

God's Message to Us in Amos

Halifax, NS

21 October 2018, 2:00 PM

Introduction

Today in our sermon series in which we are looking at God's Message to us in Every Book of the Bible, we have come to third of the twelve minor prophets: Amos.

- Hosea was the first, Joel was next, and now Amos.
- We know for sure that Amos was written in the days when the Assyrian Empire was the dominant power in this part of the world.
 - We know this because we are told that Amos prophesied when Uzziah was king in Judah and Jeroboam II was king in Israel.
 - Uzziah reigned in Judah from 792 BC to 740 BC (52 years) and Jeroboam II began his reign in Israel in 793 BC (a year after Uzziah began his) and reigned until 753—so for 40 years—not quite as long as Uzziah.
 - This particular time period was one of relative prosperity for both Israel and Judah, but their problem was that, instead of thanking God, they forgot Him.
 - Consequently, Amos has the task of warning God's people in the days of their prosperity that God is going to judge them...
 - This was a hard task because (like us in the church today) they did not feel like a people who were about to be judged... things were going pretty well.
 - Amos, who addresses Israel, (the northern kingdom), is telling them that many of them are going to be completely rejected by the LORD...
 - not just chastened for correction, but eternally condemned.

This is a message that very much applies to the church today in North America!

- We too live in relatively prosperous times and those in the church feel that God is generally pleased with us and that when we die, we will go to heaven.
 - But the truth is that many church-people today simply do not believe... they do not know the LORD in a saving way, and they will perish when He judges us.
 - Like the people in Amos' day, when they are confronted with this truth and graciously called to turn to the LORD for mercy, they utterly reject the call!
 - In their minds, they are fine; they do not need to repent!
 - The truth is that all of us need to live in both repentance and faith if we expect to go to heaven.
- I hardly know how a book could be more relevant than this book of Amos.
 - Let's dig in that we may hear God speak to us through His holy Word.

To put it in a single statement,

- Amos is a warning to the church that we will be judged unless we turn to the Lord in true repentance and faith.
 - Being in the church does not make you immune to God's judgment.

Take a look with me...

- I. **The book opens with the terrifying portrayal of God as a roaring lion coming to judge His church just as He judges their neighbours.**
- The first two verses read: **Amos 1:1-2: The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. ² And he said: “The LORD roars from Zion, and utters His voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers.”**
 - Amos, as a sheepbreeder, would be well aware of the terror of a lion’s roar just before it attacks.
 - This is how the Holy Spirit led Amos to reveal God as ready to judge.
- A. The striking thing here is that the roar is not just against Israel’s neighbours, but against Israel too.
1. Israel’s neighbours are addressed first.
 - With each of them, God begins with the words “For three transgressions of such and such a place and for four, I will not turn away its punishment.”
 - a. You can see the repeated pattern...
 - 1) First there is Damascus, the capital of Syria.
 - In verse 3, it says: **Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*...”**
 - This method of saying “three and four” is a stylistic way of showing that they are adding more transgression (sin) to the ones they have already committed.
 - Specific offenses are mentioned...verse 3... **Because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron.**
 - And then specific judgements in verse 4 & 5: **But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad. ⁵ I will also break the *gate* bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the Valley of Aven, and the one who holds the scepter from Beth Eden. The people of Syria shall go captive to Kir,” says the LORD.**
 - 2) The same formula is then used of judgment upon Gaza of Philistia (v. 6-8), Tyre (v. 9-10), Edom (v. 11-12), Ammon (v. 13-15), and Moab (2:1-3).
 - We might suppose that Israel is saying—
 - “Yes! God is going to judge our neighbours who have been harassing us. Let the lion loose on them!”
 - 3) And then the same formula of judgment is used of Judah—the covenant people from which Israel had broken away, dividing into two churches.
 - Amos 2:4-5 says: **Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, *lies* which their fathers followed. ⁵ But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.”**

