



Amos - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

Amos announces himself as a shepherd living in the time of King Jeroboam and King Uzziah. He receives the Word of God against the northern kingdom of Israel and the surrounding nations who oppose God's people. In this chapter there are specific prophecies against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom and the Ammonites. All have committed sin upon sin and will be judged accordingly.

I Amos 1:1 - Superscription

The first verse identifies the book's speaker, audience, and time frame. Amos addresses Israel during the time covered in 2 Kings 14:23-15:7, which is the period between the accession of Jeroboam II (796 BC) and the death of Uzziah (739 BC); more specifically, it is two years before the earthquake. Zechariah, like Amos, mentions an <<earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah>> (Zechariah 14:5b). At the site of Hazor in the 8th Century BC, archæologists uncovered walls that were tilted (Stratum VI), perhaps pointing to this very earthquake. However, even if it is uncertain when this particular event took place, this statement is significant because it makes unmistakable the genuine historicity of the book and its message.

Shepherds were at or near the bottom of the social order, which underscores the irony of God's choice of Amos to prophesy against Israel's wealthy, apostate leaders. Amos lived in Tekoa, a small village southeast of Bethlehem in Judah.

¹ 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 before the earthquake.

Amos 1:1

The words of Amos. This book of the prophet Amos is the only mention of this man in the OT. The Books of 1 and 2 Kings or 1 and 2 Chronicles do not mention this prophet, and he should not be confused with Amoz, the father of Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 1:1). The name Amos means burden or burden bearer. Since most of the prophecies of Amos concern coming judgement on either the nations surrounding Israel or judgement on Israel itself, he was a man with a burden.

Who was among the shepherds of Tekoa. It seems that Amos had no formal theological or prophetic training, although there was a ‘school of the prophets’ known as the sons of the prophets at that time; refer to 1 Kings 20:35, 2 Kings 2:3-15, 2 Kings 4:1 and 4:38. Amos was a simple man, a farmer, who had been uniquely called to ministry. Amos spoke of his background and calling: *<<I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, “Go, prophesy to my people Israel”>>* (Amos 7:14b-15). Amos uses an unusual word to describe his occupation. Instead of calling himself a shepherd, the literal ancient Hebrew calls Amos a ‘sheep breeder’ leading some commentators to believe he was a wealthy businessman. However, Amos probably chose this title to emphasise the fact that he really was a shepherd, and that he did not mean shepherd in a symbolic, spiritual sense. The way God used Amos is a reminder of the way he used the twelve disciples of Jesus - common, workingmen used to do great things for God. Amos was from Tekoa, a city about ten miles from Jerusalem. It seems that he delivered his prophetic message at Bethel: *<<but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom>>* (Amos 7:13), one of the southernmost cities of Israel, not very far from Tekoa.

The bible contains a story of a wise woman from Tekoa who made up a story about her own son in order to bring about reconciliation between King David and his favourite son Absalom; refer to 1 Samuel 14:1-24.

Which he saw concerning Israel. Amos was primarily a prophet to Israel, although he did speak to many nations. He served in the days of the divided monarchy, i.e. **in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel.** Most researchers date the ministry of Amos somewhere between 767-753 BC, when the reigns of the two kings overlapped. Amos was a contemporary of the prophet Hosea: *<<The word of the Lord that came to Hosea son of Beeri, in the days of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel>>* (Hosea 1:1).

When Amos served as a prophet, the people of God had been divided into two nations for more than 150 years. The southern nation was known as Judah, and the northern nation was still known as Israel. Through the period of the divided monarchy Judah saw a succession of kings, some godly and some ungodly; Uzziah was one of the better kings of Judah. The northern nation of Israel saw

nothing but a succession of wicked kings. Jeroboam the son of Joash was one of the better kings among these wicked men, especially in a political and military sense, but he was still an ungodly man (2 Kings 14:23-29). For most of its history, the northern kingdom of Israel struggled against Syria, her neighbour to the north. However, around the year 800 BC, the mighty Assyrian Empire defeated Syria, and neutralised this power that hindered Israel's expansion and prosperity. With Syria in check, Israel enjoyed great prosperity during the reign of Jeroboam II.

Two years before the earthquake. There is no independent record of this earthquake, so this phrase is no help in dating the prophecy more accurately. However, as mentioned above, there is historical confirmation as Zechariah also made mention to this same earthquake.

