**The Author and Date of Writing**

The author of the book is Amos (**1:1**), one of the ‘shepherds’ of Tekoa, a small town about ten miles south of Jerusalem and five miles south of Bethlehem.

He does not consider himself a prophet, nor are any prophets in his lineage **7:14**. The NIV records him as a **shepherd** **1:1** & **7:14** (other translations have **herdsman**) and someone **who takes care of** (**grows/cultivates/collects the fruit of**) **sycamore-fig trees** **7:14**.

Amos comes from the Hebrew word áa„mas, meaning ‘to lift a burden, to carry, burden bearer’.

Amos prophecied **two years before the earthquake** (**Amos 1:11 / Zechariah 14:5**). His writing can be dated around 760-750BC, during the reigns of kings Uzziah (Judah 792-740BC) and Jeroboam (Israel 793-753BC). This is some 150 years after the two kingdoms split following the death of king Solomon.

This is a time of great prosperity, (ironically with thanks to the Assyrian’s who had defeated Syria around 800BC, destroying Israel’s northern enemy), as well as political and military might for both countries, but it came with idolatry, immorality and judicial corruption. Consequently, Amos’ prophecies (along with others) came to fruition for the Northern kingdom in 722BC with invasion and deportation by the Assyrians.

Although Amos refers to an earthquake in **1:1**, historians have been unable to find any independent record of that earthquake, preventing a more precise date to be given.

Amos should not be confused with Amoz, the father of Isaiah (**Isaiah 1:1**).

**Overview of Book**

Despite being from Judah, Amos’ prophecy is directed at Israel, for being insular and loveless in their privileged position and unsurprisingly, this caused problems with the spiritual leaders (Amaziah). The prophecy is also aimed at the surrounding regions, Syria, the Philistines, Tyre, the Edomites and Ammonites (**1:3-15**).

Israel is not repaying God’s love for them – selling people, oppressing the poor and immorality (**2:6-8, 3:10, 4:1, 5:11-12, 8:4-6**).

Amos communicated God’s displeasure for the hypocritical lives of His people (**5:21-24**), but the Book ends with a prophetic promise.

A remnant from Judah (**9:11-15**) will be preserved and restored to their covenant blessing and political prominence, at a time that the Lord would then also draw all nations to Himself.

Within those verses Amos gives a prophecy about the Messiah being the One who will rebuild David’s dynasty (**9:11**) and who will restore His people.

**Amos 1:1 The Author
1 The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa – the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash (Joash)was king of Israel.**

The prophet Amos is only mentioned within this Book. He is not referenced anywhere else in Scripture. Amoz, the father of Isaiah (**Isaiah 1:1**), is both a different person and spelling.

His name varies in meaning between burdensome, burden and burden bearer. Given the message of judgment that he had to deliver to Israel and the surrounding nations, he was a man with a burden.

**…one of the shepherds of Tekoa**. This word translated shepherd (NIV), is translated elsewhere as herdmen and sheepbreeders. Strong’s defines the Hebrew word as a spotter of cattle or sheep, i.e. the owner or one who tends them. It is the same word used of Jacob, when he was looking after Laban’s flocks.

Amos claims no formal theological or prophetic training (**7:14-15**). There was a type of school for prophets at the time, known as the ‘sons of the prophets’ (**1 Kings 20:35, 2 Kings 2:3-15, 4:1, 38)**, but Amos makes no claim to belong to this group. We can presume from the text that he was a simple farmer, who was uniquely called to this ministry, for this period.

**…the vision he saw concerning Israel**. Amos’ prophecy was primarily towards Israel, though his message includes other countries as well.

**Amos 1:2 The message of Amos.**

**2He said: ‘The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up  and the top of Carmel withers.’**

**…The LORD roars from Zion**. This is a message of the Lord’s judgment – against both the Gentile nations, then against Judah and Israel.

**…and thunders from Jerusalem**. Stating that God was speaking from Jerusalem was a reminder to the northern kingdom of Israel that they had set up centres of worship to God (in Dan, Bethel and Gilgal), in disobedience to God.

