

Survey of the Old Testament

Amos

1. Amos was from Tekoa (about 10 miles south of Jerusalem; 6 miles south of Bethlehem).
2. Amos was a shepherd, and he tended sycamore fruit. Certain kinds of sycamore trees in Palestine bore figs, a fruit that was inferior to true figs. These trees grew in lower, warmer climates – thus in the plains and not in the mountains. These figs were pierced through to help them ripen. This was part of the normal work of Amos.
3. Amos did this prophetic work during the reigns of Jeroboam the son of Joash (Jeroboam II) in Israel and Uzziah (also called Azariah) in Judah.
 - a. Uzziah reigned c. 791-740 BC.
 - b. Jeroboam reigned c. 790-750 BC.
4. He dated his work two years before the earthquake. We do not know the time of this catastrophe, so it does not help us date Amos. This kind of a specific reference tends to indicate that Amos' work as a prophet was short-lived.
5. Under Jeroboam II Israel regained some prominence in that it retook some of its land and eventually became somewhat prosperous (cf. 2 Kgs. 14:25). Because of this, some date Amos' prophecy during the latter part of Jeroboam's reign, perhaps during the 760's BC.
6. Amos said he was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet.
 - a. "Son of a prophet" referred to a prophet training school of sorts (cf. 2 Kgs. 6:1).
 - 1) This is difficult, partly because we are not told much about the sons of the prophets.
 - 2) Prophets were chosen by God and inspired; so it seems difficult to imagine a "prophets-in-training" arrangement.
 - 3) The sons of the prophets, however, seemed to live with a prophet and to follow the guidance of the prophet. They were not the literal offspring of the prophet.
 - b. Amos seems to be denying that he was a prophet by trade (as contrasted with the charge of Amaziah in 7:12-13) or even a prophet in training. Some prophets gave their lives to this work (like Jonah); Amos seems to have taken a short break from his shepherding and sycamore tending to preach this message to Israel. This was not his "career."
7. Amos was specifically sent from Judah to Israel to proclaim this message.
8. Note the structure:
 - a. Chapters 1-2 – Oracles against the nations and Israel ("Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions and for four...")
 - b. Chapters 3-5 – Messages against Israel ("Hear this word...")
 - c. Chapters 7-9 – Visions of doom ("This is what the Lord God showed me...")