II Amos 1:2-6:14 - Oracles of Judgement

Amos delivers a series of messages from God showing that no one can escape the consequences of their actions, neither Israel's neighbours (1:2-2:5) nor Israel itself (2:6-6:14).

II.a Amos 1:2-2:3 - Judgement on Israel's Neighbours

At this time the south-eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, now called Palestine, was inhabited by seven other small nations besides Israel. All of them were in danger because of Assyria's push towards Egypt. However, Amos showed that what was about to befall them would not come from Assyria but from the Creator of all the earth who had revealed himself to Israel in particular. The culpability of these nations demonstrates the biblical principle that one is accountable for what one knows. Thus the first six were judged for sins of common cruelty and brutality, while Judah was judged for failure to keep the Torah - God's covenant instruction. These judgements by God on Israel's Gentile neighbours are similar to pronouncements of judgement on various non-Jewish nations in the writings of other prophets. They are a reminder that God's moral standards as revealed in the Bible are not merely for Jewish people, or for Jews and Christians in the NT period, but that God holds all people and all nations and cultures accountable to his moral standards, whether they have them in written form or simply in their hearts and consciences; refer also to Romans 1:18-32 and 2:14-15.

² 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.

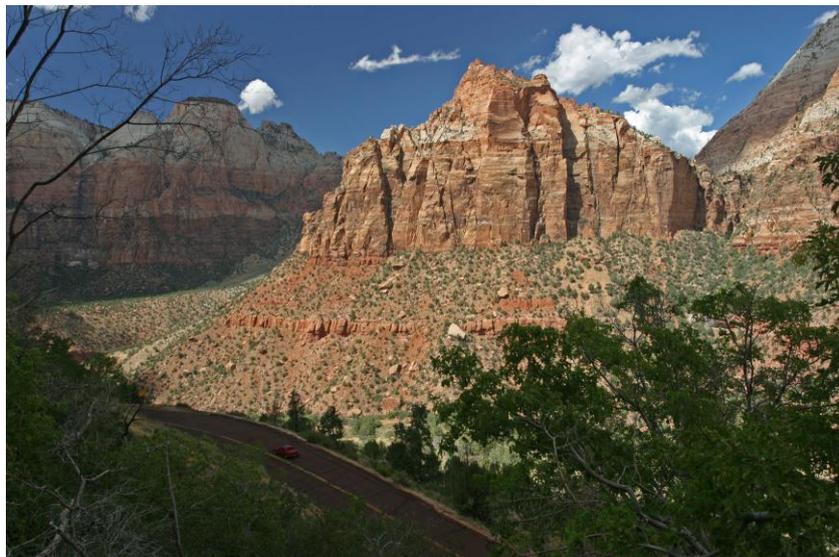
Amos 1:2

The Lord roars from Zion. Amos brings a message of judgement. The first two chapters of Amos describe the judgement of the Lord, first against Gentile nations then against Judah and Israel: <<*The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters*>> (Psalm 29:3), <<*The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel*>> (Joel 3:16), and: <<*Father, glorify your name.*' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine'>> (John 12:28-30).

And utters his voice from Jerusalem. Israel, in direct disobedience to God, established rival centres of worship in Dan, Bethel, and Gilgal. When Amos says that the Lord speaks from Jerusalem, he reminds all of Israel where the centre of true worship is. Despite Israel's rejection of Jerusalem as the only appropriate place of worship, that was still the place from which God's voice of judgement issued to all the earth.

Since Amos was a shepherd himself he knew how the judgement of God could affect the land. If God withheld rain, sent plagues, or allowed conquering armies to come upon the land, it made the pastures of the shepherds wither.

Carmel is perhaps an allusion to the encounter between the Lord and Baal, when the Lord struck the top of Mount Carmel with fire, demonstrating that he alone is the true God. Carmel was a prominent mountain in the north of Israel, the site of Elijah's dramatic confrontation with the prophets of Baal; refer to 1 Kings 18:19-40. Since Elijah served before the time of Amos, it may be that Amos is reminding Israel of this victory of the Lord God over idolatry.



Mount Carmel

3 Thus says the Lord:
For three transgressions of Damascus,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
because they have threshed Gilead
with threshing-sledges of iron.

Amos 1:3

For three transgressions of Damascus. Syria was both a major partner with and a rival of Israel in the affairs of the region. It was located north and east of the Sea of Galilee. Damascus was the capital and was a major trading city.