**…the pastures of the shepherds dry up**. Amos was well aware that many factors needed to all be right for the land to be able to produce its harvest and God’s judgement, in the form of weather (drought or flood), plagues (disease, locusts), or invading armies could affect that process. The certainty that the pastures would provide a crop was finely balanced.

**…the top of Mount Carmel withers**. This was a prominent mountain in the north of Israel, the site of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal **1 Kings 18:19-40**. Elijah lived prior to Amos (around 900BC), so this reference may have been to remind Israel of God’s previous victory over idolatry, but on this occasion there is no prospect of spiritual victory.

**Amos 1:3 – 2:16**

The next section of text includes eight judgements of God’s enemies.

* Damascus (1:3-5)
* Philistia (1:6-8)
* Tyre (1:9-10)
* Edom (1:11-12)
* Ammon (1:13-15)
* Moab (2:1-3)
* Judah (2:4-5)
* Israel (2:6-16)

**Amos 1:3-5 Judgment on Damascus, the capital of Syria.**

**3This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not relent.
Because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth, 4I will send fire on the house of Hazael that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad. 5I will break down the gate of Damascus; I will destroy the king who is in the Valley of Avenand the one who holds the sceptre in Beth Eden. The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir,’ says the Lord.**

**…For three sins of Damascus, even for four…**. Amos uses this expression before God’s judgment against each nation. The phrasing doesn’t imply there are only three or four sins, it conveys the idea of one sin being laid continually on another.

**Because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth**. Gilead was in Israel and this part of the judgement is on the Syrians for invading God’s people and His land. ‘Threshing sledges with iron prongs or teeth are probably a figure of speech used to imply both an extreme and thorough cruelty to those who opposed.’ (Hubbard) It can therefore be presumed that the Syrians were extremely harsh in their dealing with Israel.

An alternative translation of **verse 5** would include the destruction of all the inhabitants, not just the king in the **Valley of Aven** (Aven means wickedness).

**The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir**. This was fulfilled in **2 Kings 16:5-9**, when the Assyrians attacked Syria after King Ahaz of Judah paid the Assyrians. Kir can mean an enclosed space, but there are also places named Kir of Moab and Kir-Hareseth (both in Moab, to the east of the Dead Sea), so both interpretations imply the population being taken into captivity and deported.

**Amos 1:6-8 Judgment on Gaza, a city of the Philistines.**

**6This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not relent. Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom, 7I will send fire on the walls of Gaza that will consume her fortresses. 8I will destroy the kingof Ashdod and the one who holds the sceptre in Ashkelon. I will turn my hand against Ekron, till the last of the Philistines are dead,’ says the Sovereign Lord.**

**Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom**. Gaza was a Philistine city on the coast to the west of Israel and Judah. The judgement here is because they attacked God’s people and handed them to the Edomites and this judgement is extended to other Philistine cities – **Ashdod**, **Ashkelon**, and **Ekron**.

The text implies that, ‘the condemnation here is not against slavery in and of itself, just as the previous oracle was not against war in and of itself. The crime is not that soldiers were enslaved after being taken in battle, which was the standard practice, but that the Philistines used their temporary supremacy to enslave whole populations - soldiers and civilians, men and women, adults and children, young and old - for commercial profit. Gaza did not even need the slaves. She merely sold them to Edom for more money.’ (Boice)

Again, an alternative translation of **verse 8** would include the destruction of all the inhabitants, not just the king.

**Amos 1:9-10 Judgment on Tyre, a city of Lebanon.**

**9This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not relent. Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, disregarding a treaty of brotherhood, 10I will send fire on the walls of Tyre that will consume her fortresses.’**

**Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom**. Similar to the previous judgement, this is spoken at Tyre in Lebanon, to the north of Israel and again, their judgement includes **fire on the walls… that will consume her fortresses**. Tyre was dependent on the walls for both defence and security, so any breach or burning would bring potential defeat.

