

AMOS: TEACHER'S NOTES

Title and Preface: [1:1-2] Although Amos was a full-time herdsman and vine dresser and a permanent resident of Judah the southern kingdom, God chose him to take this prophecy to the northern kingdom, Israel. For more history concerning the time of this prophecy see: 2 Kings 14: 23-28; 15:1-28; and 2 Chron. 26. The earthquake mentioned here is also noted by Zechariah (14:5).

I. The approaching judgment. The heathen's and Israel's sins. [1:3-2:16]

A. Punishment of the nations bordering Judah and Israel. (1:3-2:3)

1. Damascus for their cruelty in war. (1:3-5) Notice how Amos pronounces judgment on the six surrounding heathen nations, then Judah and finally Israel. The repetitive reference to three transgressions and for four is not literal, but indicates many transgressions. He begins with three nations that have no blood ties to Israel. Damascus, the capital of Syria was located 135 miles north-northeast of Jerusalem. Their sin was that of excessive cruelty against their enemies in time of war.
2. Gaza of Philistia slave traffic. (1:6-8) Gaza was the chief city of Philistia, southwest of Jerusalem. Their sin was dealing in slaves.
3. Tyre delivered up "brothers." (1:9,10) located on the coast of northern Palestine. Tyre had made a covenant of peace with Israel in the time of King David and their King Hiram. They violated this treaty and dealt slaves with Edom. Tyre was finally destroyed by Alexander the Great.
4. Edom for implacable hatred for Israel. (1:11,12) Edom was blood related to Israel through Esau. Our study of the prophet Obadiah shed much light on the poor relationship between Edom and Israel. Their sin was simply hatred of their brethren.
5. Ammon intense and uncalled-for cruelty. (1:13-15) Ammon was located east of Gad and north of Reuben. Ammon and Moab were descendants of Lot by the incestuous plot of his daughters. (Gen. 19:30-38). Their crime was also cruelty during war. Their inhumanity towards pregnant women and their unborn children was not only an overt act of cruelty; it was also a psychological ploy to prevent their enemies from procreating.
6. Moab vengeance even on a king's carcass. (2:1-3) located south of Reuben, east of the southern end of the Dead Sea. Their sin was that of desecrating the tombs of their dead enemies and turning their bones into building materials. The judgment against Moab would be terrible in its scope. (Isa. 15:5; 16:11; Jer. 48:36)

B. Punishment of Judah her sin was religious apostasy. (2:4,5)

Note the difference between the accusations against the nations and against Judah: cruelty vs. apostasy. Judah was not free from sin. Theirs was religious apostasy. They rejected God's laws and would not live by His rules. The judgment against Judah was averted for 135 years due to the work of the prophets Isaiah and Micah and King Hezekiah.

- C. Punishment of Israel the theme of Amos' prophecy. (2:6-16)
1. Sins of Israel: injustice and oppression, shameless immorality, contempt for the Lord. (2:6-8) Now Amos comes to the true reason for coming to Israel. They were also guilty of religious apostasy. Their hearts were hardened, they had no regard for the poor, and their overall moral conduct was horrible. They had made slaves of their own people in violation of the commands of Lev. 25:39-46. The judges were corrupt and the rich got richer at the expense of the poor. They had turned to idolatry and were using temple prostitutes. They disobeyed the commands of Deut. 24:12,13. Amos will continue to cry out against their sins throughout his ministry.
 2. Scornful contempt of the Divine benefits bestowed. (2:9-12) The reason that Israel possessed the land was because Jehovah had made it so. He drove out the previous inhabitants. He brought the people out of Egypt. Those under the Nazarite vow were being compelled to violate their vows by the bullying of the people. The people killed the prophets, rebelled against God and basically held all that was holy in utter contempt.
 3. Inevitable consequences. (2:13-16) In the accusations against the nations they are pictured as cruel, barbarous, etc.; against Judah and Israel the accusations are civil religious, and charges of oppressions. This accusation becomes the thesis of the book; the remainder of the book is an elaboration of these charges. Here Amos begins to announce the judgment against Israel. An alternate translation of verses 13 and 14 reads, "I will press you with the full force of war, as a loaded wagon presses the earth over which it passes." The swift will not escape, the strong will be weak, the mighty will be helpless, the archer will not be able to pull his bow, no one will escape, and the hero will become a coward.

