

AMOS: *Prepare to Meet Thy God*

"Burden-Bearer"

A*mos* carried a tremendous burden.

AUTHOR: The book takes its name from its author. His name signifies "burden," or "burden-bearer."

George L. Robinson writes: "Stern, fearless, self-contained, a man of granite make, he possessed, a powerful well-knit mind and a vivid imagination, and is one of the most arresting figures ever on the stage of Hebrew history."

Amos lived at Tekoa which was a small village about twelve miles in the hills south of Jerusalem. It was located "on the edge of the desert that breaks down toward the Dead Sea. A more desolate place is hard to imagine. The soil around the little town itself was and is very scant and shallow. It was and is a hard place to secure a livelihood." Amos was a herdsman, and he supplemented his income by dressing an almost worthless fruit produced by sycamore trees. Robinson says the vegetation in the area was evidently not very luxuriant, and he probably had very few sheep. "He raised a peculiar breed of stunted, fine-wooled sheep, a breed small in size, and ugly in appearance, but highly esteemed on account of their wool."

DATE: Amos dates the exact year of his call as "two years before the earthquake." It was a "shock" that would be remembered two and a half centuries later (Zech. 14:5). Some interpreters suppose that a solar eclipse might have accompanied the earthquake (8:9), and astronomers tell us that there was such an event on June 15, 763 B.C. If so, the preaching of Amos of Tekoa at Bethel was somewhere around 760–750 B.C. Amos is the first of the writing prophets. He is the older contemporary of Hosea and Micah.

The Biblical accounts of Uzziah and Jeroboam II are found in II Kings 14:17-15:7 and II Chronicles 26.

PURPOSE: Amos writes to warn the northern kingdom of Israel to return to the Lord or be judged. The Lord God is a righteous God who demands allegiance from His followers. At the same time He is a merciful God who is willing to forgive and restore them. It is an urgent call to repentance.

KEY VERSE: 4:12

OCCASION: Amos is a simple peasant whose life is marked by many hardships. He travels to the Northern Kingdom to sell his wool and sees the evil at the heart of the nation. The evil arouses his righteous indignation. He sees the insincerity of the religious leaders, the righteous were hated, immorality was prevalent, and superstition prevailed.

Prosperity had dulled the hearts of God's people.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel prospered under Jeroboam II. It was the golden age of Israel. Both Uzziah and Jeroboam II brought political and economic stability and prosperity to their respective kingdoms. Territorial borders were expanded through successful military conquest against foreign foes. Israel and Judah managed a peaceful coexistence at this time, and commercial enterprise and agricultural production flourished.

However, the prophets looked beyond the facade of the golden age and saw the dry rot of social and moral

decay in both kingdoms. In real life both nations were ripe for the judgment of God (Amos 8:1-2; cf. 3:9-15).

"Outwardly the kingdom was at the zenith of power but inwardly it was idolatrous and corrupt (II Kings 14:24–25). Material prosperity and social evils further characterized the times (2:6–8; 3:10; 4:1; 5:10–12; 8:4–6)" (Ryrie). Uzziah was the king of Judah at a time of prosperity. These were good times economically. Israel was "on a roll." Commerce was flourishing, building was booming, and the military was enjoying the spoils of victory. However, prosperity had dulled the hearts of God's people.

THEME: "Prepare to meet thy God" is the theme. The basic message to Jeroboam II and Israel was "the end has come for my people" (8:2). The LORD will speak in judgment and the of uttering His voice will be devastation in Israel. Actually two themes run though the book: the impending judgment if Israel does not repent (1:20), and a messianic theme summarized (9:5). The time will come when God will build up the fallen booth of David. The prophet looks to the future and sees the work of the Messiah (cf. Acts 15:15ff). A near fulfillment would be Israel's return to the land from captivity; the distinct fulfillment would be a kingdom without end. The eternal reign of Christ is in view.

STYLE: Amos' writing has been described as "pure, classical, vivid, rhetorical, grave, original, picturesque, simple, striking, rustic, bold, lyrical, rhythmical" (B. O. Herring, *Studies in the Prophets*). There are elements of repetition, questions and exclamations. "His sentences are short and uninvolved, and are always regular, well-balanced, and flowing." He was "rude in speech, but not in knowledge." Robinson says, "The best writing is an unaffected transcript of the best speaking." C. C. Ryrie notes, Amos' "writing shows that he was a man of affairs, not an untutored rustic."

It is impossible to ascertain whether Amos dictated his revelations to a scribe or composed them himself. It is easier to assume he committed his revelations to writing upon returning to Tekoa from his preaching tour to Israel. His writing is full of first person accounts of his messages and visions (5:1; 7:1-9; 8:1; 9:1).

Title: Introduction to Amos

Series: A Look at the Book

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