**Amos 1:11-12 Judgment on Edom.**

**11This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not relent. Because he pursued his brother with a sword and slaughtered the women of the land, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked, 12I will send fire on Teman that will consume the fortresses of Bozrah.’**

This judgement is because **Edom** attacked Judah **2 Kings 8:20-22**.

**Because he pursued his brother with the sword**: The Edomites descended from Esau, who was the brother of Jacob (Israel) and both descended from Abraham and Isaac. The Israelites and Edomites should have considered themselves as brothers, giving each other support and protection.

**…because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked**: The original Hebrew is condemning Edom for retaining their **anger** and **rage** when it should have been put aside long before - and for that God’s judgement will come.

This is a reminder for us that we need to both give our **anger** and **wrath** to God, and let Him be our avenger **Deuteronomy 32:35** & **Romans 12:19**.

**Amos 1:13-15 Judgment on Ammon.**

**13This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Ammon, even for four, I will not relent. Because he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders, 14I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah that will consume her fortresses amid war cries on the day of battle, amid violent winds on a stormy day. 15Her king** (or Molek) **will go into exile, he and his officials together,’ says the Lord.**

**Because they** (Ammon) **ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead…**: The area of **Gilead** was to the east of the River Jordan and to the north of the Dead Sea. The region had borders with Syria to the north and **Ammon** to the east and was attacked by those countries.

Syria has received judgement in **v3-5**.and now it is Ammon’s turn. This reference to pregnant women may have been a result of a specific incident, or just the general result of the Ammonite’s cruelty to their neighbours.

**Her king will go into exile, he and his officials together…**: Because of their attacks against Israel, God promises judgment again Ammon.

The Ammonites caused ongoing problems for God’s people; including, opposition and inter-marriage. It is even written into Scripture **Deuteronomy 23:3** that **no Ammonite… or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, not even the in the tenth generation**.

* The Ammonites (and Moabites) refused entry to the Israelites at the end of the Exodus, even attempting to call a curse upon the Israelites through Balaam **Deuteronomy 22-24**.
* Tobias and Ammonite, united with Sanballat to oppose Nehemiah **4:1-14**.
* Inter-marriage with the Ammonites resulted in worship of other gods **Nehemiah 13:23-24**.

Inter-marriage in itself was not forbidden, as long as the woman accepted Judaism and the children were brought up as Jews.

* King Solomon married Naamah, an Ammonite **1 Kings 14:21-31, 2 Chronicles 12:13** – their son was Rehoboam.
* God’s grace allowed this marriage (and later Ruth’s to Boaz) to be part of the Messianic lineage.

In respect of the Ammonite nation, **1 Maccabees 5** (part of the Apocrypha) includes the account of the Maccabees having a decisive victory over the Ammonites, which effectively destroyed them as a nation and people.

Note: Solomon’s marriage to Naamah, causes some Jews problems with accepting the Messiah can descend from the House of David through Rehoboam (but Scripture says that is not His lineage - **Jeremiah 22:24-30**).



**Amos 2:1-3 Judgement on Moab.**

**2 This is what the Lord says:**

**‘For three sins of Moab, even for four, I will not relent. Because he burned to ashes the bones of Edom’s king, 2I will send fire on Moab that will consume the fortresses of Kerioth Moab will go down in great tumult amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet. 3I will destroy her ruler and kill all her officials with him,’ says the Lord.**

**…For three sins of Damascus, even for four…**. Amos continues to use this expression which means a multitude of sins, rather than just three or four.

**Because he burned to ashes the bones of Edom’s king…**: God promises judgment against Moab because of their cruelty to Edom and her king.

Scholars have varying opinions about the meaning of ‘**the bones of Edom’s king**’. Theories include:

* **2 Kings 3:26-27** – where the king of Moab realised he was losing a battle against Israel and attempted to break through the Israelite lines, (to safety with to the Edomite king), with a small group of fighters. They got part way, but were unable to escape, but had in the process taken the eldest son of the Edomite, who was sacrificed (as a burnt offering).
* The Moabite’s hatred of their enemies extended to removing the bones of the rival king from the grave and treating them in an undignified manner. This was in contravention of the reverence that the tomb held for people of that time.
* Some translations indicate the bones are burned to make lime, to use to coat the walls of buildings, though some sources suggest that human bones are not good for this use. So, this verse may just be symbolism to convey the overall message of the Moabites’ lack of concern for their fellow human beings.

