

AMOS – the farmer prophet

Amos tells us he prophesied, like Hosea, in the reign of King Jeroboam the Second. He explains in chapter 7:14 that he was not a professional prophet, but was called from his normal farming job to go across the border from Judah where he lived to deliver a message from God to the Northern Kingdom.

His opening words would be appreciated by his audience, for he spoke of God's judgments falling on the enemies of Israel for their cruelty. Syria to the north, the Philistines on the west, Ammon and Moab eastwards, and Edom in the south each felt the lash of his tongue. Next he condemned his own people, Judah, and warned that the people of Jerusalem would be punished for lies and lawlessness. We can imagine his listeners solemnly nodding their heads in approval at all this. But then their faces would darken, because he swung round upon them, and for the next seven chapters poured out God's anger on the Ten Tribe kingdom for their open immorality and idolatry. They were prosperous. They had money to enjoy two houses each, one for summer and one for winter, fashionably decorated with ivory. They lay on couches and listened to the latest pop songs and anointed themselves with anti-wrinkle cream. But they had no time for the God who had brought them out of slavery in Egypt.

Amos' figures of speech are drawn from his farm background, and illustrate what life was like in Israel 2500 years ago. He sees a man escape from first a lion and then a bear, but when he runs into his house a snake bites him. He follows a lion running away from a shepherd with the legs of a lamb in its mouth. He watches locusts descend to gobble up the precious pasture that was just starting to

grow again after the king had taken the first mowing. He is shown a basket of late summer fruit. Each theme is used to illustrate God's coming judgments on Israel.

Before long the priest in charge of King Jeroboam's idol worship attacked the prophet. *"Go home to Judah"*, he said. *"Do your prophesying there!"* Amos replied that he was not a professional preacher, but a farmer, taken from his herds and orchards and sent by God to prophesy against the Ten Tribe kingdom. God had seen their oppression of the poor, their greed to get on with business the moment the Sabbath was over, and the undersized weights on their shop scales. A time of judgment was coming when the divine judge would drop a plumb line (a line with a weight on the bottom to check if something is upright) into their cities, and take out all that were not upright. Then there would be a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.

In one of his most powerful statements, Amos declares

"Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground."
Amos 9:8

That is a principle. God looks down on the nations of the earth, and sorrowfully measures the depths of their depravity, until the time comes when He can stand them no more. That day is very near for our society, and His plumb line will go through the millions who mock at His words, separating out for His Kingdom the few who love Him.

Typically, Amos at once looks ahead to the Kingdom, a time when King David's capital will be restored, when Gentile nations would be called by God's name, and farmers like Amos would rejoice

because there would be such heavy crops the ploughman would overtake the reaper. As for Israel, shaken among the nations like pebbles in a wheat sieve (verse 9), Amos concludes

“I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they

shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,’ says the LORD your God.” (verse 14, 15)

© Copyright David Pearce, used with permission.