

Amos

Amos prophesied during reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel (786-746 B.C.E.), during height of Israel's prosperity & power—contemporary of Hosea, though probably somewhat earlier—Jeroboam's identity as member of Jehu dynasty not important for Amos as it was for Hosea

Amos a native of Tekoa, 5 miles SE of Bethlehem in Judah—traditionally understood to be shepherd & pincher of fruit (7:14b—low social status), but Ugaritic evidence suggests one in charge of flocks, so possibly in Israel on business (cities, not countryside)—7:14a greatly debated passage, but seems to indicate Amos' independence from prophetic guild (sons of the prophets)

two-fold reason for judgment: contempt for God's law (esp. violations of covenant faithfulness to fellow Israelites through gross injustices) & empty religiosity (perfunctory religious observance without corresponding transformation of life)

confrontation with priest Amaziah (7:10-17)—Amos describes his call (7:14-15) as his authority to speak in Yahweh's name

1:1—earthquake seen as God's judgment?

1:2 & 9:11-15 form Judahite frame for book, which otherwise (except 2:4-5) deals exclusively with Israel

1:3-2:16—progression from distantly related nations to more closely related: Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah (secondary: emphasis on law exilic, probably Deuteronomistic)—probably the earliest public prophecies of Amos, since depend on element of surprise—possibly associated in form or in actuality with oracles against foreign nations delivered at New Year's Festival—nations probably accused of crimes committed in past few years

nations condemned for their treatment of people from other nations, perhaps during times of war—failure to live up to covenant obligations (1:9, 11), war crimes (1:3, 13), desecration of the dead (2:1)—Yahweh expects justice in international relations

2:6-8—Israel charged with oppression of poor, greed, sexual immorality, abuse of offerings—four different Heb words used to describe marginalized members of covenant community: righteous (צַדִּיק) (focus on attitude toward God & his law), needy (אַבְיוֹן) & poor (רָעַל) (focus on lack of financial resources), afflicted (עָנִי) (focus on sins committed against them)—God takes up the cause of those least able to fend for themselves (cf. 4:1; 5:7, 11-12; 6:12)—what is significance of "preferential option for the poor" in liberation theology?

2:9-11—recital of Yahweh's history with Israel—recital a form of theology—what stories do we tell of ourselves as individuals, families, nations?

2:12-16—Israel disrespected its history

4:4-5: ironic invitation to come to sanctuaries of Bethel & Gilgal and sin—no condemnation of northern sanctuaries as such (pre-Deuteronomistic), but condemnation of people for failure to recognize Yahweh's attempts to get Israel to repent of its failure to implement social justice

4:6-11—five attempts to get Israel's attention that failed: famine, drought, crop failure, plague, earthquake(?)—result: God's judgment

4:12-13—"prepare to meet your God"—meeting not time of worship & rejoicing, but of terror & judgment

5:18-20—devastation of Day of Yahweh—not what people expected—day of Yahweh's judgment on all who disobey, inc. Israel—reinterpretation of earlier belief in Day of Yahweh as day of judgment on Israel's enemies

5:21-24—theme of book of Amos: God desires justice toward fellow human beings rather than empty religious rituals aimed at God—one cannot maintain a focus on the vertical relationship with God without also maintaining a focus on the horizontal relationship with other people

6:4-7—condemnation of the idle rich, who are more concerned about their next meal or about their evening entertainment than about the danger that confronts the nation because of injustice

five visions:

1. swarm of locusts (7:1-3)
2. fire (7:4-6)
3. plumb-line (7:7-9)
4. summer fruit (8:1-3)—the end is near
5. Yahweh beside altar (9:1-4)—impossibility of escaping judgment of God

progression in intensity of judgment—earlier visions stopped by intercession, but no stopping God's judgment on Israel

9:7-8—Yahweh's concern for all nations leads Amos to see God's hand in the establishment of other nations—what does it mean to be "the chosen people"?—is there only one chosen people?

9:11-15—book ends on positive note of restoration & reversal of fortune for Judah as well as Israel—redactional, but suggests that the editors took Amos's prophecies against Israel as a word against Judah as well, but not the last word