The last two judgements concern Israel and Judah.

**Amos 2:4-5 Judgement against Judah.**

**4This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not relent. Because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods,the gods their ancestors followed, 5I will send fire on Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem.’**

**For three sins of Judah, even for four…**: It may not be a surprise given the constant lapses in following God, but it is sad to see the country that God has blessed and should be following God most closely, is also under the same type of judgement and for the same layering of sins as its neighbours.

This is a reminder from Amos that whilst it is easy to see, expose and rebuke the sins of others who are not followers of God, the same standards should be applied to God's people – ultimately, we are all under the same judgement, unless we have come to faith in Jesus as Messiah.

**Because they have rejected the law of the LORD…**: Judah's sin was that they **rejected** (some translations have despised) and disobeyed **the law of the LORD**. God has blessed His people with His regulations and commandments, so He expected them to honour and obey His word - there is a higher standard required of Judah than the other previously mentioned nations.

**…they have been led astray by false gods…**: An alternative translation of ‘gods’ in this verse can be ‘lies’. God’s Word is truth, so to reject Him for false gods is to reject the truth and believe in l**ies**.

**I will send fire on Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem**: Judgement will come to Judah in the same way as it comes to the other nations – by fire targeted towards their palaces or symbols of their strength (**1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14, 2:2**). Amos is talking of actual fire to burn material things.

Fire is used in Scripture to express judgment as well spiritual purifying or testing by God of a believer **1 Corinthians 3:13-15**, **1 Peter 1:6-7**.

**1 Peter 4:17** says**it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household…**  Peter is saying we need to examine ourselves and allow God to remove (in Amos’ language) the ‘walls’ or ‘palaces’ that stand in the way of a proper relationship with Him., so His work can develop in us without hindrance.

The remainder of this chapter deals with the sins of Israel, the blessings that they have received and how God will deal with what He is confronted with.

**Amos 2:6-8 Judgment on Israel.**

**6This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. 7They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. 8They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.**

Israel is no different to the other nations, they have sinned like everyone else.

**…they sell the innocent for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals**: Amos is describing the injustice of the rich against the poor – taking advantage for their own gain, whether it be a lot (**silver**), or little (**a pair of sandals**).

**Father and son use the same girl**: Amos saw the sexual immorality and perversion of his day and comments on once-accepted standards that are now ignored. Amos may have been referring to the use of ritual prostitutes associated with the worship of Astarte, a goddess worshipped by the countries to the north of Israel.

**They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge**: Amos is again commenting on God’s laws being broken and the fact that God has heard the cries of those being oppressed - **Exodus 22:26-27** commands, **If you take your neighbour’s cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, 27because that cloak is the only covering your neighbour has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.**

In all, Amos is describing a corrupt society, where those in authority or power have no concern about others or God.

**Amos 2:9-12 God’s goodness despised**

**9‘Yet I destroyed the Amorites before them, though they were tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks. I destroyed their fruit above and their roots below. 10I brought you up out of Egypt and led you for forty years in the wilderness to give you the land of the Amorites. 11‘I also raised up prophets from among your children and Nazirites from among your youths. Is this not true, people of Israel?’ declares the Lord. 12‘But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.**

**…I destroyed the Amorites before them…**: God reminds Israel of their history - how His power and faithfulness enabled them to conquer the mighty Amorite nations when the first entered the Promised Land.

**I also raised up prophets from among your children…**: God reminds Israel of the honour He had given them in allowing His work to be done through them. This should have kept them obedient, but in their rejection of God the Israelites **commanded the prophets not to prophesy.**

**I also raised up… Nazirites from among your youths**: The Nazirite vow is described in **Numbers 6:2-21**. The vow (usually between 30-100 days in duration, but the person could set their own time), required; abstinence from wine and strong drink, refraining from cutting the hair off the head during the whole period of the continuance of the vow, and the avoidance of contact with the dead. Scripture includes only three people who were Nazarites for life, Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist (**Judges 13:4-5, 1 Samuel 1:11, Luke 1:15**).

