

## Who is Amos in the Bible?

Amos was a shepherd and farmer from the Judean village of Tekoa, about five miles south of Bethlehem, who had a vision and became a prophet for the Lord. Amos prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel and Uzziah in Judah (Amos 1:1). This would have been around 760 BC, making him a contemporary of Hosea, Joel, and Isaiah. Amos recorded his prophecies in a book bearing his name. He dates his book to “two years before the earthquake” (Amos 1:1).

Amos was distinctive as a prophet for a couple reasons. First, by his own testimony he was “neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet” when the Lord called him into service (Amos 7:14). That is, he had not been trained as a prophet, nor was he seeking the office. The Lord simply decided to use him. Also, most prophets proclaimed their message to their own nation. Amos was called from the southern kingdom of Judah to proclaim God’s word in the northern kingdom of Israel. In fact, the idolatrous priest of Bethel told Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there” (Amos 7:12).

Amos did prophesy against Israel’s neighbors (Amos 1–2), but most of his message was aimed at Israel itself. It was not a popular message in Israel, as Amos boldly pointed out sin and God’s righteous judgment. Many sentences in the book of Amos begin with something similar to this: “This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent’” (Amos 2:6).

Although a simple shepherd and fruit picker, Amos prophesied with confidence that it was God’s message, not his, that the nations needed to hear. Amos 3:7 reflects his conviction that “surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to

his servants the prophets.” His book is filled with down-to-earth symbols—bird traps, fishhooks, plumb lines, fruit baskets—that help convey the meaning and importance of his prophecies.

We are not told much about his private life or anything about how Amos died, but an apocryphal work called The Lives of the Prophets says that Amos was killed by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel. Amos 7 records the interaction between Amaziah and Amos; Amaziah told the king of Israel that Amos was raising a conspiracy against him, and Amaziah told Amos to leave Bethel and prophesy in Judah instead. Amos obeyed God’s word to continue prophesying in Israel. Part of that prophecy was a personal message of tragedy for Amaziah (Amos 7:17).

Amos is not mentioned by name in any other books of the Bible, but his work is quoted twice in the New Testament, once by Stephen (Acts 7:42–43) and once by James (Acts 15:15–17).

God’s words to Israel in Amos 5:4 are also God’s message to every human being: “Seek me and live.” Although angry with His own people, Israel and Judah, and ready to punish the pagan nations around them, God’s deepest desire was that they would turn from their sins and repent. He desires that for us, too (Matthew 3:2; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 2:5, 21). When we repent, God offers forgiveness and cleansing through His Son, Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 1:9).