

Introduction to Amos

Where is it in the Bible?

Amos is the thirtieth book in the Christian Old Testament and is found between Joel and Obadiah. It is the third book of the Minor Prophets; the term “minor” refers to the length of the books, not to their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, these books follow Ezekiel at the end of the Prophets section and are grouped together in the Book of the Twelve in the same order as found in Christian Bibles

Who wrote it?

Amos was an older contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah. He was from Tekoa (1:1), about 10 miles south of Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah, but was sent to prophesy in the northern kingdom of Israel at Bethel, about 10 miles north of Jerusalem. “Most of the messages in the book of Amos were spoken by Amos. We do not know if he wrote them down himself; his words were most probably collected by followers who were convinced that Amos spoke for God.”¹ In addition to the speeches of Amos, the book contains a story about the prophet (7:10-17) and three fragments of hymns which were probably added during the editorial process.

When was it written?

Amos was active during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah (783-742 B.C.) and Jeroboam II of Israel (786-746 B.C.). Unfortunately, the date of the earthquake mentioned in 1:1 cannot be precisely determined, but there are reports of one that occurred in 760 B.C. Amos is one of the earliest of the “writing prophets”. The book was put together later by his followers, perhaps even after the exile.²

What is it about?

The book of Amos announces God's judgment on Israel because of their corrupt worship practices and failure to observe the laws of Moses. In particular, the prophet condemns economic inequality and oppression of the poor and marginalized in society.

How is it structured?

- I. Introduction (1:1-2)
- II. Oracles Against the Nations and Israel (1:3-2:16)
- III. Oracles Against Israel (3:1-6:14)
- IV. Visions of Judgment (7:1-9:10)
- V. Restoration of David's Kingdom (9:11-15)

1 Rolf Jacobson at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=49>

2 John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 295.

What are some things to look for?

- **Judgment:** Although Amos delivered a message of judgment to Israel and other nations, it is important to note that this is not the end of the relationship between God and God's people. God uses judgment to teach, to encourage repentance, and to bring sinners back to faithful living. The book ends with a message of hope and restoration.
- **Social Justice:** The main theme of the book is that God is concerned for justice. Observing proper worship practices is meaningless if it is not accompanied by fair and righteous treatment of all people (5:21-24). God expects a connection between our worship and believers' everyday lives. This message was delivered at a time of relative peace and prosperity when wealth was being used for personal comfort at the expense of others. It is a challenge to believers of all times and places.