

The Book of Amos

Notes for 11 Jul

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Read: [Amos](#)

Themes

Let's do a small diversion from our study of Kings and take a look at the writings of Amos, a shepherd and fig grower from Judah who prophesied mainly to the northern kingdom of Israel during a time of prosperity. Despite outward success, Amos saw deep moral and spiritual decay. He was *not* a happy man...

1. Social Justice

Social justice is one of the central themes of Amos. Amos condemns:

- Exploitation of the poor
- Corrupt judges
- Dishonest business practices
- Wealth gained through oppression
- Indifference to those in need

One of the book's best-known verses is Amos 5:24:

Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.

Amos insists that true faith in God must be expressed through justice and compassion.

2. God's Judgment

Amos repeatedly warns that Israel's prosperity has made it complacent. God announces judgment because:

- The covenant has been broken.
- The people have rejected God's law.
- The powerful abuse the weak.
- Religious leaders have become corrupt.

The coming Assyrian conquest is presented as God's instrument of judgment.

3. Religious Hypocrisy

Amos sharply criticizes religious observance that is disconnected from moral living. The people offer sacrifices, keep festivals, sing hymns, and attend worship. Yet God rejects these because injustice continues. Amos teaches that worship without righteousness is offensive to God.

4. The Responsibility of God's People

A striking idea in Amos is that Israel's special relationship with God brings greater accountability, not privilege.

You only have I chosen... therefore I will punish you for all your sins. Amos 3:2

Being God's people means living according to God's standards.

5. God's Sovereignty over All Nations

The book opens with judgments against surrounding nations:

- Damascus
- Gaza
- Tyre
- Edom
- Ammon
- Moab

But Amos then turns the harshest criticism toward Judah and especially Israel. The message is that God rules over all peoples, not just Israel, and all nations are accountable to him.

6. The Day of the Lord

Many Israelites expected the Day of the Lord to be a day when God would defeat their enemies. Amos reverses this expectation. For those living unjustly, the Day of the Lord will bring darkness and judgment, not victory. Religious identity alone will not protect them.

7. Hope and Restoration

Although most of Amos is warning, the final verses, Amos 9:11-15, promise restoration.

God promises to:

- Restore the fallen tent of David.
- Rebuild the nation.
- Renew the land.
- Bless his people again.

This ending balances judgment with hope and points to God's faithfulness despite Israel's failures.

Theological Significance

Amos emphasizes that:

- God cares deeply about justice, especially for the poor and vulnerable.
- Worship and ethics cannot be separated.
- Privilege brings responsibility.
- God is sovereign over all nations.
- Judgment is real, but God's ultimate purpose includes restoration.

Discussion

It might be fruitful to treat Amos as a sophisticated theological and literary work rather than simply a collection of moral lessons.

1. Justice as Covenant Faithfulness

Rather than asking only whether Amos is about social justice, explore why injustice is fundamentally a *theological* problem.

- Why is injustice more than merely an ethical failure?
- How are oppression and idolatry connected?
- What does Amos reveal about the covenant obligations of Israel? How do you think modern Israel is doing with these obligations?
- How does Amos define righteousness and justice?

Useful comparisons:

- Deuteronomy 15
- Isaiah 1
- Micah 6
- Jeremiah 7

2. The Theology of Divine Judgment

Amos presents one of the most uncompromising theologies of judgment in the Old Testament. Frankly, I found the book a hard read.

- Is judgment primarily retributive, covenantal, or restorative?
- Why does election increase rather than reduce accountability?
- Does Amos leave room for repentance?

3. Amos and the Problem of Worship

Amos 4-5 offers one of Scripture's strongest critiques of worship.

- What makes worship unacceptable?
- Is Amos rejecting sacrifice itself or sacrifice divorced from justice?
- Think about your own history with 'worship' and 'worship styles' in churches you have attended. What do you think Amos would have to say?

4. Reading Amos Canonically

Later Scripture receives and reuses Amos, especially in [Acts 15](#), where Amos 9 is quoted.

- In Acts 15, why does James interpret the restoration of David's tent as fulfilled in the inclusion of Gentiles?
- Is this typology, fulfilment, or reinterpretation?
- What does this say about reading the Old Testament christologically?

5. The Literary Design of Amos

Amos is carefully structured and rhetorically powerful.

- The oracles against the nations
- The surprising turn against Judah and Israel

- The five visions
- The rhetorical questions
- Possible chiasmic patterns
- The movement from judgment to hope

6. Amos and Political Theology

Israel was prosperous under Jeroboam II, yet Amos presents that prosperity as spiritually dangerous.

- Can a prosperous society be spiritually bankrupt?
- How does Amos critique state religion?
- What are the dangers of nationalism becoming theology?
- What about us?! In the countries and societies where we live...

7. Amos' Portrait of God

Rather than asking only what Amos says about Israel, ask what Amos says about God.

Themes include:

- God as Creator
- God as Covenant Lord
- God as Judge
- God as Universal King
- God as Redeemer
- God as Restorer

The hymnic passages in Amos, such as Amos 4:13, 5:8-9, and 9:5-6, ground ethical demands in God's identity.

8. Justice and Eschatology

The Day of the Lord is a major theme in Amos.

- Why were Israel's expectations wrong?
- How does Amos reshape eschatological hope?

9. Wealth and Economics

Amos offers a powerful critique of economic injustice.

- Debt
- Land
- Luxury
- Markets
- False weights
- Slavery
- Sabbath economics

10. Amos in Christian Theology

Consider how Amos has been interpreted through church history and in modern theological movements.

Examples:

- Augustine (see The City of God, Book XVIII, Chapter 28)
- Calvin (see Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets (1559–1565))
- Liberation theology
- Martin Luther King Jr. (most famously quoting Amos 5:24 in his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.")
- Contemporary evangelical interpretation. How can you square, say, the 'prosperity gospel' and Amos?

Discuss where each tradition illuminates Amos and where it may overemphasize particular themes.

And, most importantly, what did *you* make of it??!