It was generally done voluntarily and should have been done to honour God, but here Amos is saying the people have rejected God by making **the Nazirites drink wine.**

In an updated form, we should all have a relationship with God based on the gratitude for what He did for us – Jesus’ death on the cross to atone for our sins.

**Amos 2:13-16 Judgement against Israel continued**

**13‘Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain. 14The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength and the warrior will not save his life. 15The archer will not stand his ground, the fleet-footed soldier will not get away and the horseman will not save his life. 16Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day,’ declares the Lord.**

Other translation record God as saying in verse 13 **I am pressed under you**: God considers Israel as a burden (the meaning of Amos), not the joy to Him that they should have been. The NIV says that the people will be crushed as if by an unstoppable heavy weight.

This is clearly symbolic language – ‘…our text is a figure, since God is not to be oppressed by man; all the sin that man can commit can never change His perfection… He speaks to us in the ways of man… so the Lord says that under the load of human guilt he is pressed down, until he cries out, because He can bear no longer the iniquity of those that offend against Him." (Spurgeon)

**The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength…**: God’s judgement will include Israel being unable to succeed in areas that they previously saw themselves as strong. This was a time a military strength for Israel.

Without God’s blessing, **the swift** will not be fast enough, **the** **strong** will not be strong enough and **the warrior** will be unable to save his own life. Israel was confident in their own ability, but God would change that.

Paul expresses the dangers of over-confidence and believing in your own strength in **1 Corinthians 10:12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall.**

We are able to escape God’s judgement, as Israel was able too, by acknowledging our strength is nothing without the Lord.

History tells us that Israel did not repent or return to the Lord and within 40 years the northern kingdom had been invaded by Assyria and deported from the Land. Those tribes were assimilated into the communities where they were taken and were never brought back.

**Amos 3:1-2 God's love for Israel makes judgment unavoidable.**

**3 Hear this word, people of Israel, the word the Lord has spoken against you – against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt: 2‘You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.’**

**…the Lord has spoken - …against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt**: Israel has rejected God, despite having the heritage that delivered them as a nation from Egypt, a history that is a matter of pride to them.

The central OT redemptive act by God is His deliverance of Israel from Egypt and the Israelites are reminded regularly that it was God who freed them (including every Passover). God’s NT act of redemption is Jesus on the cross – we should constantly remember that act and live accordingly.

God has conclusively proved His love and care for Israel, so for Him to speak against them shows He is both disappointed in their actions and provoked into action, so whilst this may have been a reluctant act on behalf of God, He has previously been gracious time and time again on their behalf.

b. **You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins**: Amos links Israel’s privilege (**you only have I chosen…**) with a need to act as such, but as they did not do so, God had to act (**therefore I will punish you…**).

**Amos 3:3-6 The logic of God's judgment.**

**3Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? 4Does a lion roar in the thicket when it has no prey? Does it growl in its den when it has caught nothing? 5Does a bird swoop down to a trap on the ground when no bait is there? Does a trap spring up from the ground if it has not caught anything? 6When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?**

Amos asks six rhetorical questions – where the answers are obvious and he concludes by asking, **When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?** This final question reinforces the fact that the answer is also obvious, when judgment comes against the cities of Israel, everyone should know that it was the **LORD** who has **caused it** – this is no accident or fate, it will be the LORD.

**Amos 3:7-8 God will reveal His work**

**7Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. 8The lion has roared - who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken - who can but prophesy?**

**Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plans**: Amos declares that God will not act in haste or without warning. The context here is the coming judgment on Israel has been revealed and passed on, leaving Israel with every opportunity to repent. To expand the immediate context, we too have God’s warnings of coming judgement and the need to be prepared for Jesus’ return.

