



AMOS

DOOM WITHOUT PROMISE?

Table of events in the eighth century B.C. bearing on the books of Amos, Hosea and Micah

Judah	Prophets	The Northern Kingdom	Assyria
Uzziah (Azariah) 783-742	Amos – at very end of reign of Jeroboam	Jeroboam II 786-746	Assyria weak for first half of century. A period of peace and prosperity for Israel and Judah
Jotham 742-735	Isaiah*	Zechariah 746-745. Murdered after six months' reign	Tiglath Pileser 745-727. Assyria gathered strength under his rule
Ahaz 735-715. When attacked by Pekah and his allies, appealed for Assyrian help	Hosea probably active through most of this period	Shallum 745. Assassinated after one month	
		Menahem 745-738. Accepted Assyrian sovereignty and paid heavy tribute	
		Pekahiah 738-737. Assassinated	
		Pekah 737-732. Reversed Menahem's foreign policy. Put himself at head of anti-Assyrian coalition and attacked Judah, who had refused to join	Assyria came to Judah's aid in 732. Overthrew the other members of the coalition (Syria and Philistia) and attacked Israel
		Hoshea 732-724. Murdered Pekah and surrendered to the Assyrians. But at the death of Shalmaneser rebelled again	Shalmaneser V 727-722
Hezekiah 715-687. Rebelled against Assyria and forced by Sennacherib to pay tribute	Micah active for unspecified period before and after fall of Samaria	722/1 END OF NORTHERN KINGDOM	Sargon II 722-705. Destroyed Samaria in 722/1 and made Israel into an Assyrian province
Manasseh 687-642. Accepted Assyrian domination			Sennacherib 705-681. Invaded Judah in 701, and probably again later

* Isaiah was active from the last year of Uzziah, and may have been still alive at the beginning of the reign of Manasseh.

What is a prophet?

The prophet is a man of God

3.7 Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.

The word of the prophet is God's word

3.8 The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?

Isaiah 55.11 ...so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Heb 4.12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Is Amos a prophet?

- Balaam (Num 22-24)
- Samuel (1 Sam 3.19-20; 19.18-24)
- Nathan – Adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 12)
- Elijah – Ahab and Naboth's Vineyard (1 Ki 21.19)
- Elisha – Son of the Shunammite Woman (2 Ki 4)

Common themes: War, King's conscience, Visions

Amos shares these: War (3.11) access to royal sanctuary at Bethel (7.13), visions (7.4, 9.1) but **NOT a professional prophet.**

7.14 Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'no prophet I, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees.

Amos is **CALLED** like Moses (Ex 3, shepherd in Midian) Samuel (1 Sam 3, temple servant at Shiloh) to speak God's word to his generation **because the professionals have got it wrong.**

Two views of Israel's salvation

Conventional Story – Salvation is Political and Unconditional

God chose Israel to act as his viceregent in the world, delegating his royal power to the house of David.

The sanctuaries, priests, prophets and kings guarantee divine favour. Prosperity in first half of eighth century BC is evidence of this (notwithstanding growing social inequality).

Use of Davidic Psalms 18.6-15 and divine warrior language (Isa 13) led to a religious nationalism which celebrated God's unconditional promise to save King and people by destroying their foreign enemies.

Idea of divine chastisement for misbehaviour was acceptable. That Yahweh should totally destroy his people was unthinkable. The result was a dangerous overconfidence in Israel's institutions to protect them.

Radical Departure – Salvation is Personal and Conditional

Amos is active c.760-750, just before Hosea (c.750-725), in the latter part of the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (786-746).

Like Hosea, Amos considers the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, God and his people journeying through history, a God who demands fidelity. The difference is that Amos, unlike his opponents (and Hosea), thinks the relationship can be broken.

6.1 Alas for those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria, the notables of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel resorts!

Amos – a new kind of prophecy

1. A wider political concern

Earlier prophets had addressed one particular issue in the life of an individual – David’s adultery, Naboth’s vineyard, Naaman’s leprosy.

Amos addresses the king, the priests, the judges, the rich, ordinary people, the nation as a whole 6.1 Samaria and Zion (Jerusalem) and foreign nations.

2. A wider view of God

God is no longer confined to a sanctuary. God is found throughout the world. See the three doxologies:

4.13 For lo, the one who forms the mountains, creates the wind, reveals his thoughts to mortals, makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth—the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name!

5.8-9 The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD is his name, who makes destruction flash out against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress.

9.5-6 The Lord, GOD of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who live in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile, and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt; who builds his upper chambers in the heavens, and founds his vault upon the earth; who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the surface of the earth—the LORD is his name.

3. A wider view of moral accountability

The nations are held to account, for there is a universally understood moral code. Oracles of judgment against 7 nations in chapters 1 and 2.

Amos the iconoclast

1. **God will NOT fight for Israel**

- i. Amos curses Israel 3.1-2; 4.12 Unheard of!
- ii. Amos sings a lament as if Israel were already dead 5.1-2
- iii. Amos inverts the Day of the Lord 5.18 *Darkness not light*

2. **The cult/sacrifice does NOT guarantee God's blessing**

- i. Religious activity without justice and righteousness provokes God to anger 5.21-23
- ii. Sacrifice without concern for social justice is null and void .
- iii. Do not go to the sanctuaries. 5.4, 6 *'Seek me and live'*

3. **Exodus is NOT a guarantee but a warning and a threat of judgment**

2.10-12; 3.2; 4.6-11 You did not return to me cf Egyptian plagues. 9.7 You are a country like any other.

God's patience is exhausted. He has abandoned Israel to its fate. 7.3,6 cf 7.7-8; 8.2

4. **God is NOT experienced as Creator but as destroyer**

God's people are so out of step with their Maker that all they receive from the natural world is drought, famine, pestilence. 4.6-10; 8.10-12 (both physical and spiritual) 9.2-4 Evil runs after them.

For Discussion

1. What are the temptations that accompany affluence?
2. What is the source of our wealth, personal and national?
3. From those to whom much is given, much is expected. What does this mean for us?
4. What do we think of 5.10, 13? Should we speak out or keep silent?
5. How would Amos rate our worship? (5.21-23)
6. Is our faith in religious rituals or in God? What is the difference between the two?
7. What are the signs that God's patience with our society is running out? What might we be able to do about this individually or collectively?