

## Introduction

Amos will teach us that true religion is much more than outward forms of piety but includes actions from the heart that bear directly on the well being of our fellowmen.

### 1A. Historical Background

The period is two years before a great earthquake. We do not know anything else about this "severe seismic phenomenon" (LaSor 320) but it is remembered for a long time, even a couple of hundred years down to Zechariah's day (Zech. 14:5).

Amos prophesied in the days of Uzziah and Jeroboam (1:1). Hence, the rough date is 760 B.C. about forty years before the Assyrian captivity. This was a time of great prosperity for both kingdoms almost reaching the heights of the days of David and Solomon. We are obviously in the time of the divided kingdom and close to the life of Jonah (2 Kgs 14.25).

The prophet was a shepherd and fig piercer (7:14; sycamore figs "must be punctured or slit before ripening to be edible," LaSor 319). Amos was "a man of humble status, a shepherd and migrant orchard worker; he was counted among the poor and exploited classes in the society, a member of those lower strata of society in behalf of whom he spoke" IOT 376).

Tekoa was his place of work (at least for shepherding, cf. western Judah was where the trees were harvested, 1 Chron. 27:28; 1 Ki. 10:27). Tekoa was six miles south of Bethlehem, which is south of Jerusalem; so he is in the southern kingdom.

He was called of God to prophesy; it was not a matter of his choice or education or family history (7:15, the Lord took me from tending the flock). Some people go into Christian service because they are momma called and papa sent, not so Amos (cf. IOT 377).

In the north a "powerful and profligate wealthy class had developed" which "formed the focus of much of Amos's preaching" (IOT 375). The time of this heyday will be brief however for it takes place under the "ominous shadow" of a threatened Assyrian invasion (1:2, an overview picture of mourning and desolation, the land will mourn and be desolate;

3:11, an enemy will overrun the land

3:12, Israel will be like a lamb in a lion's mouth; being "saved" here is not a positive!

5:3, an army of a thousand reduced to a hundred

5:27, exile beyond Damascus to the north

6:14, I will stir up a nation against you to oppress you from Hamath, farther north than Damascus, to the valley of Arabah which is south of the Dead Sea; thus a nation will be God's instrument in *oppression of both kingdoms*; destruction to the one and vassalage to the other.

### 2A. Literary Structure

The book has three main sections with an introduction (1.1) and a conclusion (9.11-15).

#### 1B. Oracles against the nations (1-2)

The literary refrain used against the nations is used against Judah and Israel: For three sins and for four (x and x plus 1 is literally "for three and three plus one" and thus: "enough and more than enough," LaSor 323).

These oracles are subversive in that they construct a circle around Israel (Damascus to the north, Gaza to West on the Great Sea, Tyre to northwest on the Great Sea, Ammon to the northeast of Dead Sea, Edom to the south of the Dead Sea, Moab is directly East of Dead Sea, Judah to the south of Israel. Then finally, focus is on Israel!). Israel has to say "we agree, we agree, we agree, we agree, ops, what can we say of ourselves!" The trap is sprung.

A striking example of Israel's sin is found in 2:6-7 where they pant after the dust of the land that is upon the head of the poor as a sign of grief in losing their land; this is translated as a trampling upon their heads. They are so greedy for land ownership and so hard-hearted that they in effect pant after the very dust that is used by the oppressed to show their despair.

#### 2B. Judgment speeches against Israel (3-6)

Much is prophetic lawsuit. The messenger reminds the disobedient vassal. For example, their greedy oppression of the poor is remarkably hard-hearted, 2.7, and the privilege of election brings with it great responsibility (3:1-2).

### 3B. Vision reports (7-9)

of events: locust plague, drought

of objects: plumb line, fruit basket

Hence, the building, city, and the people are *out of plumb* according to God's standards and will fall being *ripe for judgment*.

## 3A. Contents

### 1B. God is sovereign over history and in judgment

God is holy, righteous and just. He is sovereign over history. He will judge us for our folly/absurdities (6:12). Bethel, the house of God for Jacob (Gen. 28) has become a place of sin (sarcasm: Go to Bethel and sin, 4:4; your worship, 4:4-5 is pagan in essence and thus you will be driven to a pagan land to die in exile, 7:17). The coming enemy of Israel is God's instrument (3:11 with 14 and 6:14).

There is no escaping, not in the sea, mountains, grave or heavens (9:2-4). Prepare to meet your God (4:12).

### 2B. Social injustice incurs the wrath of God (note 5:18-24 in context)

5:24 needs clarification. It is not a call for uprightness on Israel's part. Instead, God's justice is in view, giving full sway to the force of his ethical indignation in judgment (Vos *BT* 273). God demands justice (5:15) and obedience rather than sacrifice (5:18-24, I despise your feasts... let justice roll like a river and righteousness like a never failing stream).

Religion, pious emotion, outward forms of worship without Christian graces and virtues in the life is an abomination to the Lord (despised!).

3B. God has an elect remnant though he punishes sinners. God's covenant with the descendents of Eve through Abraham is irrevocable but he requires obedience. Prepare to meet your God is not only an announcement of judgment but also a call to repentance, trust, and obedience (4:12). For disobedience, there will be judgment. However, there will always be an elect remnant (see Gen. 18:19; Elijah) to inherit afresh God's promises. Electing love is the point of 3:2, you only have I known. This is not knowledge *per se* since he knows all the nations and their sins as just enumerated in the preceding verses. It is translated "chosen," meaning electing love that separated Israel from the nations though Israel is just as sinful (x and x + 1)!

National election teaches the sovereign quality of individual election to salvation; the remnant is set apart by God's choosing, by His electing love.

Israel will be like a grain in a sieve, shaken, and not one will fall to the ground to be spared the sword! Yet abruptly, God says, "I will restore David's fallen tent" (9:9-10 with 11).

Interestingly, the remnant concept is introduced with regard to Israel possessing the remnant of Edom. Thus, 1) God will save the nations in remnant, and 2) Israel's part as a remnant is presupposed, suppressed. She will be saved in remnant but not as top dog among the nations but in the backdrop with them!

### 4B. The new Eden

God will bring history on to a new Eden (9:13-15; the land is typical of the garden lost but to be regained). *Israel's experience in history tokens this larger picture of God's purpose for fallen man cast out of Eden*, fighting with the thorns, alienated from God and others, a threat, at war, given to oppression and thus to famine and judgment. However, a new day is dawning. Coming is the rebuilding of the tent of David ultimately (cf. Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:16-17).

## 4A. Theme statement

The sovereign God of history who will judge social injustice will save His elect people and bring them to the new Eden.

The elect remnant from within the elect nation pictures election to salvation of fallen sinners.

5A. Message for us

1) True religion for NT saints includes social justice, the loving of God in the neighbor (Lk. 10, Jesus exemplifies what a Good Samaritan does in love for God).

2) This must be out of reliance on God and not in our own strength (Israel and Judah trusted their fortifications, 6:1).

We are summoned to trust in the holy God of the covenant who holds the plumb line on the conduct of the nations and on us as individuals.

Trust Him, He will carry out His purposes in history in spite of our sins and through judgment; He has a people; cling to Him for salvation; worship him from the heart that stirs your legs to loving service of others!

3) As God's elect we are to walk worthy of our calling:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Col. 3:12-14).