

## The Message of the Minor Prophets The Message of Amos

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

### Historical context

Amos 1:1 provides the Who? When? Where? information about his prophecy. I'm reading from the ESV:

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

Amos was a herdsman and sycamore-fig tree dresser (7:14) of Tekoa, some 20 miles south of Jerusalem.

The LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel' (7:15).

Amos prophesied sometime from about 750 B.C., when Uzziah (767-740 B.C.) was king of Judah and Jeroboam II (782-753 B.C.) was king of Israel, a period of prosperity for both kingdoms (see 2 Chron. 26 & 2 Kings 14:25). Amos preached in Bethel, the religious centre of the northern kingdom of the ten tribes, two years before the earthquake, the date for which is unknown. His prophecy is about the coming judgement on Israel by God, which occurred at the Assyrian deportation in about 722 B.C. Hence, his name appropriately means "Burden" or "Burden-Bearer."

### Structure of Amos

The book of Amos can be divided into four main sections:

1. Chs. 1-2, God's judgements announced.
2. Chs. 3-6, God's discourses against Israel.
3. 7:1 – 9:10, Visions concerning Israel
4. 9:11- 9:15, Israel's future restoration.

### 1. Chs. 1-2, God's judgements

Amos started his warnings in a stark way by announcing God's intentions to judge:

He said: "The LORD roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers" (1:2).

God is the King of Israel and so when,

The lion has roared; who will not fear? (3:8a).

Amos gave eight short denunciations using the repeated formula, “Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of...., and for four, I will not revoke the punishment because...” First, He would punish the five neighbouring nations that surrounded Israel: Damascus (1:3-5); Gaza (1:6-8); Tyre (1:9-10); Edom (1:11-15); and Moab (2:1-3). But including Judah, who, because they were His people, were the guiltiest:

For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept His statutes, but their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked. So I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem (2:4-5).

This judgment was meted out on Judah at their captivity by, and exile to, Babylon, a century and a half later.

Finally, Amos focused on Israel, who had become both spiritually and morally utterly corrupt, guilty of: exploiting and enslaving the poor; profaning God’s name by sexual immorality in their religious practices, like the Amorites who formerly possessed Canaan; making the Nazarites break their oaths by drinking wine; and forbidding God’s prophets to prophesy.

Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down. Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life; he who handles the bow shall not stand, and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself, nor shall he who rides the horse save his life; and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, declares the LORD (2:13-16).

## **2. Chs. 3-6, God’s discourses against Israel**

Amos made three major announcements about Israel’s judgment. Each begins with a call to the nation: “Hear this word” (3:1; 4:1 & 5:1). In each Israel is:

1. Clearly shown its guilt as measured by the same spiritual plumbline.
2. Severely rebuked.
3. Warned of the dire consequences of not heeding the message.

Historically, Israel, before the northern and southern kingdoms divided, had a unique relationship with God, which carried with it special responsibilities. He chose, redeemed, and delivered them from Egypt to become His peculiar possession. God included both kingdoms in Amos’ first declaration:

Hear O people of Israel, the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (3:1-2).

### **First announcement, The Lord God has spoken**

In the first announcement, ch. 3, Amos asked some rhetorical questions in which each cause has a corresponding effect. Amos said that likewise when the Lord God speaks, the prophets were obliged to prophesy (v. 8b).

The Lord GOD does nothing without [first] revealing his secret to...his... prophets (3:7).

Amos spoke differently to the former prophets. Amos' messages were forewarnings. Time and time again he declared: "Thus says the LORD." God would withdraw His presence from Israel because of "the great tumults within her, and the oppressed in her midst" (3:9). His case against them was:

"They do not know how to do right," declares the LORD, "those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds" (3:10).

In 3:11, God foretold their punishment: the guilty nation would be invaded and overrun by a foreign power. (We learn from 2 Kings 15-17 that this was the Assyrian power, which destroyed the northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. Ch. 3:12 indicated that the northern kingdom would be absolutely devastated and only a tiny remnant would survive. But this first judgment ended with a special call:

"Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob, declares the Lord GOD, the God of hosts" (3:12).

God would cause the Assyrian invader to destroy the altars of Bethel, where Israel worshipped the golden calf idol set up by their first king, Jeroboam (see 1 Kings 12:25-33). God will not share His glory with a rival and declared that these altars would be razed in the invasion "on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground" (3:14). Israel's luxuriant materialism would also disappear (3:15).