- Perhaps Israel was still cheering that God was going to deal this other church... for surely they deserved it.
2. But then the same formula is applied to Israel...
- You see how it begins in verse 6: **Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*...”**
 - And then the LORD begins to recount some their specific sins and their specific judgments, only He has a lot more to say about them!
 - With their neighbours, there were only two or three verses, but with Israel there are eleven verses!
 - He speaks of how they have especially offended because He had taken them to be His people and had removed their enemies and made them strong, had sent prophets to them and raised up Nazirites to minister to them—and yet they had still rebelled!
 - Israel is judged right along with all of their neighbours.
 - They are not immune to God’s judgment because they are His church—the assembly of His people.
3. Learn from this that the church is not immune to God’s judgement today either.
- a. In Revelation, you have the letters to the seven churches, and most of them are charged with sins and threatened with judgment if they do not repent.
 - Should we suppose it to be any different today?
 - Did Jesus not repeatedly warn in His teaching that the church is a mix of true and false sons, and that the false sons will be cast out in the end?
 - Did He not speak of the wheat and the tares, of the good fish and the bad fish, of the ones in Him that bear fruit and the ones that don’t?
 - It has always been this way.
 - Do not suppose that just because you are in the church, you are immune from God’s judgment.
 - It is only those who repent and believe that will stand at the last day.
 - b. Amos shows, in fact, that God punishes Israel *because* He had known them—because they were His people and yet had rebelled.
 - He says this in Amos 3:1-2: **“Hear his word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: ² ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.’ ”**
 - He is especially offended with them because He had taken them and called them to be His people, and yet they had rebelled against Him and not received His saving grace.

TRANS> Now His roar of impending judgment is aimed at them!

- It is aimed at all in the church who reject Him.
- B. God’s judgment of the church is a subject that preachers would rather avoid and congregations would rather not hear about.
- It is fine to talk about the wrong in the world and about God’s judgment of those who never profess Christ.

- But it is not so fine to talk that way about those in our own church!
1. But Amos defends himself for speaking.
 - He says, “If I have seen the LORD, roaring like a lion ready to destroy you, how can I not sound the warning?”
 - He explains in 3:4 that lions roar when they have prey and that trumpets are blown when there is impending danger...(v. 6)...
 - And in verse 7-8, he explains that God does not bring His judgment without first telling His prophets—and that when they hear of it, they must speak.
 - It says (Amos 3:7-8): **Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. 8 A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?**
 - Only false prophets and preachers can hear God’s warnings against His church and say nothing to them.
 - a. Amos notes in 3:9-10 that Israel’s sins are such that even Ashdod and Egypt, their pagan neighbours, could testify against them.
 - God is going to punish them as shown in the rest of chapter 3.
 - In this time of prosperity, the rich were oppressing the poor...and they continued to worship at Bethel instead of at Jerusalem where God had appointed.
 - Therefore, both their summer and winter homes will be destroyed.
 - Can Amos see all of this and say nothing?
 - b. In 4:1-5, the LORD shows that even their very worship was offensive to Him because of their hypocrisy.
 - It is a terrible thing to love worship when you are not serving God.
 - He describes the women of Israel as well fed cows who oppress the poor and drink lots of wine. He warns them that He will take them away with fishhooks.
 - There they are, gathering to worship Him, bringing their tithes and offerings—while living in rebellion.
 - Can Amos see all of this and say nothing?
2. Amos must speak because he sees that even greater judgment is coming!
 - a. Indeed, God had already sent many preliminary judgments to get their attention and turn them back... but Israel had ignored them!
 - In chapter 4:6-11, the LORD mentioned five judgments that He had sent to them and after each one He says, “**Yet you have not returned to Me.**”
 - How gracious He had been to keep chastening them!
 - You see His gracious goal—that they might return to Him!
 - That is why He chastens us as His people—that we might return to Him.
 - How hard our hearts are if we just keep on rebelling without turning back.
 - His goal is to restore us to Himself, but we will not hear of it.

- b. And so, because of their refusal to return to God, now they are going to meet God as a roaring lion who will devour them.
 - In Amos 4:12, the LORD says: **“Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”**
 - Amos knows what a terrible meeting with God this will be!
 - It is not just a lion, but the LORD... Amos says of Him:
 - **Amos 4:13: For behold, He who forms mountains, and creates the wind, Who declares to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, Who treads the high places of the earth—the LORD God of hosts is His name.”**

TRANS> Yes, Amos, speaking from the LORD urges us in our rebellion to prepare to meet our God.