II. Israel's crimes and her condemnation [chapters 3-6]

- A. Condemnation of the wealthy ruling classes for civil and religious inequities. (3:1-5)
1. Jehovah had known Israel, which makes her crime greater. (3:1-8)
 - a. Because chosen for Jehovah, her sins must be visited. (1,2) Amos is speaking the words of Jehovah. While the message is directed primarily at Israel, Judah would do well to listen. Because Jehovah had redeemed them from bondage, they belonged to Him. Because they belonged to Him, they must be disciplined by Him.
 - b. The prophet's right to speak: chosen of God. (3-8) The "two" mentioned in verse three is God and the prophet. Jehovah, as the lion, had His prey in sight and was about to attack. With the metaphor of the bird snare, the prophet suggests that Israel had set a trap with its own sins and was stepping into this trap of its own device. The trumpet blast was a sounding of alarm (remember Joel 2:1?). The prophet's voice is represented by the trumpet. The

judgment will not come until a warning is sounded. This warning is as a roaring lion, to be heard and to be heeded. Because God spoke to Amos, he was compelled to prophesy.

2. Civil oppression and inevitable judgment on the ruling class. (3:9-4:3)
 - a. The ruling class: their sins. (3:9-15) The first to be condemned are the wealthy ruling class. Amos calls for witnesses from the surrounding countries to view the corruption within the walls of Samaria. They would see lawlessness, oppression and mistreatment of the weak. The moral values of the entire nation were in shambles. Hosea makes it clear in his prophecy that the "adversary" to rise up against Israel would be Assyria. The adversary would eventually: (1) surround the land, (2) bring down the nation's strength, and (3) plunder the palaces. The judgment would be severe. While Samaria was the political capital of Israel, Bethel was the center of religious activity. The religious leaders were also guilty of the excesses of the rich. Additionally, they had instigated idol worship. God would destroy them for that.

Applications for Today

- A. 2:4 - Being religious is not enough. We cannot substitute our own ways for God's ways. 1 Sam. 15:22,23; Lu. 6:46; Prov. 14:12.
- B. 3:3 - When we agree with God, we will obey God and be in unity with our fellow believers. 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3-7.

- b. The luxury-loving women: a special judgment against them. (4:1-3) The wives of the rulers and the rich are referred to as fat cattle. They relaxed in the lap of luxury, while they encouraged their husbands to oppress the poor. God promises these women, through his prophet, that they would be among the first to be taken captive when Israel falls.

3. Condemnation of their religious festivities "which please you," not Jehovah.
(4:4,5) Amos uses irony here to point out that Israel was practicing "religion." But it was idol worship and contained no true piety or devotion to God. Their rules of religious conduct were self-contrived and included activities that were against God's law (Lev. 7:13,14). They forced free-will offerings from the people. They showed a rebellious spirit towards the Lord.
- B. Unheeded chastisements the prophet turns to the nation. (4:6-13)
 1. Chastisements from Jehovah, which have gone unheeded. (4:6-11)
 - a. General famine, "cleanness of teeth." (6) God had previously chastised the people, but they had not heeded these punishments

and warnings. First He sent famine to try and turn them back to Him.

- b. Drought. (7,8) Second, He sent drought, withholding the rains of February and March when the fields needed the rain the most.
 - c. Blasting, mildew, locusts. (9) A third visitation came upon the crops in the form of a withering wind, and a blight that left the grain fruitless.
 - d. Pestilence, at the same time enemy attacks. (10) Next came pestilence, similar to those brought upon Egypt. Accompanying this pestilence was war.
 - e. Earthquake, burning. (11) The fifth chastisement included earthquakes and burning reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorrah.
2. Final doom, for which prepare. (12,13) They had looked upon God as a Being to be flattered; He looked upon them as children to be disciplined. Discipline had availed nothing; therefore, "Prepare to meet thy God." Because they did not respond to these they were exhorted by Amos to prepare to meet God in a more severe judgment. While this final judgment is not outlined here, it is implied that it will be severe and final.