**The lion has roared - who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken - who can but prophesy?** Amos is declaring that he is merely the messenger of God’s Word. It is natural for a man to **fear** when a lion roars and it is natural for a prophet to **prophesy** when the **Lord has spoken**.

**Amos 3:9-10 Israel’s judgement is conveyed to the surrounding nations.**

**9Proclaim to the fortresses of Ashdod and to the fortresses of Egypt: ‘Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria; see the great unrest within her and the oppression among her people.’ ‘They do not know how to do right,’ declares the Lord, ‘who store up in their fortresses what they have plundered and looted.’**

**Proclaim to the fortresses of Ashdod and to the fortresses of Egypt**: Amos is told by God to invite surrounding countries to Israel to see her sins - **great unrest within her and the oppression among her people**.

It is reckoned that ‘the Egyptians and Philistines are chosen to be witnesses because their reputations for injustice and brutality would be such that the Israelites would consider themselves morally superior to those that God had summoned as witnesses. Israel is being judged not only by God’s commands, bur now by a level of acceptable international decency.’ (Hubbard)

**…who store up vin their fortresses what they have plundered and looted**: The rich and powerful of Israel had used that wealth and power to oppress and steal from others. God invites the nations to see the sin of Israel, so they can understand the judgment He will bring upon Israel.

**Amos 3:11-12 Prophecy of the conquest and exile of Israel**

**11Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘An enemy will overrun your land, pull down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses.’ 12This is what the Lord says: ‘As a shepherd rescues from the lion’s mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites living in Samaria be rescued, with only the head of a bed and a piece of fabric from a couch.’**

**An enemy will overrun your land…**: The Assyrian invasion took place less than 30 years after Amos made this prophecy and for ten years after that, Israel was a subject state in the Assyrian Empire, before Israel was completely conquered by Assyria and the people of Israel were taken from their land and scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire.

**As a shepherd rescues from the lion’s mouth…**: Amos may have been referring here to **Exodus 22:10-13**, which states that if an animal dies in the care of another man - such as a shepherd - that the shepherd must make restitution to the owner of the animal. The exception is where he can bring the remains that demonstrate the animal was attacked by a predator. ‘Amos' comparison is that when invasion strikes, Israel's devastation will be so complete that the only remains left as proof of death will be in the form of scraps of furniture.’ (Hubbard)

**Amos 3:13-15 Judgment will extend to the places used for wickedness**

**13‘Hear this and testify against the descendants of Jacob,’ declares the Lord, the Lord God Almighty. 14‘On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground. 15I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished,’ declares the Lord.**

**I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground**: The altars used for idol worship would also be destroyed as part of God's judgment. The **horns of the altar** were placed to represent the ‘strength’ of the altar, just as horns represent the "strength" of an animal. So, in cutting off the horns, all the power that the altar can bring has been removed.

**…the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished…**: God's judgment would also extend to places built by the people with wealth accumulated in their time of prosperity.

Prior to Jeroboam II, houses in Israel's cities were roughly the same size. Excavations at Tirzah, a city in the northern kingdom and just to the north of Shechem, show that around the 8th century BC, houses began to grow for the rich, both in physical size and also distance between neighbours. Housing for those who were poor shrink in size and neighbourhoods became more cramped. Until that time, all houses had been of a similar size and spaced equally between neighbours.

**Amos 4:1 Amos describes the indulgence of Israel.**

**4 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, ‘Bring us some drinks!’**

**…you cows of Bashan**: The livestock n Bashan, the northern part of Israel (modern-day Golan heights), were known at that for being healthy and fat. Amos is possibly using the only thing he has knowledge about to describe Israel’s women, by comparing them to the livestock. Plumpness was considered a value and a sign of affluence, but when Amos calls these women ‘fat’, as in some translations, that is not meant as a compliment.

Both **Psalm 22:12** an **Ezekiel 39:18** mention the livestock of Bashan – neither is complimentary.

