

Amos Chapter One Articles

Amos, a former herdsman from the Southern kingdom (Judah), ministered for about a year (around 750BC) and probably compiled his texts later in life. His name means, “The Lord Upholds.” He was sent to Israel (the northern kingdom) In keeping with authors of his time and area, he didn’t record events in chronological order. Both Israel and Judah were enjoying security and political success, causing the people to discount their need for God and turn to false gods. Their prosperity did not mean that God was blessing them because they were oppressing the poor and their worship was a mere formality. Although the neighboring countries were sinful, God’s major concern was the disobedience of his own people at this time. Outside cultures and religions were affecting their lifestyles and worship. Amos thought the apostasy of the Jews was a terrible affront to God’s sense of holiness and righteousness. He recognized God’s need for judgment and warned the day was coming soon. Amos warned that one form of judgment would be an invasion by the Assyrians.

Most of the Old Testament prophets addressed their words to the southern kingdom of Judah but two prophets, Amos and Hosea, were sent north to Israel. During the time that these two men were calling Israel back to the ways of God, Isaiah and Micah were also engaged in similar work in the southern kingdom. It is probable that Amos would have known Hosea and it is very likely that Isaiah and Micah were aware of the activities of each other. All of them urged the people to return to the Lord and his ways—and each one warned them of judgment to come.

Amos grew up in the southern kingdom; ‘Tekoa was a small town about six miles south of Bethlehem and eleven miles from Jerusalem’.¹ This was a very bleak area—almost a wilderness. He would have had a hard life. He would have only been able to make a living through his industrious determination. He would have needed to have been the kind of person who would not easily hold back when presented with a difficult task.¹

Yahweh roars “from Zion,” i.e., Jerusalem. In the time of David Yahweh had chosen Zion as the place of his altar. That altar was the place of both wrath (death) and mercy (atonement). Amos’ opening words were a rebuke to the northern tribes who had broken away from the God-ordained center of worship in Jerusalem.²

The individual oracles have similar structures. First they each begin with a declaration of divine hostility. “For three transgressions, yes for four, I will not reverse it.” This so-called X + 1 formula appears several times in the book of Proverbs (e.g., 30:15). The idiom is intended to produce a cumulative effect – judgment. Second, God declares that he will not “reverse”¹ that sentence of judgment. The warning roar would not be canceled. Third, Amos sets forth the reason for divine hostility against the nation. In fourth place stands a stereotyped announcement of the sending of fire against the place. Finally, the oracles speak of the removal of the king and the captivity of the people of each nation.³

¹ NIV Study Bible, Hodder and Stoughton, 1987, p. 1324.

¹ Bentley, M. (2006). *Opening up Amos* (pp. 12–13). Leominster: Day One Publications.

^{2 3} Smith, J. E. (1994). *The Minor Prophets* (Am 1:2). Joplin, MO: College Press.