

## Amos (December 3)

### Reading Amos

From the high pastures he lifts his eyes to see across the Salt Sea and the Jordan, where the shadows stalk and devour Edom, Moab, and Amon. Turning toward the sunset, he sees the distant peak of Mount Carmel, the coasts of Philistia, and the way to Egypt engulfed with reddish light. He calls together the sheep and leads them to safety before the day turns to darkness, when predators roam.

The Lord called the shepherd Amos to deliver a surprising and ominous message for Judah and Israel. In his prophecies, Amos pictured the Lord angry, crouching, and focused like a lion stalking the sinful, carefree nations. The kingdoms were prosperous when Amos preached, but his prophecies of destruction were rapidly fulfilled by the invading Assyrians, who besieged Samaria within a few decades.

### Author and Date

Amos was from Tekoa, a small town about 6 miles south of Bethlehem and 11 miles from Jerusalem. He earned his living from the flock and the sycamore-fig grove. His skill with words and the strikingly broad range of his general knowledge of history and the world preclude his being an ignorant peasant. Though his home was in Judah, he was sent to announce God's judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel. The book brings his prophecies together in a carefully organized form intended to be read as a unit.

According to the first verse, Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah over Judah (792-740 BC) and Jeroboam II over Israel (793-753). Both kingdoms were enjoying great prosperity and had reached new political and military heights. It was also a time of idolatry, extravagant indulgence in luxurious living, immorality, corruption of judicial procedures, and oppression of the poor.

### Theme and Message

The dominant theme is clearly stated in Amos 5:24, which calls for social justice as the indispensable expression of true piety. Amos was a vigorous spokesman for God's justice and righteousness, whereas Hosea emphasized God's love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Amos declared that God was going to judge his unfaithful, disobedient, covenant-breaking people. Despite his special choice of Israel and his kindnesses to her during the exodus and conquest and in the days of David and Solomon, his people continually failed to honor and obey him. They thought performance of the rites was all God required, and, with that done, they could do whatever they pleased – an essentially pagan notion. Amos condemns all who make themselves powerful or rich at the expense of others.

God's imminent judgment on Israel would not be a mere punitive blow to warn (as often before), but an almost total destruction. The unthinkable was about to happen: because they had not faithfully consecrated themselves to his lordship, God would uproot his chosen people by the hands of a pagan nation. Even so, if they would repent, there was hope that the Lord God Almighty would have mercy on the remnant. In fact, the Lord had a glorious future for his people, beyond the impending judgment. The house of David would again rule over a reconstituted Israel, for the Messiah, David's greater Son, would bring in the kingdom of God – a reality typified by the history of Israel. The God of Israel, the Lord of history, would not abandon his chosen people or his chosen program of redemption.

### Blessings for Readers

Amos demonstrates the character of God's justice, which punishes not only the nations for their sins but also his Old Testament people, Israel and Judah. The Lord insists that people of all nations, classes, and incomes treat one another responsibly and mercifully in accordance with his word. Though Amos focuses on the law's condemnation and the imminent fall of Israel, he concludes with a prophecy of the coming Savior and a note of enduring hope.