**…who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, "Bring us some drinks!** Wealth and affluence is not wrong in itself, but their wealth was being used for self-focused pleasure. There is an implication in the text that, ‘These women may not have been directly involved in mistreating the poor. But their incessant demands for luxuries drove their husbands to greater injustices.’ (McComiskey)

But Amos is saying God will hold them to account for the way they gained and used their wealth.

**Amos 4:2-3 God’s promise of judgement against these people**

**2The Sovereign Lord has sworn by his holiness: ‘The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks. 3You will each go straight out through breaches in the wall, and you will be cast out towards Harmon,’ declares the Lord.**

**The Sovereign Lord has sworn by His holiness**: Amos starts this statement saying the Lord has sworn it to be true by His holiness and he ends by stating this declaration is from the Lord. Amos is reinforcing the fact that God has made a very solemn oath.

‘This judgment will become a reality, because the holy God does not lie, nor can his holiness allow sin to go unpunished.’ (McComiskey)

The Hebrew word for ‘has sworn’ *shaba* is also used in

* **Deuteronomy 28:9** – where God describes the blessings He will give His people if they follow Him.
* **Psalm 110:4** - Jesus being an eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek.
* **Psalm 132:11** – that a son of David will sit on his throne for evermore.

The same word is also used in **Amos 6:8** and **8:7**.

**…you will be taken away hooks, the last of you with fishhooks**: God describes to Israel the way they will be taken into exile – in pain and humiliation by the Assyrians.

It was an Assyrian practice, when they took an entire region or community into exile, they were led away (often for hundreds of miles), with the captives naked and attached together with a system of strings and fishhooks pierced through their lower lip.

In addition, God foretells the walls of the cities will have been broken through. The location of the exile is stated as being Harmon – this is the only Biblical reference to this location and no actual historical place of this name has been found to exits. The root of the Hebrew word means a hostile fortress, which would equate with captivity and exile, certainly devoid of the luxuries the people have been used to.

**Amos 4:4-5 Israel continues to worship and sacrifice – in vain**

**4‘Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. 5Burn leavened bread as a thank-offering and brag about your freewill offerings – boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,’ declares the Sovereign Lord.**

**Go to Bethel and sin**: Rival centres of worship to Jerusalem, in **Bethel** (Ephraim) and **Gilgal** (Dan), had been set up by the northern kingdom kings, in an attempt to stop their people going to Judah to offer their sacrifices **1 Kings 12:25-33**. However, despite offering sacrifices at these places, because they were not made in total obedience to God, it was considered a **sin**.

**Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years**: **Deuteronomy 14:28** speaks of a tithe that was to be brought every three years. Amos is saying, that despite the appearance of complying with the daily sacrifice and other offerings such as tithes, the Lord will not accept them, as they are merely an outward show, without a real desire to follow Him.

**Burn leavened bread as a thank-offering**: Only the wave offering at the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), included **leaven**. Amos is making a point that all the sacrifices have become corrupted, as they make offerings that contain **leaven**. Whether the leaven is real or pictorial, God is condemning their offerings as unacceptable.

**…for this is what you love to do**: The Israelites loved their worship, even if it had become corrupted and unacceptable to God – it was certainly disobedient in action (due to the location) and in heart (because of their continued sin with repentance).

That is an illustration and warning to us too – our worship, in whatever form, should be done reverently, to honour God and to place Him at the centre. We should not be using it as a ‘feelgood’ exercise, before returning to our previous sinful ways, rather measure it by how it honours God.

**Amos 4:6-8 God withholds the rain from Israel**

**6‘I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me,’ declares the Lord. 7‘I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. 8People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me,’ declares the Lord.**

**I gave you empty stomachs in every city**: This statement appears to be grammatically in the ‘prophetic present’ - future events spoken of in the present tense. At the time of Amos’ prophecy, Israel had financial prosperity, which would have equated to agricultural prosperity as well, but Amos foretells of a time where there will be hunger, with no food because of the drought God will send.

**I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another**: The implication is that the provision of rain will be so specific, the people will know it is by God’s hand. This is a further opportunity, given by God, for Israel to repent and return to Him.

