

AMOS

WHO WAS AMOS?

Amos was from the southern kingdom of Judah. His hometown, Tekoa, was about five miles from Bethlehem. He was a sheep herder and a “dresser of sycamore figs (7:14). These trees are also called “fig-mulberry.” The fruit is like a fig. Each fruit had to be pierced individually in order to ripen properly. This was a very important crop to the Near Eastern people. King David even appointed a special supervisor to oversee these crops (cf. 1 Chr. 27:28). Amos' agricultural knowledge is evident in his message.

Jewish tradition says Amos was also a well-to-do businessman. The style and poetry of this sermon indicate Amos was well educated.

WHEN DID AMOS SERVE?

Though Amos was from Judah, he preached to the northern kingdom of Israel. The book of Amos was his sermon manuscript. Amos delivered this message to Israel in 751B.C. Amos 1:1 states these words were spoken two years before *the earthquake*. Archaeological evidence indicates a Richter magnitude 8.2 to 8.4 earthquake with epicenter in northern Israel struck on the Day of Atonement, 749B.C. People felt the ground shake for 90 seconds (most earthquakes are felt for less than 20 seconds). This quake was so devastating it became a fixed historical event in the Jewish psyche such that Zechariah referenced it 230 years later (Zech. 14:5). According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the earthquake occurred when King Uzziah of the southern kingdom of Judah was improperly offering incense within the Temple of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 26:16-21).

Amos was not alone in his ministry; during the period of 755B.C. to 720B.C. at least 5 prophets were active in ministry (Amos, Jonah, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah).

WHAT WAS GOING ON IN ISRAEL AT THE TIME?

755B.C. to 730B.C. was a time of economic prosperity and military expansion for both Israel and Judah. Jeroboam II (786-746B.C.), king of Israel and Uzziah (783-742B.C.), king of Judah both provided over 40 years of stable leadership for their kingdoms. Egypt to the south and Mesopotamia to the north and east were in a period of decline. Syria,

directly north of Israel and a perennial enemy was defeated and weakened by the Assyrians. Israel and Judah were at peace. The trade routes of The Great Trunk Road and The King's Highway both passed through Israel and Judah bringing tax revenue and trade with Asia Minor and Africa.

However, this prosperity benefited only the wealthy. The rights of the poor and middle class were trampled in the courts; judges were on the take. Brokers routinely cheated farmers using false weights and measures.

WHAT WAS THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF ISRAEL?

Religion also thrived, but it was a concoction of the fertility cults of Canaan, the gods of Syria and Tyre, mixed with Judaism which the people called Yahwehism.

It had nothing to do with Yahweh as 2 Kings 17:7-18 makes clear:

2 KINGS 17:7-18 (ESV)

And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practiced. And the people of Israel did secretly against the Lord their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, and there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the Lord carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the Lord to anger, and they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, "You shall not do this." Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers, and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets."

But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the Lord their God. They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them that they should

not do like them. And they abandoned all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made for themselves metal images of two calves; and they made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. Therefore, the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only.

In 751B.C., Amos preached this sermon at the Temple of the Golden Calf in Bethel, in the northern kingdom of Israel (Amos 7:10-17). You could cut the tension in the air with a knife.

WHAT WAS AMOS' MESSAGE TO ISRAEL?

Amos began by declaring the Lord's judgment upon the nations surrounding both Israel and Judah. He declared God's judgment upon Syria, Philistia, Phoenicia, Edom, Ammon and Moab. With this the audience could agree.

But then Amos took aim at Israel:

AMOS 2:6-12 (ESV)

6 Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals— 7 those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; 8 they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined.

9 "Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. 10 Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite.

11 And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?" declares the Lord. 12 "But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, 'You shall not prophesy.'

Again, in chapter 8 beginning with verse 4:

Amos 8:4-6 (ESV)

4 Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, 5 saying, “When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, 6 that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?”

As the Apostle Paul explains in Romans 1, when a society rejects the most basic truth that there is a Creator God to Whom we are accountable, their minds and their society become dark. By rejecting Yahweh and the Law of Moses, Israel rejected the basis of a just and righteous society. It became the law of the jungle; the powerful and wealthy preying upon the weak and poor. Our society is in the advanced stages of this same decline.

Through Amos, God called Israel to repent (Amos 5:14-15):

Amos 5:14-15 (ESV)

14 Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said.

15 Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

But as you know, Israel refused and God punished Israel by three means.

GOD PUNISHED ISRAEL IN THREE WAYS

First, Amos warned Israel that if she did not repent and reform, God will shake the nation (Amos 8:7-8; 9:9).

Amos 8:7-8 (ESV)

7 The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: “Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. 8 Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who dwells in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?”

Amos 9:9 (ESV)

“For behold, I will command, and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve,

This was fulfilled in 749B.C. by the great earthquake that devastated the land of Israel destroying the stone walls and stone buildings of her cities.

