

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: AMOS 1:1**

To learn about the prophet Amos, and to distinguish between prophecy in the Old and New Testaments.

## An Introduction to Prophetic Writing

There is, perhaps, nothing more intimidating than studying the prophets of the Old Testament. Unlike the more narrative oriented books of Scripture (i.e. Genesis, Judges, Kings, etc.), the prophets pronounce judgements against peoples and kings that are often confounding to the modern reader. Yet, the New Testament regularly quotes them, and even the Apostle Peter himself said that we, “should remember the predictions of the holy prophets” (2 Pet. 3:2). Prophetic writing is fundamental to understanding not only the first coming of the Messiah, but the second coming as well.

Prophetic ministry in the Old Testament can essentially be defined as *communicating the words of God to a specific audience*. In Exodus 7:1, Yahweh tells Moses that Aaron will be a prophet in that he will communicate to Pharaoh the words that Yahweh communicates to Moses. Moses is, of course, the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, and second only to Jesus (Deut. 34:10-12). The Old Testament does have a specific designation for prophetic writing. In Hebrew, the Old Testament is referred to as The Tanakh, which is an acronym for the three distinct types of literature contained in. *Ta* stands for *Torah* (Teaching, or the law). *Na* stands for the *Nevi'im* (the prophets). *Kh* stands for *Ketuvim* (the writings). Along with the Law and the Writings, the Prophets serve as a major portion of the Old Testament, underlining the importance of their contribution. In their writings, there are several words that are used to refer to God. The Hebrew term *Elohim* is the more generic term for God and is also used for false gods as well. Therefore, you will see it translated as either *God* or *god*. The more specific, covenant name of God in Hebrew is *Yahweh*, which your English Bible typically translates in all caps as LORD. There is another word that means, “lord” in Hebrew, the word *Adonai*, and so it will also be translated, “lord,” but not capitalized.

The overarching pattern of the messages of the prophets is usually very similar, regardless of the prophet. Usually the cycle goes something like this: 1. *You have sinned, and Yahweh is calling you to repentance*, 2.

Since you have chosen not to repent, you will face judgment for your sin, and, 3. There is still hope for you beyond this judgment. Regardless of which the time or location, the prophets all pretty much carry this same basic formula, just customized to their situation. Amos is no exception. Amos prophesies to the northern kingdom of Israel, they are unwilling to repent, Amos warns of God's impending judgment through the Assyrian nation, and yet there are future promises guaranteed even in spite of the judgment coming to them.

## When Did This Happen?

Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah (783–742 B.C.) in Judah and Jeroboam II (786–746 B.C.) in Israel. While it doesn't help us give a precise year, contemporaries of Amos would have understood exactly when he ministered by the next phrase, "two years before the great earthquake" (Amos 1:1). This phrasing has led many scholars to speculate the length of Amos' ministry as well. How long was Amos an acting prophet? Some have speculated as little as a few days, to a month, to possibly over a year. It doesn't seem likely that it was much longer than that, but there is no precise way of knowing. It is also interesting to note that a couple contemporaries of Amos included the prophets Jonah and Hosea as well. Additionally, Isaiah's ministry was in operation when King Uzziah died (Is. 6:1). There is a chance Isaiah was aware of the ministry of the other prophets.

## Who Is Amos?

Very little is actually known of Amos. He is described as one, "who was among the shepherds of Tekoa" (Amos 1:1). This particular Tekoa is probably the Judahite village about ten miles south of Jerusalem, not the Galilean Tekoa mentioned elsewhere in the Talmud. Being a southerner, one would expect his prophetic ministry to be geared towards Judah, but he is concerned with prophesying first about the surrounding nations, and primarily the northern kingdom of Israel. He is called, "a shepherd," which is a relatively common profession for prophets (although Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Ezra were priests). However, this particular Hebrew word is only found one other time in the Old Testament to describe Mesha, the king of Moab (2 Kgs. 3:4). In this passage, Mesha supplied the king of Israel with the wool of a hundred thousand rams. The idea here, then, is that both Mesha and Amos were both shepherders and, by extension, sheep breeders as well.

## The Prophetic Method of Amos

Prophecy does not always work the same way in the Old Testament. Some prophets *heard* the words of God as they write them (Hos. 1:1; Jon. 1:1; Mic. 1:1). Sometimes the revelation they received came through *sight* (Hab. 1:1). Sometimes they saw them specifically through *visions* (Ob. 1:1; Nah. 1:1). Amos falls into this category: "The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel" (Amos 1:1). The visions that Amos received were enough to qualify him as a prophet. It's important to understand that what qualified a prophet then had very little to do with formal training or education, and everything to do with receiving revelation from God.

