

AMOS

- 1) – Amos prophesied c 750 BC, was a contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah, and influenced Jeremiah. The earliest of the prophetic books, marks the beginning of a unique tradition in the history of religion: prophecies of the end of the existence of God’s people. The tradition continues on through Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Zephaniah, early parts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Then it ends. This had a profound effect on the theology of Israel. But then interest waned until its social justice message was taken up in the 19th and 20th centuries. The reason: both Jewish and Christian interpreters sought messages of comfort and hope in the OT and there is little of that to be found in Amos /// The oracles against the six foreign areas plus Judah and Israel refer to the areas under control of the Assyrian Empire in the 8th century.
- 2) 1:1-2 – The Hebrew word translated here as “shepherd” is “n_q_d,” a word used in only two other times in the OT, and refers to the *owner* of a large flock of sheep. /// Excavations at Hazor reveal an earthquake in 760 BCE. /// V.2 introduces the God of Amos waging holy war against the enemies of justice and compassion. Amos gives us one side of God’s character – the death of Israel at his hands. And Israel heeded Amos’s words and maintained its faith.
- 3) 1:1-5 – Hazael and Ben-had were Syrian kings. Aven: "Valley of Wickedness." Beth-eden. "House of Evil." Or “house of pleasure” (brothel). /// Kir is probably part of Elam, present day Iran. According to 2 Kings 16:19, Tiglath-pileser III did indeed exile the people of Dan to Kir in 732 BCE. /// The “threshing sledges” were wooden sledges with iron teeth dragged over the threshing floor. This is probably a metaphor for the Arameans’ cruel suppression of the whole of Gilead.
- 4) 1:6-8 – There were no massive deportations from these Philistine cities, but perhaps people were taken and sold as slaves by the Assyrians. No record elsewhere of this atrocity, but Amos knew the people would remember it.
- 5) 1:9-10 – The treaty between Solomon and Hiram was in the distant past, so this must have been a more recent one, perhaps even between Tyre (Phoenecia) and Judah.
- 6) 1:11-12 – The “crime” is against Judah, annexation of the southern part of Judean territory. Edomites were descended from Esau, Jacob’s twin brother. (See Obadiah vv. 10-14.)
- 7) 2:1-3 – The “crime” is probably the desecration of a king’s tomb and the burning of his bones. Israel could take no offense here, the offense concerning Moab and Edom, but Amos claims that the God of Israel did.
- 8) 2:6b – “Righteous” is “just man” in the NAB, and translated by Shalom Paul as “innocent.” /// Apparently people were being sold into slavery for not paying their debts. The “pair of sandals” doesn’t seem to be a fit parallel. It may refer to an obscure legal process (see Ruth 4:7-8 and Deut 15:9-10.)
- 9) 2:7b – Probably a slave girl that father and son use, not a temple prostitute.
- 10) 2:8 – Garments taken in pledge from the poor were supposed to be returned before evening because they would usually be the only clothes they had to keep them warm.
- 11) 2:13-16 – Donald Gorman thinks that both the NIV and NRSV lose the force of the verb translated as “press” and “crush.” Since the rest of the verses in this passage are filled with images of flight, he suggests, “I am causing a quaking beneath you as a wagon filled with sheaves quakes.” /// He also thinks that the fleeing enemy is the Israelites.
- 12) 3:6b – This sounds like God causes the disaster. Gowan: “Does evil happen in a city and

Yahweh not act?"

- 13) 3:9-11 – Since the human adversary here is never mentioned, it is likely that the oracles of judgment in this book achieved their final form before the Assyrian threat became obvious.
- 14) 3:12 – According to Exodus 22:13, if a person entrusted with another person's animal claimed it was killed by wild beasts, he had to prove it by showing the owner parts of the animal "rescued," to prove that he hadn't sold it or eaten it. The "remnant of Israel saved" is more a threat than a promise.
- 15) 2:14 – Cutting off the horns would destroy the saving power – see 1 Kings 1:50 and 2:28, where first Adonijah and then Joab flee to the temple to grasp the horns of the altar to save them from Solomon's wrath.
- 16) 4:1-3 – Bashan was noted for its herds of cattle. The NAB inserts "women of the mountain of Samaria" after "Hear this word.." The reference is probably to the titled ladies of Samaria and might not have been derogatory to Amos – see Psalm 22:12, Jeremiah 31:18 and others. The rest of this oracle uses words unfamiliar to modern translators. The "hooks" were probably used to pierce a slave's nose and lead him away. The "baskets" were probably to carry the dead. The location of Harmon is not known.
- 17) 4:4-5 "Gilgal" seems to be used of several places marked by stone circles: Joshua 4:19, 1 Samuel 7:16, etc.
- 18) 5:1-2 – Mourning Israel's death before she died (exile). Intensified by comparing her to a childless young woman who is left unburied in a field, both images shocking in that culture.
- 19) 5:3 – Not a lament, not epigrammatic, out of context. Probably preserved and inserted by a redactor because the vv are short and potent. That only 10% of Israel will survive is a threat.
- 20) 5:5b – Gilgal "going into exile" is a play on words. The Hebrew echoes the sound of "Gilgal," and is simply another word for death.
- 21) 5:7 – Seems to connect with v. 10 and should be moved there, as in the NAB.
- 22) 5:12-13 – As usually rendered, this probably means that it is hopeless to attempt justice in the courts. However, Gowan thinks the word translated as "prudent" can also mean "prosperous." And the "silent" may be the silence of death. So v. 13 can read, "Therefore, the prosperous will be silent in death for it is time for disaster."
- 23) 5:21-27.-- Like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Amos denounced mere ritual and demanded ethical behavior. See also Hosea 6:6, and Matthew 12:7. Gowan points out that it is now accepted that it is the worshipers, not the form of worship, that God believes is wrong. God does not accept the worship of those who shown no interest in justice in their daily lives. /// Sakkuth and Kawain were Canaanite (or Assyrian) idols, raising the question of how early the northern kingdom became acquainted with those cults. The star-god was Saturn. V. 26 remains the most difficult in the book of Amos.
- 24) 6:4-6 – The point is not that the rich are enjoying fine wines and choice meat, but that in their revelry no one thinks serious thoughts nor considers the plight of the poor and needy (the ruin of Joseph). Nowhere in Amos or the OT as asceticism recommended.
- 25) 6:8-11 – V. 8 is another of Amos's shocking statements because "pride of Jacob" is the Promised Land. Vv 9-10 are enigmatic. The burning of the ten bodies may be a reference to the plague because cremation was not common in Israel except for plague. Who is speaking inside is uncertain, perhaps a lone survivor, perhaps one of the two men