Second, God will punish Israel by sending her into exile (Amos 7:10-17). This comes out clearly in the confrontation between the priest of the Temple of the Golden Calf at Bethel and Amos:

Amos 7:10-17 (ESV)

10 Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. 11 For thus Amos has said,

“ ‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile away from his land.’ ”

12 And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, 13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

14 Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, “I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. 15 But the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ 16 Now therefore hear the word of the Lord.

“You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel,
and do not preach against the house of Isaac.’ ”

17 Therefore thus says the Lord:

“ ‘Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.’ ”

If Amos preached in 751B.C., this prophecy against Amaziah was fulfilled in either in 732B.C. in the first invasion of Israel by Assyria or it was fulfilled in 722B.C. in the second invasion that decimated Israel and ended its existence as a nation. Those Israelis who survived the slaughter were humiliated and deported by the Assyrians out of the land.

The third means of punishment would be cessation of prophecy; God will stop communicating to His people for a time (Amos 8:11-12).

Amos 8:11-12 (ESV)

11 “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst

for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. 12 They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.

The leaders and elites of Israel didn't want to hear the Word of the Lord that He was sending them through His prophets. So, God stopped sending them prophets. From about 400B.C. to the coming of Jesus, no prophets spoke the words of the Lord to the Jews.

But as God always does, He speaks a word of hope to His covenanted people (Amos 9:11-15).

A DAY IS COMING WHEN GOD WILL RESTORE ISRAEL

AMOS 9:11-15 (ESV)

11 "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, 12 that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the Lord who does this.

13 "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. 14 I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. 15 I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them," says the Lord your God.

The book of Amos raises the point that not only is personal righteousness important to God, but societal righteousness; societal justice is important to God. Israel had become like all the other nations of the earth ruled by power, not principle.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO PROMOTE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE IN OUR SOCIETY?

We are fast heading in the same direction as ancient Israel. Greg Koukl of Stand to Reason writes:

the downward arc of the shifting ethos of the West has revealed a disquieting trend. Liberal democracy—in the best sense of those

words—is becoming a thing of the past. America is moving rapidly toward the brink of a peculiar species of totalitarianism that promises to erode freedom, hinder our ability to proclaim the gospel, and compromise our liberty to live peacefully with our Christian convictions.¹

This is from Koukl's article titled *Freedom Fading*. He presents many examples evidencing our swift decline into totalitarianism. Quite frankly, it's a depressing read. But I think it's true. It's what we've become because we reject the fundamental truth of the Creator God.

But what can we do?

Koukl gives us two concrete responses drawn from the writings of a man who suffered greatly from totalitarianism, Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

At times, the tsunami of change we're facing seems overwhelming for its force, dizzying for its speed, and chilling for its darkness. It's easy to begin feeling helpless, but that is not our path. There is another way.

In September 1974, Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Soviet Union and sent into exile. His final salvo was an essay suggesting a remedy for the common citizen, the ordinary person dwarfed by the totalitarian state. He titled it "Live Not by Lies."

Most of us are not in a position to effect any immediate change in the culture at large. That does not mean we're powerless, though, he argued. The lies that drive the system can be resisted by ordinary people being faithful to truth while living lives of simple integrity. This approach entails two things.

First, we refuse to be cowed by pressure to affirm falsehood. Like the noble Christians at Nini's Deli, we stand our ground. We live consistently with our convictions, firmly holding to truth even when we can't defend it well or make sense of it to outsiders.