## A Note About Prophecy

With the New Testament also in view, it is also important to make the distinction between prophecy in the Old Testament and prophecy in the New Testament. Prophecies are held to a standard of perfection in the Old Testament. If a prophet gives a prophecy that *does not* fully come to pass, they are to be put to death (Deut. 18:20-22). Additionally, if a prophet speaks and the prophecy *does* come true, but they attempt to sway the

people into idolatry, they are to be put to death as well (Deut. 13:1-5). Why? Because prophets speak on behalf of God Himself (Deut. 18:18-19; Num. 22:38; Jer. 1:9; Ezek. 2:7). Prophets of the Old Testament are the mouthpiece for God to communicate divine revelation to His people. To disobey a prophet is to disobey God Himself. So their clarity and precision is necessary to *prove* their veracity as a prophet.

The New Testament departs from this standard considerably. To disobey a prophet was not the same thing as disobeying God Himself, and they were not always held to a standard of total perfection. For example, in Acts 21:4, the people prophesy to Paul to not go to Jerusalem, and yet Paul does not listen to them. Additionally, in Acts 21:10-11, the prophet Agabus warns Paul that the Jews in Jerusalem would bind him and "deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." This prophecy is almost correct, but not quite. It is actually the Romans who bind Paul, and the Jews, instead of delivering him voluntarily, are actually the ones who try to kill him. In 1 Thess. 5:19-21, Paul tells the church: "Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good." How can Paul tell the body to test prophecies and only hold to those which are true and good, if all prophecy must be fully true? This passage only makes sense if there is an assumption that portions of prophecy will be true and others might not be. This also means that prophecy in the New Testament does not hold the same kind of authority as it did in the Old Testament. Paul also tells the Corinthians: "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh (or evaluate) what is said" (1 Cor. 14:29). What need is there for evaluation of the words of prophets if all of them are always true?

This brings up, then, an important question. Why did the standards change? My answer to you is that they did not change, but that the title of prophet in the Old Testament is not equivalent to the title of prophet in the New Testament. There is, in fact, another title in the New Testament that correlates to the Old Testament prophets: The apostles. Anytime Paul appeals to his God given authority, he does so by appealing to his apostleship (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1, 9:1-2; 2 Cor. 1:1, 11:12-13, et al.). It is the apostles, not the prophets, who have the authority to write God's words that form the New Testament Scripture. To disobey an apostle is to disobey God Himself. They are endowed with miraculous signs and wonders in the same way that the Old Testament prophets were, to establish their authority as they warn the people to turn from their sin and back to their Creator. This is why Paul says in Ephesians 2:19-20: "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." God's divine family is built on the foundation of both the prophets of the Old Testament as well as the apostles of the New Testament, both authoritative in their own right, and proclaiming Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone.

This is important because the New Testament speaks of a, "gift of prophecy," and we will not understand how this gift works if we have the wrong idea about what the New Testament means when it speaks of prophecy in general. For now, however, we will focus on the Old Testament definition. Next week, we will begin to dive into the prophetic words of Amos, shepherd of Tekoa.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Amos 1:1. Who is the author of this book? How do you know?

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- 2. Read Amos 1:1. Where is Amos from and what did he do for a profession?

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### Day Two

- 1. Read Amos 1:1. When did Amos prophesy? Who was king of the northern kingdom of Israel? Who was king of the southern kingdom of Judah? What took place two years after he prophesied?

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- 2. According to the notes, who were contemporaries of Amos?

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### Day Three

- 1. Read Amos 1:1. How did Amos receive his revelation?

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- 2. According to the notes, what were some other ways the prophets received revelation?

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### Day Four

- 1. According to the notes, were the Old Testament prophets doing the same thing as the New Testament gift of prophecy? Why or why not?

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- 2. According to the notes, what is the New Testament equivalent of an Old Testament prophet? Why?

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## Week 1 Discussion: A New Study

Kicking off a new study is always so exciting, especially when it's a book of the Bible you've never studied before. It's similar to the feeling of beginning a new diet or fitness plan. However, the real change comes weeks and sometimes months into the plan, when the newness has worn off. Talk as a group about what you hope to get out of this study, what you will need help and encouragement with, and how you feel about studying prophetic literature.

- 1. Icebreaker: Have you ever studied, or even read, the book of Amos?
- 2. Are you intimidated by studying a minor prophet? Why or why not?
- 3. What kind of accountability will you need to get the most out of this study? What would be helpful from your group to push you deeper into studying God's word?
- 4. Do you have any additional thoughts or concerns regarding this study?

## **Takeaways:**

1. Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa in Judah that prophesied primarily to the northern kingdom of Israel.
2. Prophecy in the Old Testament is different from prophecy in the New Testament.
3. The Old Testament prophet is equivalent to the New Testament apostle.

### ***PRAYER REQUESTS:***