

Introduction to Amos

1. Setting the Stage: A Divided Kingdom

After the reign of King Solomon, the united kingdom of Israel split in two because of sin, pride, and bad leadership.

- The Southern Kingdom was called Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital.
- The Northern Kingdom kept the name Israel, with Samaria as its capital.

In Bible study, that word “Israel” can be confusing because sometimes it means the whole people of God, and sometimes it means just the Northern Kingdom. In the book of Amos, it usually refers to the Northern Kingdom.

Judah and Israel were related, but spiritually they were drifting in different ways. Judah still had the temple and the priesthood in Jerusalem, but it was compromised. The Northern Kingdom turned much more quickly into idol worship, false religion, and political corruption.

2. Where Amos Fits in the Prophets

Most Christians are somewhat familiar with the “major prophets”:

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel
- Daniel

They are called “major” not because they are more important, but because their books are longer.

Then we have twelve “minor prophets.” Again, “minor” just means shorter, not less important. Amos is the third book in that section of our English Bibles (Hosea, Joel, Amos), but chronologically things are a bit more complex.

If we look at the timeline:

- Some prophets served before the Babylonian exile.
- Some served during the exile.
- Some served after the exile when a remnant came back into the land.

Amos is one of the pre-exile prophets. He ministers to the Northern Kingdom (Israel) while living in the Southern Kingdom (Judah).

He is roughly contemporary with:

- Hosea – who also preached to the Northern Kingdom
- Isaiah and Micah – who ministered mainly in the Southern Kingdom

So Amos is not a fringe voice. He's one of God's key spokesmen in a time when the people felt secure but were actually on the brink of judgment.

3. Amos the Man: A Surprising Prophet

Amos introduces himself this way:

"The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders 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 1:1, NKJV)

A few important details:

- He was from Tekoa, about six miles south of Bethlehem in Judah.
- He calls himself a sheepbreeder, not a professional prophet.
- In Amos 7, he also says he cared for sycamore fig trees, which grow in the warmer lowlands. That suggests he was a rancher and farmer with significant land, not a poor, obscure shepherd.
- He lived during the reigns of:
 - Uzziah, king of Judah (a generally good king, though not perfect)
 - Jeroboam II, king of Israel (a powerful but spiritually corrupt king)

God took this self-employed, hard-working, rural businessman and sent him north to speak to a wealthy, sophisticated, self-confident society that did not want to hear from Him. Amos was a foreigner to them. He had no official religious credentials. That alone is a reminder that God often calls and uses very ordinary people in very unexpected ways.

4. The Times of Amos: The Best of Times... and the Worst of Times

From a human vantage point, the days of Amos were "the best of times."

Politically and militarily

- Jeroboam II in the north and Uzziah in the south both had long reigns.
- Long reigns usually meant stability and economic growth.
- Israel's borders were extended.
- Trade routes were secured.
- The Northern Kingdom controlled important highways and had access in every direction.
- There was a growing wealthy upper class, elaborate homes, and what we would call "luxury lifestyles."

They had, in modern terms, "a strong economy, secure borders, and full markets."

Spiritually and morally

Under the surface, however, it was “the worst of times.”

- Idolatry flourished. The golden calves at Dan and Bethel (set up by Jeroboam I generations earlier) were still central.
- There was a religious culture, but not a humble, obedient relationship with the living God.
- Immorality and injustice were widespread.
- The rich oppressed the poor, manipulated courts, and exploited the vulnerable.
- People still went to religious festivals and offered sacrifices, but their hearts were far from God.

In other words, they were comfortable, religious, and corrupt. That combination is deadly. They thought success was proof that God was pleased with them. Amos was sent to say, in effect:

“You think this prosperity is a sign that everything is fine. It is actually mercy before the storm.”

5. The Structure of Amos

Amos is not a random collection of harsh speeches. It is a carefully crafted, Spirit-inspired book.

A simple outline:

1. Introduction – Amos 1:1–2
2. Eight Judgments on the Nations – Amos 1–2
3. Three Sermons against Israel – Amos 3–6
4. Five Visions of Judgment and Hope – Amos 7–9
5. The Restoration of the Davidic Kingdom – Amos 9:11–15

A. Eight judgments (Amos 1–2)

Amos begins with a brilliant strategy. If he had walked into Israel and started with “God is judging you,” they would have shut him down immediately. So instead, the Lord leads him to pronounce judgment on other nations first:

1. Damascus (Syria)
2. Gaza (Philistia)
3. Tyre (Phoenicia)
4. Edom
5. Ammon
6. Moab

7. Judah (his own homeland)
8. Israel (his real target)

Each judgment begins with the same formula:

“Thus says the Lord: ‘For three transgressions of [name], and for four, I will not turn away its punishment...’” (for example Amos 1:3, NKJV)

That “for three... and for four” is a Hebrew way of saying, “Your sins are full and overflowing.” It is a poetic form of intensification.

