

Amos

1. Introduction – Amos, one of the minor prophets, records the message of the prophet Amos addressed to Israel and the surrounding nations prior to Israel’s fall to the Assyrians and exile into Assyria.
2. Author and date – The book is attributed to Amos of Tekoa. There is no mention of Amos in Scripture outside the pages of his book. However, the book of Amos gives us a basic picture of the man. Although he was a prophet to the northern kingdom (Israel), he was from Tekoa, a town in the southern kingdom (Judah) about five miles south of Bethlehem. He was a shepherd (1:1) and apparently not a “career” prophet or from a line of prophets (7:14). Some have tried to make a case that Amos was actually a member of the upper society of Israel and his designation as a shepherd indicated a supervisory role, perhaps being the manager of shepherds or a large-scale breeder. However, the weight of evidence makes this quite implausible. He was also said to be a “dresser of sycamore figs”, which was regarded as food for poor people. His position in the lower levels of society may have helped him to see more clearly the sins of the rich. Amos was a contemporary of Hosea in the north and Isaiah and Micah in the south, ministering in the first half of the 8th century B.C. There is a wide variety of opinion about the length of his ministry. Some believe the entire message of the book was delivered on a single occasion; others believe his ministry may have lasted many days or much longer.
3. Background and purpose – During the time of Amos, King Jeroboam in the north and King Uzziah in the south had prospered greatly. The combined land of the two kingdoms nearly encompassed the area held during the glory days of David and Solomon. During this time, a wealthy class had emerged. Much of Amos’s message is aimed at the abuse of power and wealth among the rich. On the horizon, however, was the threat of Assyria. Amos spoke to Israel of her unfaithfulness in the shadow of this threat.
4. Major themes and ideas:
 - a. Oracles against the nations (ch. 1-2): Amos brilliantly encircles Israel with the judgment of the surrounding nations only to zero in on Israel and her judgment as his central point. Amos mentions Syria to the northeast, Philistia to the southwest, Tyre to the northwest, then Edom, Ammon, and Moab to the southeast, and finally Judah to the south. Then he springs his trap, and Israel is caught in the middle. The nations are guilty of war crimes. And while the Israelites are readily agreeing to this indictment, Amos lays the charge to Israel that they are just as guilty of social injustices on the home front.
 - b. Covenant lawsuit (ch. 3-6): Amos brings a covenant lawsuit on God’s behalf against the people of Israel. This form of speech had a standard form in the covenant relationships in the ancient Near East. We see a close approximation of this form in 3:1-15 – a rehearsal of the history of the relationship and the failure to maintain it, witnesses and cross-examination, and a confirmation of the lawsuit messenger. Amos draws on ideas from the Pentateuch in a number of places to draw out his charges and the curses of disobedience. Amos’ message is fully integrated with the earlier revelation of Moses and the covenant established there with Israel.
 - c. The remnant: God was unalterably committed to a perpetual relationship with the offspring of Abraham. Yet he was also equally committed to his own holiness and glory and the requirement of holiness in his people. These two ideas are clearly in tension; they are dealt with through the concept of the remnant. God would judge and winnow his people, but a remnant would survive and thrive under God’s blessing (9:9-15).

Reference:

An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.