

Amos

Chapter 1

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

Judgment on Israel's Neighbors

2 And he said: “The LORD roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers.” **3** Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. **4** So I will send a fire upon the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad. **5** I will break the gate-bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven, and him who holds the scepter from Beth-eden; and the people of Syria shall go into exile to Kir,” says the LORD. **6** Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom. **7** So I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza, and it shall devour her strongholds. **8** I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod, and him who holds the scepter from Ashkelon; I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish,” says the Lord GOD. **9** Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they delivered up a whole people to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. **10** So I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, and it shall devour her strongholds.” **11** Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever. **12** So I will send a fire upon Teman, and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah.” **13** Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border. **14** So I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour her strongholds, with shouting on the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind; **15** and their king shall go into exile, he and his princes together,” says the LORD.

Chs 1–2 Text moves in a circle, pronouncing judgment on Israel’s neighbors one by one (1:3–2:3) before finally taking aim at Judah (2:4–5) and then Israel (2:6–16). By structuring each oracle in chs 1–2 along similar lines, Amos not only builds dramatic tension but also emphasizes that God’s people are acting no better than their pagan neighbors. (TLSB)

1:1 *The words ... which he saw.* Amos received God’s Word through visions. Joel and Zephaniah, e.g., simply report that “the word of the LORD” came to them (e.g., Jl 1:1; Zep 1:1). (TLSB)

Amos. Apparently a shortened form of a name like Amasiah (2Ch 17:16), meaning “The LORD carries” or “The LORD upholds.” (CSB)

He was not a man of the court like Isaiah, or a priest like Jeremiah. He earned his living from the flock and the sycamore-fig grove (1:1; 7:14–15). Whether he owned the flocks and groves or only worked as a hired hand is not known. 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 (Israel). He probably ministered for the most part

at Bethel (7:10–13; see note on Ge 12:8), Israel’s main religious sanctuary, where the upper echelons of the northern kingdom worshiped.

The book brings his prophecies together in a carefully organized form intended to be read as a unit. It offers few, if any, clues as to the chronological order of his spoken messages—he may have repeated them on many occasions to reach everyone who came to worship. The book is addressed also to the southern kingdom (hence the references to Judah and Jerusalem).

shepherds. † The Hebrew for this word occurs elsewhere in the OT only in reference to the king of Moab (2Ki 3:4, where it is translated “raised sheep”). Cf. 7:14, where a different Hebrew word is used. Amos was not a professional prophet who earned his living from his ministry; he was not a functionary of religious institutions. (CSB)

Like David, another famous character from the same region, Amos worked as a shepherd before the Lord called him as a prophet. (TLSB)

Tekoa. A small town about 6 miles south of Bethlehem and 11 miles from Jerusalem. (CSB)

saw. Received by divine revelation. (CSB)

earthquake. Evidently a major shock, long remembered, and probably the one mentioned in Zec 14:5. Reference to the earthquake suggests that the author viewed it as a kind of divine reinforcement of the words of judgment. (CSB)

If scholars are correct in dating this quake to c 760 BC, then we can specify the time of Amos’s ministry more precisely. Given that his oracles warn that this earthquake is impending (8:8; 9:1, 5), we can reasonably assume that he gave these warnings in the years just prior to this upheaval. This seismic event was so unforgettable that the prophet Zechariah could refer to it several centuries later and count on people recognizing his mention of “the earthquake in the days of Uzziah” (14:5). Archaeologists have found evidence of the earthquake’s destructive effects at Hazor. (TLSB)

Uzziah. Mention of these two long-reigning monarchs provides evidence that Amos’s ministry took place between c 792 and 740 BC. (TLSB)

Jeroboam. See Introduction: Date and Historical Situation. (CSB)

1:2–2:16 A series of oracles against the nations. After pronouncing judgments on Israel’s neighbors for various atrocities—judgments that Israel would naturally applaud—Amos announces God’s condemnation of his own two kingdoms for despising God’s laws. His listing of Israel’s sins under the same form of indictment used against the other nations shockingly pictures Israel’s sins alongside those of her pagan neighbors. (CSB)

1:2 A thematic verse, ominously announcing the main thrust of Amos’s message. (CSB)

roars. Amos, a shepherd, was sent to Israel to warn her that he had heard a lion roar and that the lion is none other than the Lord himself, who has only wanted to be Israel’s shepherd. For the use of this imagery in other contexts see Jer 25:30; Joel 3:16. (CSB)

Amos compares his prophetic revelations to the terrifying roar of a lion. Such imagery commanded Israel’s undivided attention and hints that this prophet’s words focus on judgment. (TLSB)

from Zion. The Lord established his earthly throne in Jerusalem, among his special people, and from there he announces his judgments on them, as well as on the other nations. (CSB)