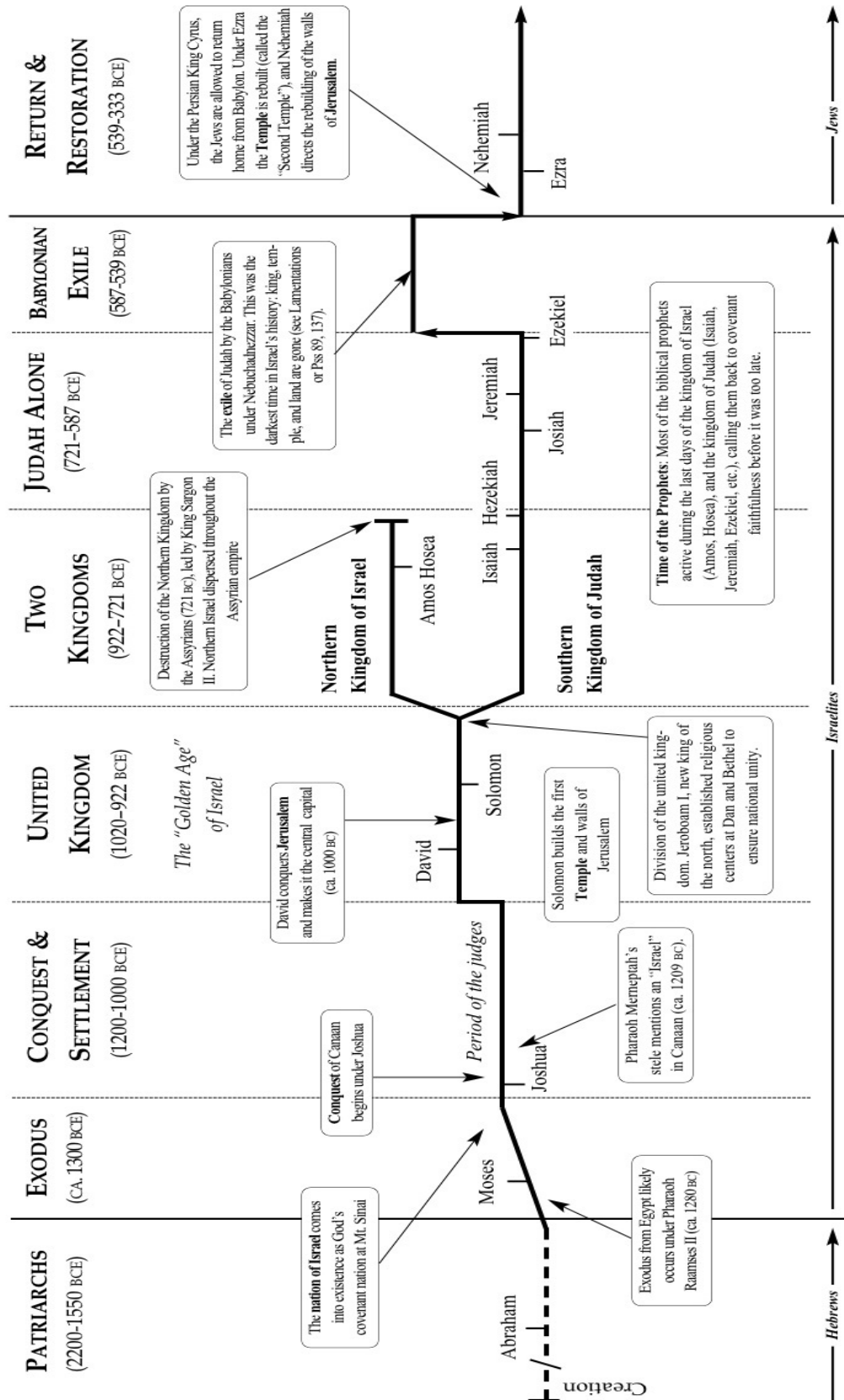
Solzhenitsyn counseled not to say, write, affirm, or distribute anything that distorts truth. Rather, walk out of meetings where discussion is forced and truth is not allowed to be spoken. Refuse to affirm what you do not believe. Just say no, but do so respectfully, even when the price for fidelity is public shaming, silencing, or canceling.

Second, we act. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil," the saying goes, "is for good men to do nothing." Resisting takes inner

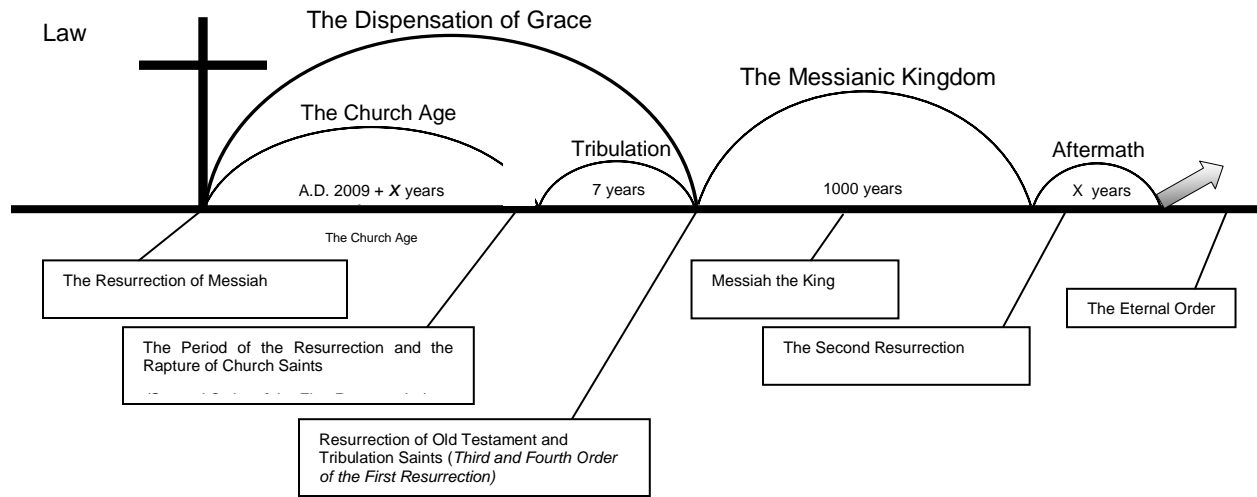
¹ Can be found on www.str.org, "Freedom Fading" by Greg Koukl.

courage, of course, and courage starts with small steps. It also takes a group, a family, the Body of Christ. We stand together. It takes outward virtue, too. We are careful to live with integrity in all areas of our lives.

The Old Testament Story†



Chronology of Eschatology



Adapted from *The Footsteps of the Messiah*.