Damascus by 17th Century Dutch Physician Olfert Dapper

For three transgressions and for four. This poetic expression is used to introduce the judgement upon all seven of the neighbouring nations and upon Israel as well in Amos 2:6. It is a way of expressing totality: three expresses the plural in Hebrew, and by raising it to four the idea of multiplicity is conveyed. It does not mean that Damascus only committed three sins, and then God thought of a fourth;

it simply has the idea of 'sin upon sin upon sin.' The idea is conveyed in: <<**Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand**>> (Proverbs 30:18), and: <<**Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up**>> (Proverbs 30:21).

Gilead was on the east side of the Jordan River where the tribe of Gad resided. Syria sought to control that area in part because the highway leading south to the Red Sea and its lucrative trade with Sheba went through it.

Threshing sledges of iron. One way of separating grain kernels from their hulls was to put all the grain in a pile and then have an ox pull a heavy wooden sledge around on the pile. Amos says Syria has treated the people of Gilead as though they were nothing but a pile of grain, crushing them into the ground. God will judge Damascus and the Syrians for coming against the land of God's people, and coming with such complete destruction that it is as if a deep plough had been run through the land.

4 So I will send a fire on the house of Hazael,
and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad.

Amos 1:4

Ben-hadad, the son of **Hazael**, was the king of Syria during the first years of the 8th Century BC: <<**When King Hazael of Aram died, his son Ben-hadad succeeded him**>> (2 Kings 13:24).

Fire is the judgement meted out on all seven neighbouring nations; refer to Deuteronomy 4:24 and 9:3; and Isaiah 29:6, 30:27-30, and 33:14. Against the fire of God not even the most powerful of human strongholds can endure.

5 I will break the gate-bars of Damascus,
and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven,
and the one who holds the sceptre from Beth-eden;
and the people of Aram shall go into exile to Kir,
says the Lord.

Amos 1:5

I will break the gate-bars of Damascus. The wooden city gates were fastened shut with a heavy wooden bar across them. If that bar were broken, the city could be entered by an invading army.

The Valley of Aven and **Beth-eden** were regions in Syria. **Kir** is identified in Amos 9:7 as the ancestral home of the Syrians. It is conjectured to be somewhere to the

northeast of Mesopotamia. Thus they were being sent back to where they started, with nothing to show for the intervening years. In 2 Kings 16:9 this is where the Assyrians exiled the people of Damascus.

⁶ Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of Gaza,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
because they carried into exile entire communities,
to hand them over to Edom.

⁷ So I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza,
fire that shall devour its strongholds.

⁸ I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod,
and the one who holds the sceptre from Ashkelon;
I will turn my hand against Ekron,
and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish,
says the Lord God.

Amos 1:6-8

Four of the five cities of the Philistines are named in this judgement oracle, Gath is the one not mentioned. This is because there never was a single enduring capital city of Philistia. Rule of the region went back and forth among the five cities depending on which city's ruler happened to be strongest at the time. Philistia was located southwest of Jerusalem on the Mediterranean coast.

They carried into exile entire communities, to hand them over to Edom. It is not known precisely what event this refers to. It may be a prediction of events at the time of the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 BC, when Edom was actively assisting the Babylonians in subduing Judah: *<<But you should not have gloated over your brother on the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah on the day of their ruin; you should not have boasted on the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of my people on the day of their calamity; you should not have joined in the gloating over Judah's disaster on the day of his calamity; you should not have looted his goods on the day of his calamity. You should not have stood at the crossings to cut off his fugitives; you should not have handed over his survivors on the day of distress>>* (Obadiah 12-14). This would then be saying that the Philistines were the partners of the Edomites in that affair. However, it may also refer to something that had taken place in Amos' own lifetime in the continuing struggles

between the Judæans and the Philistines: <<*He went out and made war against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod; he built cities in the territory of Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines. God helped him against the Philistines, against the Arabs who lived in Gur-baal, and against the Meunites*>> (2 Chronicles 26:6-7).

Entire communities probably does not equate to an entire national group, but to the people from several towns and cities.

⁹ Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of Tyre,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
because they delivered entire communities over to Edom,
and did not remember the covenant of kinship.

¹⁰ So I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre,
fire that shall devour its strongholds.