### **Second Announcement, Prepare to meet your God**

The second announcement, in ch. 4, is directed at Israel's rich, but morally corrupt, high society women. They oppressed and crushed the poor in order to maintain their indulgent lifestyles. In 4:2-3, Amos warned them that they'd be led away prisoners by the Assyrians.

In 4:4-5, Israel is sarcastically invited to continue to sin at the idolatrous centres: Bethel, Dan and Gilgal. (4:6-13) for God had already chastised them for these things. In their recent history they'd experienced: scarcity and famine; drought; sicknesses from pestilence; warfare and judgment - all designed to awaken them to spiritual repentance. Israel's depravity went hand-in-hand with its idolatry. Israel was morally what they idolised. But the outcome of these five incidents was the same - each time God said: "Yet you did not return to Me" (4:6, 8, 9, 10 & 11).

Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel! For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth – the LORD, the God of hosts, is His name! (4:12-13).

### **Third Announcement**

The third announcement contains three overtures of grace.

#### **First, Seek Me and live**

In 5:1-2, Amos lamented the demise of Israel, who, portrayed as a virgin, was supposed to be wholly for Jehovah. Soon she would be: forsaken by the Lord; dispossessed of her land; and die as a nation. In this funeral dirge, Amos saw no hope for her citizens - only ten percent would remain alive! If idol worship, with its accompanying social injustices, continued at Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba, the nation would abruptly disappear in disaster. However, the Assyrian invasion could be averted if they repented so Amos continued with a second message of grace:

Thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek Me and live" (5:4).

## Second, Seek the LORD and live

Seek the LORD and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel, O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth! (5:4, 6-7).

Again, they were reminded who the Lord is:

He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD is His name (5:8).

But, if they didn't heed this final invitation, He wouldn't hesitate with punishment, He: "who makes destruction flash forth against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress" (5:9).

### The third overture, Seek good, and not evil, that you may live

Alas, the Lord knew that sinning Israel hated any godly person who reproved them. Yet again Amos stated that the only way of escape was for them to repent of their many transgressions of: affliction and oppression of the poor; bribery and corruption; and their arrogant presumption that they could continue in these ways to fuel their lifestyles of ease whilst ignoring the truth.

Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph (5:14-15).

This third announcement finished with the reminder again that without repentance, the judgment would definitely come – the Lord would "pass through" them in the same way that He passed through Egypt, when the Egyptian firstborn perished (see Exodus 11:1-12:28). Except this time, it would be in Israel where there would be weeping and wailing (5:16-17), which Amos pronounces as three woes.

### The First Woe

Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light (5:18).

The Israelites thought that the day of the Lord would only involve God's intervention on their behalf to deliver them from their enemies. Amos told them that this was a misconception. Rather it would be "as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?" (5:19-20). God knew their religion was fake and their response to Him was at best only an outward show of worship:

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen (5:21-23).

God wanted them to practise a pure religion: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5:24). Moreover, He knew the nation had always been unfaithful to Him, even under Moses' leadership. Whilst journeying through the wilderness, they worshipped Jehovah by the sacrifices and offerings required by His Law, but they also secretly carried with them the god Moloch and other idols (5:25-26). Because of this longstanding blatant deceit they would be sent far away into exile, beyond Damascus in Syria, by the command of "the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts" (5:27).

### **The Second Woe**

Amos' second woe was directed at the self-confidence of the rich ruling class to awaken them from their complacency:

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes! (6:1).

Amos preached when Israel had become militarily strong and very wealthy under King Jeroboam II. Success and security had seduced them to "put far away the day of disaster" (6:3); and they became indifferent to the impending "ruin of Joseph" (6:6). Life for them was all about pleasure and leisure.

### **The Third Woe**

Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! (6:4-6).

Amos advised all such in Israel to consider their position relative to Calneh, Hamath and the Philistines, whom the Assyrians had already conquered. Amos warned they would suffer the same fate (6:2). As the rich always had been indulgent, God would make them the first to experience the horrors of the invasion and at the same time, their revelry would cease (6:7):

The Lord GOD has sworn by himself, declares the LORD, the God of hosts: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it" (6:8).

The Assyrian invasion would be accompanied by serious diseases and only a few Israelites would survive (6:9-10). Then the entire nation would be taken into captivity. There would be widespread plunder, slaughter, destruction, and affliction. Not only so, but by then judgement would be unavoidable, even if they attempted a hasty return to Jehovah (6:10). Escape would be as impossible as it is for horses to run up a rocky cliff, or for oxen to plough there! Israel had "turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood" (6:12). They also rejoiced in their worthless idols and boasted in the military strength of their armies, saying: "Have we not by our own strength captured Karnaim for ourselves?" (6:13). But Amos declared they'd be overrun by the Assyrian, who'd conquer the whole land of original Israel established during King David's conquests (6:14).

