Amos
Scripture: Amos
Code: MSB30

Title

As with each of the Minor Prophets, the title comes from the name of the prophet to whom God gave His message (1:1). Amos' name means "burden" or "burden-bearer." He is not to be confused with Amoz ("stout, strong"), the father of Isaiah (Is. 1:1).

Author and Date

Amos was from Tekoa, a small village 10 mi. S of Jerusalem. He was the only prophet to give his occupation before declaring his divine commission. He was not of priestly or noble descent, but worked as a "sheepbreeder" (1:1; cf. 2 Kin. 3:4) and a "tender of sycamore fruit" (7:14) and was a contemporary of Jonah (2 Kin. 14:25), Hosea (Hos. 1:1), and Isaiah (Is. 1:1). The date of writing is mid-eighth century B.C., during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah (ca. 790–739 B.C.) and Jeroboam II, king of Israel (ca. 793–753 B.C.), two years before a memorable earthquake (1:1; cf. Zech. 14:5, ca. 760 B.C.).

Background and Setting

Amos was a Judean prophet called to deliver a message primarily to the northern tribes of Israel (7:15). Politically, it was a time of prosperity under the long and secure reign of Jeroboam II who, following the example of his father Joash (2 Kin. 13:25), significantly "restored the territory of Israel" (2 Kin. 14:25). It was also a time of peace with both Judah (cf. 5:5) and her more distant neighbors; the ever-present menace of Assyria was subdued earlier that century because of Nineveh's repentance at the preaching of Jonah (Jon. 3:10). Spiritually, however, it was a time of rampant corruption and moral decay (4:1; 5:10–13; 2 Kin. 14:24).

Historical and Theological Themes

Amos addresses Israel's two primary sins: 1) an absence of true worship, and 2) a lack of justice. In the midst of their ritualistic performance of worship, they were not pursuing the Lord with their hearts (4:4,5; 5:4–6) nor following His standard of justice with their neighbors (5:10–13; 6:12). This apostasy, evidenced by continual, willful rejection of the prophetic message of Amos, is promised divine judgment. Because of His covenant, however, the Lord will not abandon Israel altogether, but will bring future restoration to the righteous remnant (9:7–15).

Interpretive Challenges

In 9:11, the Lord promised that He “will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down.” At the Jerusalem Council, convened to discuss whether Gentiles should be allowed into the church without requiring circumcision, James quotes this passage (Acts 15:15,16) to support Peter’s report of how God had “visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). Some have thus concluded that the passage was fulfilled in Jesus, the greater Son of David, through whom the dynasty of David was reestablished. The Acts reference, however, is best seen as an illustration of Amos’ words and not the fulfillment. The temporal allusions to a future time (“On that day,” 9:11), when Israel will “possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles” (9:12), when the Lord “will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them” (9:15), all make it clear that the prophet is speaking of Messiah’s return at the Second Advent to sit upon the throne of David (cf. Is. 9:7), not the establishment of the church by the apostles.

Outline

I. Judgments Against the Nations (1:1–2:16)

A. Introduction (1:1, 2)

B. Against Israel’s Enemies (1:3–2:3)

C. Against Judah (2:4, 5)

D. Against Israel (2:6–16)

II. Condemnations Against Israel (3:1–6:14)

A. Sin of Irresponsibility (3:1–15)

B. Sin of Idolatry (4:1–13)

C. Sin of Moral/Ethical Decay (5:1–6:14)

III. Visions of Judgment and Restoration (7:1–9:15)

A. The Lord Will Spare (7:1–6)

1. Vision of locusts (7:1–3)

2. Vision of fire (7:4–6)

B. The Lord Will No Longer Spare (7:7–9:10)

1. Vision of the plumb line (7:7–9)

2. Historical interlude (7:10–17)

3. Vision of the fruit basket (8:1–14)

4. Vision of the altar (9:1–10)

C. The Lord Will Restore (9:11–15)

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