Synonymous with Jerusalem, the site of the Davidic throne and Solomon's temple. (TLSB) God's judgment will produce a drought that devastates Judah's grazing lands. Carmel. Mountain in the Northern Kingdom; notorious site for Baal worship. Amos urges Israel to turn away from idols and return to the Lord, whose temple is in Jerusalem. withers. Verb and image it conveys effectively ridicule Baal, the Canaanite storm-god. Carmel, the peak dedicated to this phony lord of rain and fertility, would soon be parched and bare. (TLSB)

pastures ... top of Carmel. From the driest portion of the land to the greenest, the Lord's judgment will be felt like a severe drought that devastates the whole land. (CSB)

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1:3 *For three transgressions ... four.* For their many sins, especially the one named; see also vv. 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6. For similar numerical expressions see Pr 6:16; 30:15, 18, 21, 29; Mic 5:5. (CSB)

This expression recurs throughout the oracles of the first two chapters (1:3–5, 6–8, 9–10, 11–12, 13–15; 2:1–3, 4–5, 6–16). It implies an ongoing escalation of wickedness during Amos's day. (TLSB)

The writers may name three comparable things, and then he particularly emphasizes the fourth. Amos does not mention the first three sins of the nations. They have actually sinned many more times than that. By repeatedly disobeying the law which the Creator God wrote in their hearts, they have deserved His judgment. The emphasis falls on the fourth sin – the offense which brings God's long patience to an end and opens the floodgates of judgment. (PBC)

will not revoke the punishment – literally, by way of parenthesis, "not will I reverse it," both threat and punishment being irrevocable. (Kretzmann)

Recurring phrase and constituent part of the oracles of Amos's opening chapters (1:6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). This vow underlines that the Lord will not rescind the judgment being pronounced. (TLSB)

Damascus. Capital of the Aramean state directly north of Israel and a constant enemy in that day. Her crime was brutality to the conquered people of Gilead, Israel's territory east of Galilee. (CSB)

Leading city-state of Aram (modern-day Syria. Conquered by King David c 250 years earlier (2 Sam 8:6), it soon recovered its strength and became a lasting nemesis of Israel (cf 1 Ki 11:23-25; 2 Ki 8:7-15). (TLSB)

Gilead. Northeast of Jerusalem; part of the Northern Kingdom. It sat in the territory separating Israel and Aram and so was among the first places attacked by Damascus. (TLSB)

threshing sledges. Heads of grain were threshed by driving a wooden sledge fitted with sharp teeth over the cut grain. (CSB)

Attacks of Damascus on Israel are likened to metal-toothed devices used for ripping the wheat from the chaff on the threshing-room floor. (TLSB)

1:4 *send fire ... that shall devour.* A common description of the threat of divine judgment, usually carried out by a devastating war that resulted in the burning of major cities and fortresses. See the judgments mentioned in Jer 17:27; 49:27; 50:32; Hos 8:14. (CSB)

Destruction by fire is another common thread in the oracles of judgment appearing in chs 1–2. In all but one of these oracles, the Lord threatens to punish by fire (1:7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5). Given that Hazael became king of Syria after murdering Ben-hadad and usurping his throne (2Ki 8:7–15), the penalty here pronounced seems fitting. (TLSB)

Hazael. King of Damascus c. 842–796 B.C. and founder of a new line of kings (see 2Ki 8:7–15). (CSB)

strongholds. Perhaps referring to the fortress-like palatial dwellings of the rich and powerful. (CSB)

Though made of stone, the fortresses at Damascus would be devoured by the fire of God’s judgment. (TLSB)

Ben-Hadad. Son of Hazael (2Ki 13:24) and the second king with this name (cf. 2Ki 8:14–15), ruling c. 796–775. (CSB)

1:5 *will break the gate-bar* – The was the bar that secured the fortress gates of a city (cf 1 Ki 4:13). Once a city’s gate-bar broke, its overthrow was all but guaranteed. (TLSB)

Valley of Aven. Possibly the Beqaa Valley between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains, but may refer to the river valley in which Damascus is located, calling it the “valley of wickedness.” (CSB)

Location uncertain, but most likely “Valley of Lebanon” spoken of in Jsh 11:17. It extended along the northern border of Israel. *Aven.* Hbr “vanity,” “idolatry”; wordplay (i.e., “valley of sin” or “valley of idolatry”). (TLSB)

scepter. Symbol of kingship, thus referring to the reigning power. (TLSB)

Beth Eden. Probably Damascus, the garden spot of that region. (CSB)

Aramean city-state north of Damascus, on the banks of the Euphrates. (TLSB)

Syria. Also called Aram; empire north of Israel. Its leading city-state was Damascus. (TLSB)

go into exile. To be forcibly removed from one’s land and taken captive by a conqueror. Such forced relocations were common in ancient conquests. (TLSB)

Kir. An unidentified place, possibly in the vicinity of Elam (2Ki 16:9; Isa 22:6), from which the Arameans of Damascus are said to have come (9:7). (CSB)

ation uncertain; the place where the Syrians originated. The Syrians would lose their kingdom and be reduced to their place of origin. (TLSB)