**…yet you have not returned to Me**: This is God’s desire – that His people will return to Him, but they continue to go their own way.

**Amos 4:9-11 More judgments on Israel**

**9‘Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, destroying them with blight and mildew.
Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me,’ declares the Lord. 10‘I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to me,’ declares the Lord. 11‘I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me,’ declares the Lord.**

God lists the things that He will bring against Israel in an attempt to get them to return to Him – b**light, mildew, locusts, plagues, death by the sword…** The fact that Amos mentions Egypt in the list should have been a warning to the people as the Exodus was part of their heritage and spoken about yearly at Passover.

‘This wasn't a demonstration of God's anger, but of His love. He starts His chastisement slow and increases it incrementally, so that He can use the smallest amount of discipline necessary to turn our hearts back to Him. If we will not turn back the hand of chastisement grows heavier and heavier, out of loving desire to see our repentance.’ (Guzik)

‘Blight is the work of the east wind that dries and scorches the grain prematurely so that it turns brown. Mildew is the product of parasitic worms which turn pale the tips of green grain.’ (Hubbard)

**You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to Me**: God still offers Israel redemption, to remove them from a judgment similar to that given to Sodom and Gomorrah – although they were not judged by physical fire, they were completely destroyed as a nation.

**Amos 4:12-13 God vows to perform what He has promised.**

**12‘Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, Israel, prepare to meet your God.’ 13He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind, and who reveals his thoughts to mankind, who turns dawn to darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth – the Lord God Almighty is his name.**

**…prepare to meet your God**: This is a sober warning to Israel, but also to every person throughout all ages, as we will all have to face God at the judgement. God is warning everyone to be prepared for that time.

There are three ways commentators have applied this text:

* As a challenge
* As an invitation
* As a summons

The challenge - God invites even His enemies to prepare to meet Him. ‘The prophet makes an ironic challenge to rebels, to meet in arms the God whom they have despised. Let them prepare to fight it out with him whom they have made to be their enemy and against whose laws they have so continually revolted.’ (Spurgeon)

The invitation - this is a blessing. In the beginning, meeting God was a blessing for Adam, but since the fall we must prepare ourselves by putting our trust in Jesus as Saviour, so that our meeting will not be one to fear, but something to look forward to,

The summons - one day we will stand before God and give account.

‘Think awhile upon who it is that you have to meet! You must meet your God – the One whose laws you have broken, whose penalties you have ridiculed… You must meet your God; to be examined by unblinded omniscience. He who has seen your heart, read your thoughts, remembered your idle words… the God who will see through the veils of hypocrisy and all the concealments of formality. There will be no making yourself out to be better than you are before him.’ (Spurgeon)

**The LORD God Almighty is His name**: Amos concludes what has been designated the end of a chapter for us, with a reminder who God truly is. He is Almighty and to be treated seriously.

* He is the God of all creation - **He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind…**
* He is the God who is absolutely sovereign over man - **who reveals His thoughts to mankind…**
* He is the God who controls nature – **who turns dawn to darkness…**
* He is the God who rules above everything – **and treads on the heights of the earth…**

**Amos 5:1-3 Coming exile and captivity.**

**5 Hear this word, Israel, this lament I take up concerning you: 2‘Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up.’ 3This is what the Sovereign Lord says to Israel: ‘Your city that marches out a thousand strong will have only a hundred left; your town that marches out a hundred strong will have only ten left.’**

**Fallen is Virgin Israel**: Other translations state that Israel has fallen and been forsaken - Amos sees Israel as a young woman who has no one coming to her aid, amid the impending violence of invasion.

**Virgin** ‘depicts the vulnerability of Israel and the special sadness that accompanies her death, as though she should have had a whole life of live and fruitfulness before her.’ (Hubbard)

**Your city that goes out a thousand strong shall have only a hundred left…**: Amos predicts that events will be for Israel that when the enemy comes, the army will be decimated. ‘Only a handful of ragged, war-weary men will be left of Israel's proud army.’ (McCuskey)