### **3. Chs. 7:1 – 9:10, Warning Visions concerning Israel**

In 7:1-6, Israel's imminent judgment was momentarily averted by Amos' intercession. In vv. 1-2, he saw a plague of devouring locusts, and then the land being consumed by fire (vv. 4-6). He

prevented both judgements by crying out in prayer to the Lord. However, the Lord's judgment was finally determined by use of His plumb line.

### **Vision of the LORD with His plumb line**

The Lord said, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword" (7:8-9).

This prophecy showed that God had assessed Israel's many sins by His righteous standards. This prophecy also caused Amaziah, priest of Bethel, where King Jeroboam I had set up gold bull idols to mimic the true worship of Jehovah (see 1 Kings 12:28-33) to command Amos to go back to Judah (7:10-11). But Amos replied:

The LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. '...Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land' (7:15-16, 17).

[This came to pass in 722 B.C., when Israel was invaded /overrun /exiled by Shalmaneser, the Assyrian \(see 2 Kings 17\).](#)

### **Four Messages**

So Amos' vision in 8:1-14, showed that judgment was inevitable. First, by an initial vision (vv. 1-2) which was developed into four messages beginning, "In that day" (vv. 3, 9, 13) and "The days are coming" (v. 11).

### **Next, The Vision of the basket of over ripe fruit**

As fruit comes to the stage when it must be harvested, so Israel had ripened itself for judgement (8:1-2):

The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them. ...Surely I will never forget any of their deeds (vv. 2, 7).

In 8:4-6, Israel's sinful deeds were repeated: lack of social care; greed - money-making and slave-trading the poor, activities being regarded as more important than holding non-working religious feast days and Sabbaths; false weights and measures; even fraudulent amounts of sweepings/chaff being added to wheat supplies!

When Israel's day of judgment came, wailing over the many corpses would replace singing in the temple (v. 3); and physical darkness would replace sunlight at noontide (v. 9). The judgement would be so severe that festive rejoicing would be turned into bitter mourning as for an only son (v. 10). Israel was to be afflicted with a spiritual famine -they would not hear the word of the LORD, even if they searched the length and breadth of the land for it (v. 13-14). This would result in their youth being deprived of spiritual guidance. But positively, from God's point of view, Israel's idolatry was to be terminated (v. 14).

### **The inescapable Judgement: The Vision of the LORD at the altar in Bethel**

The message of the vision of the LORD at the altar in Bethel in 9:2-10, was that no one could escape God's judgement, neither by fleeing nor by going into exile nor by hiding on the top of Mount Carmel. Not even if they tried digging into Sheol or climbing up to heaven!

Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground, except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, declares the LORD. "For behold, I will command, and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble shall fall to the earth. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, 'Disaster shall not overtake or meet us'" (vv. 8-10).

#### **4. Chs. 9:11- 9:15, Israel's future restoration.**

In 9:11-15, Amos abruptly finishes his book by prophesying about Israel's future, their full restoration. He states that "in that [future] day", David's throne will be restored, and the two kingdoms permanently reunited to be one nation who will rule the entire world (v.11-12). In Christ's Millennial reign, there will be a super-abundance of agricultural blessings.

I will restore the [captivity] of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them, "says the LORD your God" (ch.9 vv.14-15).

#### **Some Reflections on the Message of Amos**

Have you seen a Gospel preacher carrying a placard "Prepare to meet your God" and thought: "That's a rather stark and scary message"? But we have seen that Amos finished his second announcement with this very message in 4:12-13. I recently heard a preacher in my city centre giving such a message of judgement to come, but passers-by paid little attention. That's exactly the response Israel gave to Amos' preachings despite his question to them in 3:8a, "The lion has roared; who will not fear?"

The sober fact is that every person will have a personal interview with God, our Creator and righteous Judge,

"For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:11-12).

But He is always gracious and forewarns men of the errors of their ways to give them ample opportunity to repent and return to Him for forgiveness and blessing. But eternal judgment awaits those who refuse!

Finally, is twenty-first century Christendom any better than Israel in Amos' time:

For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us [Christians], what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:17).

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on the Message of Amos, talk number T1443, in the series Messages of the Minor Prophets.

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