

A Study of the Minor Prophets
The Book of Amos ~ Introduction and Chapter 1
Lesson 1

- I. Introduction: Amos preached in an environment of unparalleled prosperity for the upper class of Israel, though the vast majority of people still lived in poverty and oppression. The political expansion of Jeroboam II ensured a false sense of geopolitical security (see 2 Kings 14:23–29); the Assyrian Empire was temporarily subdued by its own internal strife, and Israel had little to fear from other external threats. The ruling class had come to see their blessings as a sign of God’s favor, yet they were blind to the suffering of the population they suppressed. Moreover, they were blind to the coming wrath of God. What seemed nearly impossible during the reign of Jeroboam II—the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel—was actually only decades away.

- II. Structure of Amos: Following an introduction (1:1) and summary oracle (1:2), the main body of Amos consists of three sets of judgment oracles (1:3–2:16; 3:1–4:12; 5:1–6:14), five visions (7:1–3; 7:4–6; 7:7–9; 8:1–3; 9:1–4), and a concluding salvation oracle (9:11–15). The first set of oracles utilizes numerical formulas to proclaim judgment against the nations, ultimately functioning as an indictment against Israel. The second set of judgment speeches contain rhetorical disputation, courtroom imagery, and biting sarcasm, and the third set of oracles uses a combination of lament and woe speeches to proclaim the impending death of Israel. In the first pair of visions (7:1–6), Amos intercedes for the nation after receiving a vision of their coming destruction. In the second pair (7:7–9; 8:1–3) judgment is inevitable, and there is no prophetic intercession given. Interwoven between these visions are Amos’s announcement of judgement. The fifth vision is independent of the prior four. Of significant interest to the structure and theology of Amos are the hymns that exalt the power of Yahweh and bring attention to the reverence due to his name (4:13; 5:8–9; 9:5–6). Each hymn celebrates his role as a divine warrior, fully capable of bringing judgment to Israel in the most cataclysmic way.

- III. The introduction to the book of Amos contains helpful clues in determining an approximate date for Amos’s prophetic ministry. Reference to Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam II, king of Israel, narrows the range for Amos’s ministry to 767–753 BC. In addition to establishing a historical context, the introduction to the book provides a glimpse into the personal background of the prophet. Amos was a citizen of Judah called to prophesy to the upper-class rulers of Israel. He was an outcast, a foreigner living among people who were not his own. Nor was he a prophet by profession. Amos was a “sheep breeder” and tender of “sycamore figs,” called by God out of his rural homeland to prophesy to the hostile leadership of Israel.