

AMOS

1:1-1:10

Prophet to the Northern Kingdom

In the short span of time between the ministries of Elisha and Amos (about thirty to forty years) the world witnessed significant changes! Even though the ever-present menace of Assyria had been subdued a few years earlier when the prophet Jonah was sent to Nineveh, *the capital city of Assyria*, to preach repentance and *Nineveh repented* (Jonah 3:10); the re-emergence of Assyria as a super power would eventually change everything for Israel and Judah. These two small nations which stood along the caravan routes to Egypt were natural targets for warlike Assyria. About 100 years before Amos' time Assyria had already attempted to crush the nation of Syria, Samaria's northern neighbor (856-854 B.C.). (Refer to Map 2 for locations.) But this invasion ultimately failed. This permitted King Jeroboam II to extend his borders and build up a lucrative trade that created a powerful merchant class in Samaria (2 Kings 14:23-25). The population began to shift from farms to cities and towns. Class distinctions crystallized, with the rich piling up profits at the expense of their poorer brothers. In spite of the political and economic security under Jeroboam II the financial success led to a collapse in moral standards and brought about widespread corruption. The Jews desperately needed to get right with God because they had no other defense against this ominous northern power.

The national religion during the early Minor Prophets was a corruption of the faith God initiated with Abraham, Moses and David. Jeroboam I, founder of the northern kingdom, reigned from 930-909 B.C. He built idolatrous shrines in Dan and Bethel that were served by an apostate priesthood. The purpose of these shrines was to keep the northern kingdom from returning to Jerusalem to worship (1 Kings 12:26-27). Jeroboam's cult became deeply entrenched among the ten tribes of the northern kingdom and the worship of a golden calf was generously supported by him (1 Kings 12:26-33). Jeroboam II reigned 41 years from 793-753 B.C. He carried on the traditions of his many predecessors and continued to perpetuate the sins of idolatry and corruption. To such a society Amos was sent during the reign of King Jeroboam II. The date was around 760 B.C.

Open Your Heart: "O Lord, make my heart tender to Your Word, to Your voice—Your Spirit, to the sins in my life that need to be addressed. I ask You to prune me that I may bear much fruit."

Getting Started

Locate Amos, Jonah, Elisha and other contemporaries of Amos on the Timeline.

Review your own observations about the book of Amos from the Overview lesson.

Carefully **read** Amos 1:1 and 7:14-15. **Locate** Tekoa on Map 2 and note which kingdom Amos resided in.

1. What helpful insights does Amos supply about himself and the times in which he prophesied from the passages above? Also reflect on Zechariah 14:5; I Corinthians 1:26-29.

When you climb the hill of Tekoa and, looking east—see those fifteen miles of chaos sinking to a stretch of the Dead Sea—you begin to understand the influence of the desert on Jewish imagination and literature. It gave the ancient natives of Judea, as it gives the visitor of today, the sense of living next door to doom; the sense of how narrow is the border between life and death; the awe of the power of God, who can make contiguous regions so opposite in character. The desert is always in the face of the prophets, and its howling of beasts and dry sand blow mournfully across their pages the foreboding of doom.
(From *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 1894)

Prayerfully read through the entire book of Amos from your favorite translation. Try to imagine that you are one of the first recipients of his message.

2. Like any literary work there is a particular structure to the way Amos lays out his prophecy. The book falls naturally into three sections. After you complete your reading of Amos give a title to each section below.

1:1-2:16

3:1-6:14

7:1-9:15

Meet the “Roaring One”

In contemporary America we don't often hear the LORD referred to as “the Roaring One.” We would much prefer to hear about His love, mercy and grace. Yet any true relationship with God must begin with the recognition that the holiness of God is foundational to His entire working with us, as it was with Israel. God's holy character also carries with it the obligation to respond justly and fairly to sinful behavior. When we continually ignore God and our sinful ways, whether it be personally or corporately (i.e., group, organization or nation), we can be certain that in due time God's justice will prevail!

Before Amos launched into his declaration upon the cities and nations, he opened with the commanding words: “*The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem*” (1:2a). (NIV)

3.
 - a. To a shepherd, the roar of a lion means it is about to pounce on its prey. Expand on this meaning as it pertains to the context in Amos chapters one and two.

 - b. What did the *roar* of God's voice produce (1:2b)? Note: Mount Carmel is a prominent large hill from which constant streams of water often flowed. From such mountain streams the prophet Elijah was sustained through three and a half years of drought.

 - c. Do you find any significance in the *location* from which the *thunderous* voice of God came? (Recall the longtime rivalry between Israel and Judah.)

*In Amos 1:3-2:16 the voice of God now pierces the silence and “roars” out justice through His servant Amos, declaring judgment against the wickedness of men and nations. First of all He cries out with great ferocity against the neighboring nations that had no blood ties with the Hebrew people: Damascus, Gaza and Tyre. Thoughtfully **reread** Amos 1:3-10. Note: The expression “For three sins . . . even for four” means the measure of iniquity is full and wrath cannot be turned away.*

4. For each nation or city below describe the grievous sin that God condemns and the dreadful judgment that is to befall them. **Locate** cities and nations on map 2.
 - a. **Damascus/Aram** (verses 3-5)—capital city of Syria; Hazael and Ben-Hadad were Syrian leaders. This event was foretold by Elisha in 2 Kings 8:12; also see 2 Kings 10:32-33 and 13:3-7 for added insight.

This prophecy was fulfilled through the Assyrian conqueror Tiglathpileser whose policy was to uproot conquered peoples and deport them to prevent future uprisings.

- b. **Gaza/Philistines** (verses 6-8)—Gaza was strongly fortified, the first important town on the trade route out of Egypt toward Tyre and Sidon. 2 Chronicles 21:16-17 records such a raid. **Locate** the other Philistine cities mentioned on Map 2.

God’s just verdict was the decimation of the Philistine population who were conquered by Babylon from 605-562 B.C. and their kings carried captive to Babylon.

- c. **Tyre** (verses 9-10)—One of the most powerful city-states in the ancient world. On the whole, relations between Tyre and Israel had been friendly from the days of David. (See 1 Kings 5:1.)

Tyre fell to Alexander the Great in 332-330 B.C. after he laid siege to it for seven months. Six thousand people were slain; 2,000 were crucified and 30,000 were sold as slaves.

Note: The fire mentioned in Amos 1:4, 7, 12, 14 and 2:2 is best understood as a metaphorical representation of God's judgment. Try to visualize the scene we just witnessed (1:3-10): Amos, the lowly shepherd—thundering out God's message in the capital city of Samaria or possibly at Bethel, to an upper-middle-class group of people who had come to worship. Before charging them with their own sins, he told them of the punishment God would pour out on the sins of the enemy nations around Israel.

5. How do you think his listeners might have reacted to God's punishment of their enemies?

6. Consider Amos' strategy. What do you notice about the order in which he lists the nations? Using Map 2 trace the nations as listed in Amos 1:3-2:16. What do you discover?

7. Do you think it is characteristic of human nature to assume that judgment will always fall on someone else? Explain.

8. Think back to some occasion or period in your life when you were faced with a dreadful incident which you consider may have been the Lord warning you to mend your ways. What did you learn from that experience? How has your thinking and behavior changed as a result?

Note: Chapters one and two of Amos are a unit and best studied as one prophetic message. Due to time constraints we will look at the remaining portion of Amos' initial prophecy next week.

9. From Amos' opening prophecies in 1:1-10 what did you discover about God and the nations? How might these insights affect your perspective of world events today?

Store in your heart: Amos 1:2

MAP 2