Amos 1:9-10

The great maritime city of Tyre was northwest of Israel on the Mediterranean coast. With its fine harbour and easily defended island citadel, it was positioned to dominate the sea trade of the eastern Mediterranean; refer to Isaiah Chapter 23 and Ezekiel Chapters 26-28. Tyre is accused of the same act of inhumanity as the Philistines (v.6), but it was more heinous because it involved the repudiation of a covenant of kinship. This may refer to the covenant that had existed between Solomon and Hiram: <<*So the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him. There was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and the two of them made a treaty*>> (1 Kings 5:12), or perhaps to that between Ahab and Eshbaal of Sidon as a result of which Jezebel became Ahab's wife: <<*And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, he took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him*>> (1 Kings 16:31).

So I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre, fire that shall devour its strongholds.

The walls of a city were its defence and strength. If the walls were burnt down and breached, the city was defeated.

Tyre was a Gentile city and was frequently the object of condemnation by OT prophets for their Baal worship and arrogant materialism. Excavations have unearthed many remarkable finds at Tyre. The city evidences both Roman and Byzantine structures including, largely from after Jesus' time: a hippodrome; an immense bathhouse; a forum; a theatre; and tombs.

Tyre was originally an offshore island later connected to the mainland during a siege in the days of Alexander the Great in the 4th Century BC. The Assyrians laid siege against Tyre for five years but never conquered the city. Nebuchadnezzar tried for thirteen years to conquer Tyre, but Alexander did it in just seven months! He conquered Tyre by laying siege, then using the rubble from the old city to make a causeway out to the island city. It was a spectacular achievement of both military and engineering strategy.

¹¹ Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of Edom,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
because he pursued his brother with the sword
and cast off all pity;
he maintained his anger perpetually,
and kept his wrath for ever.

¹² So I will send a fire on Teman,
and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah.

Amos 1:11-12

Edom was located south and southeast of Judah around the southern end of the Dead Sea. Descended from Esau, the Edomites maintained enmity toward Israel, extending at least as far back as Israel's journey from the wilderness to the plains of Moab prior to crossing the Jordan; refer to Numbers 20:14-21. Here the sin for which Edom is judged is implacability – perpetual anger. Teman and Bozrah were Edomite cities.

Because he pursued his brother with the sword. The people of Edom descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob who was later named Israel by God. In this way, the Lord can speak of the people of Edom as brother to the people of God in that they share common ancestors in Abraham and Isaac. God promises judgement against Edom because they attacked Judah: <<*In his days Edom revolted against the rule of Judah, and set up a king of their own. Then Joram crossed over to Zair with all his chariots. He set out by night and attacked the Edomites and their chariot commanders who had surrounded him; but his army fled home. So Edom has been in revolt against the rule of Judah to this day. Libnah also revolted at the same time*>> (2 Kings 8:20-22).

And cast off all pity; he maintained his anger perpetually, and kept his wrath for ever. Edom held on to anger and wrath when they should have long before put it away. For this, the judgement of God is coming against them. The lesson here is

to give personal anger and wrath to God, and let him be the avenger: <<*Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'*>> (Romans 12:19).

¹³ Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of the Ammonites,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead
in order to enlarge their territory.

¹⁴ So I will kindle a fire against the wall of Rabbah,
fire that shall devour its strongholds,
with shouting on the day of battle,
with a storm on the day of the whirlwind;

¹⁵ then their king shall go into exile,
he and his officials together,
says the Lord.

Amos 1:13-15

The Ammonites were located east of the Jordan River between Syria to the north and Moab to the south. Their ancestral territory did not extend all the way west to the Jordan, so they were in constant conflict with the tribes of Reuben and Gad in an effort to extend their border westward to gain control of the desirable region of Gilead where the two Israelite tribes lived.

The sin of the Ammonites was the viciousness and brutality of their attacks, without pity even for pregnant women.

Ammon's capital city of Rabbah is present-day Amman, Jordan. It was mentioned by Moses before the Israelites came into the land: <<*Now only King Og of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. In fact his bed, an iron bed, can still be seen in Rabbah of the Ammonites. By the common cubit it is nine cubits long and four cubits wide*>> (Deuteronomy 3:11).

Their king shall go into exile. When Assyria conquered a nation, they deported the leadership and imported people from elsewhere into the area: <<*In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria. He placed them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes*>> (2 Kings 17:6), and: <<*The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and*

placed them in the cities of Samaria in place of the people of Israel; they took possession of Samaria, and settled in its cities>> (2 Kings 17:24). This was both a way of defusing any tendency to rebellion and also of homogenising their diverse empire. Because of their attacks against Israel, God promises judgement against Ammon.