This prophecy was fulfilled when the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser took the city of Damascus and dissolved the Syrian kingdom. Cp. 2 Kings 16, 9. (Kretzmann)

1:6 Gaza. One of the five Philistine cities (See map of “Five Cities of the Philistines”); it guarded the entry to Palestine from Egypt. (CSB)

Main city in Philistia, located southwest of Israel and Judah, along the coast of the Great Sea. (TLSB)

whole people. Not just warriors captured in battle. The reference may be to villages in south Judah on the trade route from Edom to Gaza. (CSB)

to Edom. See v. 9; trading the people like cattle to another country. (CSB)

Kingdom south of Judah. The Edomites descended from Esau and thus from Abraham, through Isaac (Gn 25:23–26; Dt 2:4). (TLSB)

1:7 send a fire – Amos threatens Gaza with the same fiery destruction as Damascus (v. 4). (TLSB)

Gaza – Gaza being a proud and rich city. (Kretzmann)

1:8 Ashdod ... Ashkelon ... Ekron. Three more cities of the Philistine group (see note on v. 6). Gath, the fifth (cf. 6:2), may already have been subdued by Uzziah (see 2Ch 26:6). (CSB)

Along with Gaza (v 6), these are renowned strongholds of the Philistines. List conveys that all of Philistia will be punished. (TLSB)

1:9 Tyre. The senior Phoenician merchant city, allied to Israel by a “treaty of brotherhood” in the days of David (1Ki 5:1), later in the time of Solomon (1Ki 5:12) and later still during the reign of Ahab, whose father-in-law ruled Tyre and Sidon (1Ki 16:30–31). (CSB)

Port city northwest of Israel; important city-state in Phoenicia. (TLSB)

shall devour her strongholds. Her crime was like Philistia’s (v. 6). (CSB)

Tyre was known for engaging in the slave trade. In particular, Amos is rebuking Tyre for the role it would play in selling Israelite slaves when the northern tribes fell to Assyria in 722 BC. (TLSB)

covenant of brotherhood. Israel and Tyre made a covenant during the days of King Solomon (1Ki 5:1–12; cf 2Sm 5:11). Motivated by greed, the people of Tyre would soon violate that agreement. (TLSB)

1:10 wall. Tyre was an almost impregnable island, boastful of her security (cf. Eze 26:1–28:19). (CSB)

The prophecy being fulfilled during the Babylonian and Grecian conquests. (Kretzmann)

1:11 Edom. The nation descended from Esau (Ge 36; cf. Ge 25:23–30; 27:39–40). (CSB)

Archenemy of Israel, who would be sure to treat the captive Israelites with the highest degree of cruelty. (Kretzmann)

Sadly, biblical history is full of accounts about Edom making war against Israel (1Sm 14; 2Sm 8:12–14; 1Ki 11:14–22; 2Ki 8:20–22). (TLSB)

brother. Israel (cf. Ob 8–10). Reference may be to treaty “brother” (see note on v. 9). Edom’s crime was in violating this relationship by persistent hostility. (CSB)

cast off all pity. Wordplay. Literally, Edom “destroyed [Israel’s] wombs through brutal treatment and murder of Israelite women. (TLSB)

Refusing, also in this instance, to give them any consideration after once their doom was decided upon. (Kretzmann)

anger tore – This presents an image of an animal tearing at its prey. The prophet thus characterizes Edom’s attacks on Israel as unrelentingly vicious. (TLSB)

perpetually – Edom would never end its outpouring of rage against Israel.. (TLSB)

1:12 *Teman ... Bozrah*. Major cities of Edom, the former thought to be near Petra, the latter now identified with Buseirah, 37 miles to the north. With their destruction, Edom would lose its capacity for continual warfare. (CSB)

Edom’s northernmost city. Amos hints that Edom will suffer widespread, or even complete, destruction. (TLSB)

1:13 *Ammonites*. Judgment centered on Rabbah, modern Amman. Greed for land bred a brutal genocide that would be punished by a tumult of men and nature, leaving the state without leaders to continue such practices. (CSB)

People east of the Jordan. (TLSB)

ripped open pregnant women. Ammon’s enmity against Israel will express itself in brutal attacks against women and children. Sadly, Israel suffered this fate more than once. (TLSB)

enlarge their border – Taking possession once more of the territory gained by the tribes of Israel east of Jordan, Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. (Kretzmann)

Ammon attempted to capture territory from the Israelites. (TLSB)

1:14 *Rabbah*. Hbr “great”; Ammon’s capital city (cf 1Ch 20:1). (TLSB)

tempest ... whirlwind. Ammon’s judgment is coming in a terrible storm. Ammon will suffer a complete collapse in battle, and this defeat should be understood as divine punishment. (TLSB)

Fulfilled through the Assyrians. (CSB)

1:15 *king shall go into exile* – Defeat of the Ammonites will be such that even their royalty will be captured and carried away. (TLSB)