C. Overthrow of kingdom of ten tribes. (chapters 5 and 6)

1. Lamentations, denunciations, exhortations, and threats. (5:1-17)
 - a. Lamentation Israel is fallen. (1-3) In the following two chapters, Amos stresses the coming judgment and reminds the people that they can avert this judgment. Here in chapter five, Amos begins a lamentation (funeral poem) over the nation of Israel. Even though Israel had remained protected from captivity to this point, the kingdom was near its end (Hosea 1:4). The nation would perish in a destructive war and only a remnant would remain.
 - b. Seek Jehovah, forsake idolatry, and live. (4-6) Jehovah offers hope of salvation on His terms. This salvation cannot be found in any of their idolatrous religious centers of worship. This included cities that had previously been centers of true worship in former times when the kingdoms were united. The call here is accompanied by a threat of severe judgment.
 - c. But Israel turns righteousness into unrighteousness. (7-9) The ruling classes had made a mockery of the court system. They would pay for their unrighteousness. As Creator, God had the power to destroy as well. He not only controls the immediate forces of nature, but has the ability to supernaturally affect the earth if He so desires.
 - d. This unrighteousness God must punish, unless they seek Jehovah. (10-15) The people hated honest judges and only wanted those in power who matched their corruption. A true judge under the law was to meet the qualifications and dispense his duties according to Deut. 16:18-20 and Ex. 23:6-9. The judges in power in Amos' time were the antithesis of true judges. Although Amos

senses the futility of his preaching, he continues to speak under God's direction, much like Isaiah (Isa. 6:11,12). Some of the people claimed to be in touch with God, but Amos denies that claim. They trusted in false confidence that they were still God's people and He would not allow these judgments to come upon them.

- e. The announcement of judgment. (16,17) As the Lord passes His judgment upon the land, sounds of mourning and despair will be heard as death and destruction takes place.
2. First woe terrors of the day of Jehovah. (5:18-27)
- a. Terrors of the day. (18-20) The people were yearning for the "day of Jehovah," but expecting it to be a day of darkness and judgment on their enemies. The prophet emphasizes that "the day" will actually be one of terror upon their own ungodly nation. As Israel tries to escape, they will jump from the frying pan into the fire.
 - b. Their heartless worship will not avert the day. (21-24) God's attitude towards Israel's religious activities is clearly shown. He rejects all aspects of their worship the feasts, solemn assemblies and offerings. God had previously ordained all of these activities, but they had corrupted them and themselves to the point where God would not accept their worship. Their music was "noise." Their songs were empty. Verse 24 brings a majestic vision of God's justice and righteousness returning as water cascading out of the mountains.
 - c. They have followed the steps of their fathers. (25-27) The people had been hypocritical in their worship even back to the wilderness wanderings, when they mingled idol worship with God worship. Because they were unable to free themselves spiritually from their captivity to idols, God would return them to physical captivity.
3. Second woe upon the careless heads of the nation. (chapter 6)
- a. The luxury-loving wealthy rulers. (1-6) Many of the rulers felt secure and at ease. They did not see the immediate danger. If other great cities had fallen, then Samaria and Bethel could suffer similar fates. They had embraced violence, luxury and revelry as the way of life. They would not heed the warnings of Amos, because they did not believe the warnings. They were content to manufacture musical instruments and use them in their sordid feasts and banquets.
 - b. Exile and destruction are certain. (7-11) These revelers will also be at the head of the line, when captivity comes. The people and the cities will be delivered up. Those that escape the sword will die of starvation. Custom would be broken when bodies would be cremated because cemeteries would be inaccessible. The people would come to fear even the sound of Jehovah's name and the destruction it would bring.

- c. Cannot be averted by their foolish trust in power. (12-14) The end of sin against God is always disaster. Israel had acted in a manner that can be characterized by the words "sheer stupidity." They had turned from God to idols and taken their own lives into their own hands, because they believed they had the power of their own salvation within themselves.

Applications for Today

- A. 5:21-23: You can not worship God any way you choose. Mt. 15:5-7; Gal. 1:6-8; Mt. 7:21-23.
- B. 6:1-6: Prosperity often gives us a false sense of security. Lu. 12:15-21; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; Prov. 30:9; Deut. 8:11-17.

