

## AMOS: THE MAN AND HIS WORK

### I. A General Note on Old Testament Prophets

The term prophet is translated from the Hebrew word "navi" which means spokesperson, or one who speaks by divine inspiration, and is derived from a verb meaning "to bubble forth" like a fountain. Thus prophets were men who "poured forth" the inspired messages of God. They had received a personal calling from God and they served as instruments through which God revealed His will to man, including the foretelling of future events and the warning of coming judgment. (Deut. 18:15-22)

Some prophets, like Elijah and Elisha, did not pen any books in the Old Testament. Of the 16 who did, four are called "major" prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel); the remaining 12 are sometimes referred to as "minor" prophets. These adjectives do not refer to the importance of the men and their work, but rather to the length or brevity of their writing. Books written by major prophets average 46 chapters in length, while those of minor prophets average about 6 chapters. The focus of this lesson is on one of the earlier minor prophets named **AMOS**.

### II. The Man

From 1:1 and 7:14-15, we know that Amos was from a town about 12 miles south of Jerusalem, called Tekoa (stockade); that he was a herdsman and gatherer of "sycamore fruit," probably a variety of fig; and that he had no heritage or formal training as a prophet. Apparently, Amos never enjoyed the advantages of a formal education in a "school of the prophets" like Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha, nor do we have record of him ever being officially anointed for his prophetic ministry. We know nothing more about his life before or after his recorded ministry - only that at the call of God, he left his home in Judea as a mere layman to proclaim a confrontational message from God. Without any status as a recognized prophet, he pressed forward to bravely and faithfully carry out his mission, even in the face of opposition from the resident priest of Bethel. In view of his calling, his name, which means "burden-bearer," seems very appropriate, for it was indeed a heavy and difficult task he was chosen to fulfill. Unlike other prophets, whose ministries covered many decades, that of Amos seems to have involved a more compressed period of time. His contemporaries were Hosea and Isaiah.

The above verses aid us in dating his ministry to the time that Uzziah reigned as Judah's tenth king, and Jeroboam II ruled as Israel's thirteenth king, (two of the longest reigning in their respective kingdoms), and "two years before the earthquake," putting it around the year 760 BC. Interestingly, Jewish tradition holds that this quake, also referenced in Zech. 14:5, occurred just as Uzziah presumptuously entered the temple to burn incense, 2 Chr. 26:16. Josephus mentions this quake, *Antiq.* 9.225, and says, "By it half of a mountain was removed and carried to a plain four furlongs off; and it spoiled the king's gardens." Archaeologists who have examined regional damage and core samples from beneath the floor of the Dead Sea believe the quake was centered in Lebanon and would have measured 8.2 on the Richter scale, making it the worst documented quake of the Holy Land in the past 3,000 years. (<http://www.icr.org/article/greatest-earthquakes-bible/>) NT references to Amos occur twice: by Stephen in Acts 7:42-43 (Amos 5:25-27); and by James in Acts 15:16-17 (Amos 9:11-12).

### III. His Work

The call of God came to Amos while he tended sheep in the field (7:15), and apparently it included a vision of the prophecy based on the verbiage of 1:1 - "The words of Amos...which he saw concerning Israel..." and other scriptures that say "The Lord God showed unto me..." and "Amos, what seest thou?"

Fairview Memorial Missionary Baptist Church

Winter Bible Study - The Minor Prophets

February 18, 2014, Lesson 1

Prepared by Elder Jeff Moran

III. His Work (Cont.)

In Amos' day, Israel was experiencing a time of material prosperity, apparent religious devotion and national security - so in this respect, times were good. From a spiritual standpoint though, the people's hearts were empty, their religion a mere show, and their society shamefully corrupt. God called Amos to address these problems - a call that took him to Bethel, a trip of roughly 25 miles, to confront the people with their sin and deliver a message of woe and judgment to come.

Throughout history, the city of Bethel (Luz) had been the site of many important events: where, in 1760 BC, Jacob dreamed of the ladder to heaven; where, in 1350 BC, the ark of the covenant was and the people of Israel went to inquire of God whether or not to engage in battle; where, in 1050 BC, Samuel traveled as a circuit judge; where, in 931 BC, Jeroboam I placed a golden calf and set up counterfeit worship; overtaken in 913 BC by Abijah, king of Judah; where, in 850 BC, Elijah was sent by God, where "the sons of the prophets" lived, where Elijah and Elisha made one of their last stops before Elijah was carried away by a fiery chariot in a whirlwind to heaven, and where in II Ki. 10:29 & 32, the Bible says idol worship continued and "God began to cut Israel short." In the days of Amos, it was described as both their national worship center and the king's residence (7:13 - "the king's chapel and ...the king's court"). Such was the destination of this farmer-prophet on a mission from God.

