

Amos

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Amos

Introduction

Date and Authorship

- Amos tells us right off the bat the date of his ministry: "in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake." This places him in 8th century BC. Jeroboam ruled from about 783 BC to 745 BC. The comment about the earthquake doesn't help too much except that this earthquake is also mentioned in Zechariah 14:5 as having taken place during the reign of King Uzziah where the prophet says that when the final battle comes the people will flee as they did during the earthquake. The quake must have been enormous for it to be mentioned by both prophets and for Amos to use it as a means of dating, just like we might when thinking about the San Francisco earthquake or Hurricane Katrina, an event everyone would remember and date their lives by. Amos did not say it was two years before AN earthquake, but THE earthquake!
- Amos is never mentioned by any other Biblical writer. All the information we have about him comes from his own little book. His name means "burdened" or "burden bearer". It must not have been a common name as the name Amos is only mentioned one other place in the Bible, in Luke 3:25, where it refers to someone other than the prophet, an ancestor of Jesus' earthly father Joseph.
- Amos says he is from Tekoa, a small village which is now mostly a cluster of ruins sitting on a hilltop some six miles south of Bethlehem, 11 miles south of Jerusalem and 18 miles west of the Dead Sea. The ruins suggest that Jeroboam had fortified the town as an outer defense of Jerusalem. Second Chronicles 20:20 tells us that King Jehoshaphat led his army into the "wilderness of Tekoa" to meet the armies of Moab and Ammon. Amos therefore was not a citizen of the Northern Kingdom, but a southerner, who would not be warmly welcomed in the north on a good occasion!
- We think of a wilderness as being heavily forested but in the Bible, wilderness basically means desert. The area around Tekoa is rocky, desolate, with sharp limestone hills. If then Amos was a shepherd, such an area would not sustain a large flock, requiring him to further support himself by being a grower/picker of sycamore figs (7:14), which was a poor, cheap fruit that only poor people would buy.
- So the picture we have of the man is that of a man of the outdoors, a man of courage who is willing to lay down his life for his flock. He is a man with a keen eye and sharp ears, with great powers of

observation. Here is a man who knows how to survive on little. He's tougher than a \$2 steak and not easily backed down.

Purpose

- Amos introduces a new element in the story of God's prophets. There had been others before him: Elijah, Elisha, and Nathan, but Amos comes with a new word from God, a word of judgement signaling God wrath on His people, like a parent angry with His rebellious children. This new word would be spoken declaring the end of the Kingdom of Israel. The nation of the Jews had split with the Kingdom of Judah in the south and the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the northern kingdom had so thoroughly broken its covenant with God that the time had come for the consequences of their actions.
- During this time the two Jewish kingdoms were getting along quite well and together they were becoming quite rich, but not everyone was enjoying the economic boom. The Occupy Wall Street protests a few years ago where common people were protesting against the economic gap where the top 1% holds the majority of the capital were protesting a situation as old as humanity itself. It was here that the wealthy and ruling classes of Jews began to mold the Law of Moses so that the Law would conform to their lifestyle, rather than them conforming to the Law, a practice that Jesus raged against nearly 800 years later. The ethic of a pure heart and clean hands had been replaced by the evidence that was: if I am rich then I am blessed by God, whereas if you are poor, you are cursed by God, therefore I am justified and you are condemned.
- Thus Amos is coming with a word from God. He is not there to reform his country. The Northern Kingdom is not his home. He is there because God came to him and gave him a word to speak, a punitive word of judgement.

Why Amos is important

- The message of Amos is virtually a precursor to the message of Jesus. The first word Jesus spoke as He began His ministry was "Repent!" And in that repentance was the first step toward restoration. Amos takes his listeners down into the darkness of judgement and pain so that they come to repentance, but then leads them out of the Valley and back into the light as at the end of God's punishment for the sin of Israel comes restoration and redemption. In the end, the message of Amos is a message of hope and forgiveness. It is a very New Testament type message, straight from the heart of God! Here we see God closely involved with the human struggle, but He sees us all in the light of His divine sovereignty. What is our wealth and our great accomplishments next to God? Thus, what Amos wants us to see is that true worth and value are to be found not in bank accounts or colossal feats of engineering, but in utter and complete surrender to God, where we discover the Truth, the Way, and the Life.