- who came to collect the bodies. Whatever, the aim is to create a sense of dread, to imagine a time of suffering so intense that one is afraid to even mention God's name.
- 26) 6:13 – Lodebar (nothing). Karnaim (horns). Probably refers to the taking back of territory east of the Jordan by Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). But Amos holds this up to ridicule as not sufficient to justify the people's feeling as secure as they do.
 - 27) 7:1-6 – These events are visions, not actual happenings – the Lord relents before causing the locust invasion and the fires.
 - 28) 7:7 – the word translated as “plumb bob” is actually an Akkadian word that appears only here in the OT and means “tin.” We do not know what God is actually showing Amos (a wall of tin?).
 - 29) 7:9 – This was a treasonous declaration. Amos was forced out of Israel, presumably back to Judah, or he would have been executed and there is no record of this.
 - 30) 7:14 – Sycamore trees then bore a fig-like fruit which was incised to hasten ripening and to prevent wasps from infesting them.
 - 31) 7:17 – There is no historical evidence or biblical confirmation that any of this ever happened to Jeroboam. These words are not Amos's ill-tempered outburst but traditional language applied to covenant breakers.
 - 32) 8:2b – The Hebrew word for “the end,” as used here, can mean the end of life for Joel as in 6:11, Psalm 39:5, Daniel 8:17, and five others. But it also can mean the end of a people as in Genesis 6:13, Jeremiah 51:13, Lamentations 4:18, Ezekiel 7:2-3,6. This verse is the most extreme statement in Amos. /// “I will never again pass them by” means there will be no more forgiveness.
 - 33) 8:5 – apparently the monthly celebration of the new moon was a day of rest and feasting, and no commerce took place.
 - 34) 8:5c-6 – Meaning unclear. Perhaps the wealthy made loans of grain to the poor, cheating them to make them debt-slaves, and taking their sandals as pledges on the debt.
 - 35) 8:9 – There was a solar eclipse in 763 BCE, ten years before Amos prophesied.
 - 36) 9:1-6 – Uses the same imagery as Psalm 139, but that psalm reassures us that Amos 9:1-14 represents only one special case of God's activity.
 - 37) 9:7 – Referring to the land of Cush, now Ethiopia and Sudan. Not in a derogatory manner, but meaning that even though the Israelites were a chosen people, God's reign extended to the far corners of the earth, even if those nations didn't know him. /// “Philistines from Caphtor (Crete)” – one of nine migrations of “sea peoples” to Palestine in 12th century BCE. Kir is Syria.
 - 38) 9:8 – The “sinful kingdom” is not specifically Israel, but any nation who oppresses its subjects.
 - 39) 9:9 – The word “pebble” occurs in only one other place in the OT – 2 Samuel 17:13, where it means “stone.” If it means that here, Amos is saying *ērô*, not one of the wicked will escape. If it means “grain,” Amos is saying that none of the righteous will be overlooked.
 - 40) 9:11-12 – Almost certainly written by an exilic or post-exilic writer. Prior to the exile almost nothing is written about restoring the house (hut, tent, booth) of David, but is common in exilic materials (see Jeremiah 31:4, 28). The LXX of v. 12 translates edom as adam (humanity) and it is so used by James in Acts 15:16-17. Also translates “conquer” or “possess” (NRSV) and “seek” (NIV), which might reflect an interest in eventual conversion of the Gentiles, and is the way James uses it. /// Quoted by Paul in Acts

15:16-17.

- 41) 9:13-15 – The close similarity to Jeremiah 31:27-28 suggests that the writer of those vv was contemporary with Jeremiah. The people of Amos's time did not need these promises, but those of Jeremiah's did. /// Barley and wheat were harvested in the spring and plowing done in the fall. So v 13a promises that the harvest will be so great that the harvesters will still be working when the plowing starts.