key Word: Plumbline (7:7, 8) – a symbol of judgment (II Kings 21:13; Isaiah 28:17).
3. Other key words: Punishment (1:3) and Captivity (5:5,27; 6:7; 7:9,17).

4. Key phrases:

- A. Amos 3:3 – “Can two walk together except they be agreed?”
- B. *For three transgressions...and for four* (1:3, 6, 9, 11). This expression was used to show that their cup of sin was full and running over.
- C. ***Thus saith the Lord*** (Fifteen times in nine chapters).

5. Character of the book: Prophetic

V. Outline

The outline is based on three types of presentations in Amos (all negative - bad news).

- I. **Eight Oracles** or Prophecies (Chapters 1-2) – “Thus saith the Lord.” Prophetic condemnation of the gross injustices committed by Israel, Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, and sins against Israel by the other nations.

- II. **Three Sermons** – Judgment against Israel (Chapters 3-6) - *Hear this word*.

- A. Their sin of presumption (3:1-15)
- B. Their sin of religious orthodoxy (4:1-13)
- C. Their sin of moral and ethical corruption (5:1-6:14)

- III. **Five Visions** picturing judgment (7:1 – 9:10) – *The Lord God showed me*.

- A. Locust (7:1-3)
- B. Devouring fire (7:4-6)
- C. Plumbline (7:7-9)
- D. Basket of rotten fruit (8:1-14)
- E. Altar – Israel’s unavoidable judgment (9:1-10) – Their religion was only outward with no inward sincerity.

- IV. Promise of Restoration (Future Blessings (9:11-15)

VI. Observations

- A. Amos is the only Old Testament prophet called from one part of the divided kingdom (Judah) to prophesy in the other part (Israel).
- B. The people found his message of judgment difficult to imagine since Assyria, Babylon, Syria, and Egypt were all relatively weak. His message was harsh and them told him to go back to Judah and preach his message there (7:12).

- C. The message of Amos was strong and stinging. Many in Israel considered him a traitor to speak against the government as he did. He told them that God hated their arrogance, smugness, and self-sufficiency. He called women who mistreated poor servants and beggars, "fat cows," who would be dragged away by sharp hooks. He condemned leaders, nobles, and merchants who cheated honest people.
- D. The people were most upset at him and his message. They basically said to him, "Get out of town. Go back to Judah and preach your message down there" (7:12).

It would take a seasoned old farmer to not be bothered with their railings against him. He came from a wild place in Judah (Tekoa). He lived in the desert of Judah and knew what it was to suffer and therefore it made little difference what the king or high priest thought of him.

VII. Special Application

- A. Amos said things the way they were. People didn't like it, but it was the Word of God. God chose the man who would say it like it was. Today, we ruin God's Word by trying to sweeten it up. The Word of God is one of the most down to earth, straight, forward books.

There are a number of people wearing initials on wristbands and other places that have letters representing these words – What would Jesus do? These folks wear these things in total ignorance of what Jesus would do. He would come in with a scourge and drive all of the entertainment out of our churches. He would pronounce judgment as He did in the Olivet Discourse.

- B. In America today, and even in our churches, we don't believe what happened to Israel can happen to us. People expect to get up in the morning and be as secure as they are when they went to bed. We need to recognize that God is not passive toward man. He is offended when we trample His laws. Like Israel, we don't think He will do anything later because he hasn't done anything yet. The only thing that wakes people up is the judgment when it comes.