

Amos was probably edited within a few years of his ministry (1:1 requires at least a two-year wait). It consists mainly of poetry with a few sections of prose (e.g. 6:9-10; 7; 8:1-3).

In outline form Amos looks like this:

- I. Judgments against the nations 1-2
- II. Judgments against Israel 3-6
- III. Five visions of Judgment 7-9:10
- IV. Restoration described 9:11-14

Some outliners combine the first two sections into the general heading of "Oracles of Judgment" but this still keeps the same outline pattern.

Regarding the History of Redemption, it has been said that the concept of God that Amos espoused is fundamental to any understanding of his prophetic message. Amos understood God to be the Creator of the world (4:13) who uses natural phenomena as he pleases and for his own ends (4:6-10). The Lord not only controls natural phenomena but history as well, causing the rise and fall of nations (1:3--2:16; 9:7). His judgment upon the nations was understood by Amos as caused by their sin against his moral standards (1:3, 6, 9, etc.). Israel had been brought into a covenant relationship with this God (3:2 -here the verb "to know" implies not intellectual but covenantal knowledge) which gave her a privileged place among the nations (2:9-11). Because she had disobeyed his moral standards, and because of this special covenant relationship with the Lord, Israel would be judged more strictly than any of the nations. Compare the space given to Israel in chapters two and three with that given to all the nations mentioned in chapter one.

Amos summoned Israel away from empty observance of ritual and outward acts of worship (4:4-5; 5:14, 18) to a change of heart attitude (5:4-6, 14-15, 21-24; 8:5-6). But even a change of their hearts would not guarantee deliverance from the judgment to come. The final restoration would be on the basis of grace, not of the works of the people of Israel (9:11-14), making this hope an ultimately messianic one.

Archaeology and Amos offers some interesting corollaries in that Amos, one of the more important prophetic books in sociology, gives better insight into the sociological practices of the time. Archaeology has discovered many corroborating evidences of Amos's accusations.

Beersheba is mentioned twice in Amos; both times in connection with cultic practices. While excavating the city wall, several stones were found which, when reassembled, formed a large "horend" altar. A major building has also been uncovered there. Interpretation of this, however, differs from archaeologist to archaeologist. Some say that it is a temple; others say Beersheba never had a temple, only a holy place. If this building was a temple, its size shows that by this time Beersheba had become an important center of public cultic activity. One of Amos's concerns was improper and sinful worship of the local Canaanite deities. Cultic prostitution was a normal part of such worship (2:7) and we know from a text from Ras Shamra (Ugaritic) that drinking also played an important role in these ceremonies (2:9).

Amos also condemned the "conspicuous consumption" of the upper class of Samaria. Pieces of carved ivory inlay have been found there, apparently used to decorate furniture in the houses of the rich (6:4-6). Amos mentions the king who reigned in Beth Eden (1:5). Tablets have been discovered which tell us that he was Shamsi-ilu (780-745 BC), governor of the Assyrian province along the Middle Euphrates.