II. Look at how we are instructed to prepare ourselves to meet God when He comes to judge.

A. Amos urges the people to simply seek the LORD and live.

1. He warns them not to go along with the majority in the church.
 - In 5:1-3 he raises a lamentation over Israel, expressing that only a few will stand in the day when the LORD comes to judge.
 - **Amos 5:1-3: Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel: ² the virgin of Israel has fallen; she will rise no more. She lies forsaken on her land; *there is* no one to raise her up. ³ For thus says the Lord GOD: “The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which goes out by a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel.”**
 - That is a ratio of 1 to 10 who are saved!
 - It is never safe to go along with the majority in the church.
2. The LORD, through Amos, urges us to seek the LORD and live instead.
 - a. You can see this in chapter 5...seek... seek... seek...
 - Look at 5:4: **For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: “Seek Me and live...”**
 - Look at 5:6: **Seek the LORD and live, lest He break out like fire *in* the house of Joseph, and devour *it*, with no one to quench *it* in Bethel—**
 - Look at 5:14-15: **Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. ¹⁵ Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.”**
 - b. This is the gospel of grace. Think of what it means!
 - Even though we deserve to be utterly cut off, mercy is held out to us!
 - And it is not perfection to which we are called—it is simply to return to the LORD our God.
 - Simply come to Him to be saved.
 - Come and put yourself in His hands, sinner that you are, that you might be delivered.

- Our hope is not in our own strength—it is not in what we do—it is in our Saviour.
- c. And now in the new covenant, He is more fully revealed to us than ever before!
- Now we see that He has come in our flesh to save us.
 - Now we see that He has come to die for the remission of our sins.
 - Now we see that He has come to give us His Spirit to tie us to Himself so that we can follow Him until He brings us into His Father’s house forever.
 - He does the saving.
 - Seek Him, and you will live—He will carry you to glory.
- B. The LORD, through Amos, urges us not be content with the status quo—with simply going on as we are.
1. If you go on without Christ, the day of the LORD will be a day of ruin for you.
 - Amos speaks about that in the last half of chapter 5...
 - You will be judged with all the rest...
 - In 5:18, he says: **“Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It *will be* darkness, and not light.”**
 - You hypocritical worship will avail you nothing in that day...
 - In 5:21, He says: **“I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies.”**
 - Join yourself to Christ... Seek the LORD and live.
 2. Don’t let your present prosperity give you a false security.
 - a. Amos says to Israel in chapter 6—in the first verse: **“Woe to you *who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria, notable persons in the chief nation, to whom the house of Israel comes!*”**
 - They felt secure.
 - Their leaders at Samaria had given them a time of peace...
 - b. Judgement seems very far off when you are enjoying the good life:
 - Amos 6:3-6 says: ***Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near; ⁴ who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall; ⁵ who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; ⁶ who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.***
 - You get the picture—everything seems good—no worries—judgment could not be near.
 3. When you are like that, you look at those who warn you about God’s judgment as a nuisance.
 - a. “Why these warnings of judgment?
 - “All is well—we do not need to hear such things.
 - “We are God’s people and we are flourishing.
 - “Yes, we have the occasional storm or locust plague, but all in all life is good and we do not need to seek the LORD as Amos suggests.

- “We do seek Him—we go to church and worship—why is Amos telling us to seek Him that we may live? All is well Mr. Amos.
- b. “Look at this prophet Amos...
 - “He is seeing visions of destruction and praying for our forgiveness...”
 - In chapter 7, a vision of locusts, followed by a vision of fire, followed by a vision of a plumb line showing how crooked the people are all become...
 - Amos cries out to God for mercy for the people.
 - He is announcing doom as in 7:9: **The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste. I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam.**
- c. Amaziah the priest speaks for the established church to Amos...
 - The established church has almost always rejected warnings of judgment. Amaziah is no different.
 - He tells Amos to leave them alone... to go and serve in Judah.
 - Look at 7:10-13: **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 shall surely be led away captive from their own land.’ ” ¹² Then Amaziah said to Amos: “Go, you seer! Flee to the land of Judah. There eat bread, and there prophesy. ¹³ But never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is the royal residence.”**
 - Amos assures Amaziah that he has not been speaking his own words, but proclaiming God’s word.
 - Since Amaziah sees the word of God’s warning as a nuisance, Amos declares that judgment will fall on him personally and on the church.
 - Look at 7:16-17: **Now therefore, hear the word of the LORD: “You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not spout against the house of Isaac.’ ” ¹⁷ Therefore thus says the LORD: “Your wife shall be a harlot in the city; your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword; your land shall be divided by *survey* line; you shall die in a defiled land; and Israel shall surely be led away captive from his own land.”**