III. Five visions, which the prophet explains. [7:1-9:10]

- A. The vision of the locusts, in which the mercy of God averts the catastrophe. (7:1-3). In this first vision Amos saw a swarm of locusts eating up the last of the crops. Amos prayed to God to not go through with this calamity and God heard his prayers (Jms. 5:16).
- B. The vision of the devouring fire a severer judgment than that of the locusts, again averted by mercy of Jehovah. (7:4-6)
The second calamity was to be more severe than the first total destruction. Again Amos interceded on behalf of Israel and this calamity is also averted.
- C. The vision of the plumb line destruction on the idolatrous nation of Israel. (7:7-9)
In this vision God is showing Amos that Israel no longer measures up to His standards. The plumb line would show that Israel was no longer straight and true.

An interlude: antagonism of Amaziah towards Amos. (7:10-17)

With this threat against the King, Amaziah the priest of Bethel confronts Amos. First by sending word to the King, then in a face to face stand off. Amaziah accuses Amos of being a prophet for hire. He wants Amos to leave Israel and cease his work. Of course we know from Chapter 1, that Amos was not a professional prophet and from the later chapters that he would not be deterred from doing God's work by man's intimidation. Because of his ungodly attitude, Amaziah and his family would be accursed.

- D. The vision of the basket of summer fruit - the ripeness of Israel for judgment. (ch.8)
1. The vision and its significance: the time of mercy is now past, destruction is at hand. (8:1-3) After this interruption, Amos sees a fourth vision. The nation is ripe for destruction. Jehovah repeats the threat of the third vision

(7:8). Any joy that had been previously found in the land would turn to mourning.

2. The final eclipse of the nation her sun sets at noon. (8:4-14) Even though the people pretended to be religious, they longed for the holy days to end so they could be about their business. Their religion was hypocrisy. They were short- selling some customers and overcharging the rest. The poor had become impoverished because of these unscrupulous tactics of the rich. To be true to Himself, Jehovah must punish Israel. The end will come as an earthquake, a flood or an eclipse. Suddenly, and totally, Israel will be destroyed. The consequences of this judgment will be a famine of the word of God. Even if they cry out for a message from God, He will not respond. Because of their idolatry, God would withhold further messages from them.

- E. The vision of smitten sanctuary destruction of the sinful kingdom. (9:1-10)
In this final vision, Amos sees the people buried beneath the ruins of a house built on the foundation of falsehood. The false places of worship would be destroyed from top to bottom. They could run from the Lord but they could not hide! Those who were captives would suffer as well, no prisoners would be taken. If these threats seem harsh, we must realize that justice demands punishment of corruption and iniquity. The earth will melt at the mere touch of Jehovah. His omnipotence and omniscience allows Him to use all of the forces of nature to bring either judgment or blessing. Even though Israel had once been Jehovah's own, they would not mean any more to Him now than a heathen nation. While the nation of Israel might cease to exist, the lineage of David would continue (Jer. 30:11; 46:28). As a race of people, the Jews still exist, but their former glory as a world power has never been restored. The kernels would be spared and the chaff destroyed. The chaff is obviously sinners (v.10).

IV. Promise of a bright future the Messianic hope. [9:11-15]

This conclusion is the only optimistic note in the book. Notice how each book directed to Judah or Israel has an optimistic note of future glory. Compare this passage with Acts 15:14-18. Amos closes his book with a final optimistic look at the future. When would this day come? Our reference to Acts 15 shows that Amos was looking forward to the spiritual kingdom as established by the Messiah. There would never be another physical, earthly kingdom of God's people. See also Lu. 1:67-79; Acts 3:18,21,24-27. James the Apostle understood the message of Amos and realized that the gentile acceptance of Christ was a fulfillment of this prophecy. If we believe that the spiritual throne of David has not yet been established (as the premillennialists teach) then we as gentiles are still without hope. Those that follow the Messiah will enjoy God's blessings through the Messiah. These blessing will be of a spiritual nature and culminate; in a heavenly home. Once we reach that heavenly homeland, we can never be removed from it (Phil 3:20,21). These verses have already been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Applications for Today

- A. 8:11- If we reject the truth, a time may come when we can no longer find it. 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Acts 13:45,46; Jms. 1:22-25.

- B. 9:11 - David's tabernacle has been raised up through Christ. The kingdom is now and it is of a spiritual nature. Acts 2:33-36; Eph. 1:20-23; Heb. 12:28; Col. 1:13; 1 Tim. 6:13f.