By the time Amos gets to Judah and then to Israel, he has drawn his Northern audience in. They would have applauded the judgments on their enemies. Then, suddenly, the finger points at them.

It is as if God says:

“You rejoice that I will judge the cruelty and injustice of the nations. But you, who know My law, have done the same and worse.”

B. Three sermons (Amos 3–6)

Chapters 3–6 contain three main messages that explore:

- Israel’s present – their privileges and their guilt (chapter 3)
- Israel’s past – how God has repeatedly warned and disciplined them, but they would not return to Him (chapter 4)
- Israel’s future – the coming “day of the Lord,” not as a day of comfort, but as a day of darkness if they refuse to repent (chapters 5–6)

Amos contains some of the most famous prophetic lines in Scripture. For example:

“Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:7–8)

And:

“But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.” (Amos 5:24, NKJV)

God confronts a people who love religious music, feasts, and offerings, but trample the poor and twist justice. He basically says, “I know how loudly you sing. I also know how you treat people when the song is over.”

C. Five visions and the hope of restoration (Amos 7–9)

The book ends with five visions:

1. Locusts – God’s judgment restrained in answer to Amos’s intercession
2. Fire – consuming judgment

3. A plumb line – God measuring His people by His standard
4. A basket of summer fruit – a picture that Israel is ripe for judgment
5. The Lord by the altar – final, inescapable judgment

Yet Amos does not end in despair. The book closes with a promise of restored blessing and a renewed Davidic kingdom:

“On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old... Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed... I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them,” says the LORD your God. (Amos 9:11, 13, 15, NKJV)

God judges, but He also restores. He confronts, but He also heals. His heart is not to destroy His people, but to bring them back to Himself.

6. Bringing It Home: Why Amos Still Matters

It is not hard to see why Amos speaks so powerfully to our own generation.

Like Israel in the days of Amos, many of us live in a culture that:

- Feels militarily secure
- Enjoys economic prosperity
- Is increasingly materialistic and pleasure-driven
- Still uses religious language and symbols
- Tolerates or even celebrates injustice, greed, and sexual immorality

We have churches, worship music, online sermons, and Christian bookstores. But God is not impressed by religious activity apart from a humble, obedient heart. He cares how we treat people, especially the poor, the powerless, the overlooked, and the unborn. He cares about what we do in private when no one is watching. He cares about truth, marriage, honesty, and faithfulness.

Amos is a warning: God will judge sin, even when it is wrapped in religious clothing.

But Amos is also an invitation: God is eager to show mercy if we will turn back to Him with all our hearts.

A Challenge to Believers

If you already belong to Jesus, Amos presses some very practical questions on your heart:

1. Where have I grown comfortable?

Israel thought prosperity meant blessing, and blessing meant approval. Am I assuming that because my life is comfortable, God must be pleased, even if my heart is drifting?

2. Is my faith only public and external?

Do I worship loudly on Sunday and then cheat, gossip, or walk in impurity the rest of the week? God told Israel He hated their feasts and songs because their lives contradicted their worship (Amos 5:21–23).

3. How do I treat people with less power than I have?

Amos especially confronts those who “sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals” (Amos 2:6, NKJV). How do I treat employees, co-workers, service workers, the marginalized, and those who cannot pay me back?

4. Am I willing to let God search me and change me?

Amos did not come just to give information. He came with God’s call to repent—to turn around, to seek the Lord, to pursue justice and righteousness.

If the Holy Spirit puts His finger on an attitude, a habit, a relationship, or a pattern of sin, do not push Him away. Bring it into the light. Confess it honestly to the Lord. Scripture promises:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (First John 1:9, NKJV)

An Invitation to Those Who Do Not Yet Know Jesus

Underneath the book of Amos is a big, simple truth: God is holy, and we are not. Left to ourselves, we all stand under judgment. The people of Amos’s day faced coming judgment because of their sin.

So do we.

But God did something Amos could only hint at. In His love, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus lived the life we have not lived—a life of perfect love, perfect justice, perfect obedience. Then, in love, He took our place.

- On the cross, Jesus shed His blood for us, bearing the judgment our sins deserve.
- He was buried.
- On the third day, He rose again, declaring by His resurrection that He is truly God, Savior, and Lord.

God has not changed. He still judges sin. But He has provided a way of full forgiveness and new life through His Son.

The same God who warned through Amos now speaks through the gospel of His Son and says:

“...whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”
(Romans 10:13, NKJV)

If you have never personally turned to Jesus Christ, you do not have to wait. You do not have to clean yourself up first. Come as you are, but do not plan to stay as you are. Come to Him in simple, honest trust.

You might say to Him something like this:

“Lord Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins, that You shed Your blood for me, and that You rose again from the dead. I confess that You are God, Savior, and Lord. I turn from my sin and place my trust in You. Take my life, forgive me, change me, and make me Yours. Amen.”

The words themselves are not magic, but the heart that turns to Him is never rejected. Jesus said:

“The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” (John 6:37, NKJV)