



Amos 5:24

# AMOS

## Background File

Amos told one of his opponents that he was not a prophet but a farmer who raised sheep and tended fig trees (7:10-14). Though he may not have been part of a prophetic guild that served the king, he speaks in the language of a prophet. His arguments are among the most well-constructed of all the prophets, and his elegant use of the Hebrew language is rivaled only by the psalmists. Amos' prophecies date to the first half of the eighth century B.C.E., making him one of the earliest of the prophets whose writings appear in the Bible.

## What's the Story?

According Amos 1:1, Amos was active as a prophet during the time of King Uzziah (783-742 B.C.E.) of the southern kingdom (Judah) and King Jeroboam (786-746 B.C.E.) of the northern kingdom (Israel). Though Amos was from Tekoa, about ten miles south of Jerusalem, he seems to have prophesied mainly at Bethel (7:13), one of the royal sanctuaries of the northern kingdom. It was located about eleven miles north of Jerusalem. Though Amos never mentions the Assyrians by name, he warned that the northern kingdom would be judged on the dark day of the LORD and that the people would be taken into exile beyond Damascus (5:18-27). Amos' prophecies came to pass when the Assyrians defeated Israel and captured its capital, Samaria, in 722 B.C.E. (see 2 Kgs 17:1-6).

Why did Amos bring his message of judgment to the north? Like the other eighth-century prophets, Amos wanted to invite the ten northern tribes (Israel) back into communion with their God (Yahweh) and with their two southern "brothers," Judah and Benjamin. The northern tribes of Israel disrupted the brotherhood that existed under the reign of kings David and Solomon. In 921 B.C.E., after the death of Solomon, the northern tribes worshiped in the wrong places, such as Samaria and Bethel, using rituals regarded as improper by the two southern tribes. While the history of this epic family separation is rich and nuanced, it can be told quite simply.

Judahite interpreters from the southern tribes blamed the north and its leaders for the broken relationship. They pointed to the northerners' rebellious spirit, which was fueled by the polluting influence of Canaanite and Phoenician politics and religious practices. The worship of other gods in addition to Yahweh was a severe offense. Also mentioned frequently was the issue of economic inequality. The mistreatment of the poor and disenfranchised was a key offense. Southerners accused

the northerners of abandoning their shared core value, equality among siblings, based in their equality before God.

The book of Amos can be outlined as follows:

Introduction (1:1-2)

Oracles condemning Judah, Israel, and neighboring nations (1:3-2:16)

Oracles against Israel (3:1-6:14)

Visions of judgment (7:1-9:10)

Vision of a restored kingdom (9:11-15)

## What's the Message?

Amos clearly announces God's concern for justice. Properly observing worship practices, festivals, and sacrifices had little meaning if the people did not treat others with justice and righteousness (5:21-24). Even though the people of the northern kingdom lived in a time that was relatively peaceful and prosperous, they used their wealth for personal comforts, not to help others. Unfair business practices and oppressive taxes that squeezed the poor were common.

Poverty and landlessness were conditions that never should have come to exist in ancient Israel and Judah. The land, a visible sign of God's presence and promise, was a trust from God for the sake of all Israel and Judah. Laws and customs described in Leviticus and Deuteronomy prohibited the accumulation of land and goods in ways that would impoverish a fellow descendant of Abraham and Sarah. Regular land redistribution was a part of the ideal religious landscape.

The message of Amos is a challenge to people and nations caught up in the pursuit of material wealth and comfort. Societies driven by consumerism can lose sight of faithful stewardship of wealth and the just distribution of goods. Amos reminded the people that true faithfulness is trusting in God alone and treating the neighbor with justice.

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**I** The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years<sup>a</sup> before the earthquake.

### Judgment on Israel's Neighbors

<sup>2</sup>And he said:

The LORD roars from Zion,  
and utters his voice from Jerusalem;  
the pastures of the shepherds wither,  
and the top of Carmel dries up.

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<sup>a</sup> Or during two years



#### **1:1 The words of Amos...which he saw concerning Israel:**

These introductory words establish Amos' authority as a prophet or spokesperson for God.



#### **1:1 in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and...King Jeroboam...of Israel:**

These clauses establish the time, two years before the earthquake during the reign of Jeroboam of Israel (786-746 B.C.E.) and the solitary reign of Uzziah of Judah (782-743 B.C.E.). The earthquake may have been the one reported to have happened in 760.



#### **1:2-2:3 The LORD roars from Zion:**

In the first two chapters of Amos, the neighboring nations are condemned to endure