III. Let me ask you, what hope is there for the church if she rejects the very gospel of God?

- A. If she denies her sin and the judgment of God so that she thinks she does not need to seek the LORD in order to live, what hope remains?
 1. In chapter 8, the LORD declares through Amos that the end has come.
 - **Amos 8:1-3: Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, a basket of summer fruit. ² And He said, “Amos, what do you see?” So I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then the LORD said to me: “The end has come upon My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore. ³ And the songs of the temple shall be wailing in that**

day,” says the Lord GOD—“Many dead bodies everywhere, they shall be thrown out in silence.”

- He goes on to say many more things... even that He will send to them a famine of hearing the word of God.
 - The chapter ends with these terrible words.
 - Amos 8:14: **“They shall fall and never rise again.”**
 - You can see that this is not merely a temporary judgment—this is ultimate judgment without recovery—for they have rejected the only remedy there is.
 - They have refused the gospel and there is nothing left for them but destruction and misery.
2. In chapter 9, the LORD declares that there will be no escape for Israel.
- The chapter opens with these words:
 - Amos 9:1: **I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said: “Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword. He who flees from them shall not get away, and he who escapes from them shall not be delivered.”**
 - This is not corrective—this is utter rejection.
 - In verse 4, the LORD even says: **“I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good.”**

B. Yet, there is hope for a remnant to be saved:

1. The promise is given in verses 8-10.
- a. In verse 8, He says: **“Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,” says the LORD.**
- Do you hear the ray of hope? He will not utterly destroy them...
 - He explains in verse 9 that there are those who do seek the LORD in Israel... and that He will separate them out from the rest.
 - Amos 9:9: **For surely I will command, and will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve; yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground.**
 - When you sift something, you separate what out what you want (the grain) from all the rest...
 - Not even the smallest grain will fall to the ground.
- b. God is going to separate out those who seek Him for salvation... those who look to Christ instead of denying their need of Him...
- The rejecters are called sinners in v.10: **All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, who say, “The calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.”**
 - Though privileged to be God’s people and to hear gospel call, they are rejected for rejecting the call.
2. But look at what the LORD will do with the good grain.
- a. He will raise up His true church... what He calls the tent of David.

- He tells us in Amos 9:11-12: **“On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will 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 Gentiles who are called by My name,” says the LORD who does this thing.**
 - This was fulfilled after Jesus came and the church began to be raised up and to reach the Gentiles under the ministry of the apostles.
 - James quotes this verse from Amos in Acts 15:16-17 to prove that God had planned all along to raise up His church again and call the nations (or Gentiles) who are called by God’s name into it.
 - b. We saw in the first two chapters how Israel was lumped in with its neighbours as those who would be judged.
 - And so they were—they were brought to an end as a separate nation from Judah, never to rise again.
 - But those among them who truly sought the LORD for salvation were restored to the true house of David from which Christ sprang.
 - The LORD to whom they looked came to His temple and they, along with the remnant of Judah received Him and were raised up from among the ashes to reach the nations.
 - c. Amos describes the tremendous blessing that is theirs in verse 13-15:
 - Amos 9:13-15: **“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow *with it*. ¹⁴ I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit *them*; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. ¹⁵ I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them,” says the LORD your God.**
3. What a splendid thing it is that there is salvation for all who seek the LORD.
- a. Jesus is a Saviour.
 - We all need Him.
 - And anyone who comes to Him will be saved.
 - b. As Amos has shown us, the ones who are lost are those who think they are fine without Him—whether they be in the church or outside the church.
 - God has made a way of salvation for sinners.
 - We are all desperate sinners until we come.
 - If you do not come to Him in this way, you will be ruined forever.
 - But if you do come, how blessed you will be on the day of judgment!