IV. Summary of the Book

A. 1:1 - 2:3 Sins of the surrounding nations (Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon & Moab)

- Prophecy concerns Israel, but starts with surrounding heathen peoples. (Compare Warren County, surrounded by Edmonson, Logan, Butler, Simpson, Barren, & Allen Counties)
- "For 3 transgressions and for 4" - multiple sins/atrocities; symbolic of all
- "Will not turn away the punishment because \_\_\_\_\_" - indictment/unwillingness to ignore it
- "Will send a fire ...shall devour the palaces." - punishment is coming even to the wealthy

B. 2:4 - 6:14 Ruinous conditions of Judah & Israel

- Just as God will not dismiss the sins of their heathen neighbors, He will not overlook those of Israel who had enjoyed the privilege of being God's chosen people, but who had failed to live up to the responsibility that came with a position of favor. "Hear this word..." (3,4,5)
- Agreement required to walk together; Israel is not walking with God so punishment is imminent, as promised in Lev. 26:23-28, and it will be inescapable
- God has given them multiple opportunities to return to Him and they have not
- "Seek ye me" - not Bethel, Gilgal or Beersheba (designated religious centers) - and live!
- "Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" - used in MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech; a call for righteous justice to correct abuses and inequities
- At ease in Zion - privilege & luxury have lulled Israel to sleep, but the lion's roar is about to wake them up with a great overthrow

C. 7:1 - 9:10 Visit to Bethel & impending judgment of Israel

- "The Lord showed me" ...grasshoppers, fire, plumbline, basket of summer fruit
- Grasshoppers/fire - consuming judgment; "by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small." - remnant spared (Ps. 106:44-45)
- Plumbline/Summer fruit - "The end is come upon Israel; I will not again pass by any more"
- Famine of hearing the words of the Lord is coming & God's judgment is inescapable
- Amaziah confrontation: "Amos, go home and take your prophecy with you!"
- Amos' response - "This is not my message, but God's. Israel is headed into captivity and you will die in a heathen land"
- Amos' prophecy fulfilled as Israel was conquered by the Assyrians less than 40 years later; and the people removed from the land and scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire.

Fairview Memorial Missionary Baptist Church

Winter Bible Study - The Minor Prophets

February 18, 2014, Lesson 1

Prepared by Elder Jeff Moran

IV. Summary of the Book (Cont.)

- D. 9:11-15 Promised restoration and blessing
- Tabernacle of David raised up as in past days
  - Times of material abundance/blessing
  - Cities re-populated after captivity ended
  - Land repossessed

V. Takeaway Truths

- a. God does the calling - not man. He qualifies those He calls, so never discount the vessel. Amos was not "a prophet or a prophet's son" when chosen; yet God inspired and enabled Him to be His messenger.
- b. Real service to God involves faith and sacrifice. Amos had to leave the familiarity and comfort of home to reach and preach to a distant people he did not know. He was lied about and told to go back where he came from but he stood firm and delivered God's message with boldness before returning to Judah.
- c. Be careful in judging success. From all appearances, Amos was just a country preacher whose message was rejected by an audience who sent him packing. Yet, his prophecy came to pass and his writing is included in the greatest of all books - the ultimate mark of legitimacy and endorsement.
- d. God is righteous and He requires righteousness in His people. Sin and idolatry are unacceptable. His judgments were pronounced on the nations surrounding Israel, but Israel too was included. They were His people, they had seen His great miracles, and they should have known better than to stray from His paths. We are His people today and He expects us to live uprightly before Him and the world; punishment awaits those who are practitioners of sin.
- e. God rejects the formalized, superficial, religion of the proud and complacent in heart. The right thing can be done the wrong way, and when we leave the Spirit out of the equation, all that's left are the dry works of the flesh, well-intentioned though they may be. We must be careful not to fall into the ruts of formalism, having a form but denying the power.
- f. God is fair and just. He provides a warning and an opportunity for repentance, but when these go unheeded, He brings vengeance and judgment. This principle applies both to nations and to individuals.
- g. After the refining fires of judgment, what remains are pure elements usable by God. Following the overthrow of Israel, God would "raise up the tabernacle of David" and bring restoration to spiritual Israel through Christ and His Church, if not also eventually through the Jewish people.

Fairview Memorial Missionary Baptist Church

Winter Bible Study - The Minor Prophets

February 18, 2014, Lesson 1

Prepared by Elder Jeff Moran

Resources/Recommended Reading

Boice, James Montgomery, The Minor Prophets, Vol. 1, An Expository Commentary, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, c. 1983, pp. 159-231.

Hester, H.I., The Heart of Hebrew History, A Study of the Old Testament, Broadman Press, Nashville, c. 1949, pp. 219, 233, 281-282.

Smith, William, Smith's Bible Dictionary, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, c. 1999, pp. 37-38, 87, 270-27, 292, 656, 724-725.

[www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org)