

BIBLE SURVEY - AMOS

"A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?"

Amos 3:8

Who Was Amos?

Amos was a prophet from the Southern kingdom of Judah called to deliver a message primarily to the Northern tribes of Israel. He was not of priestly, or noble descent, but worked as a sheep breeder and a tender of sycamore fruit (7:14). Amos' name means *"burden bearer"*. Amos was a contemporary of the prophets Jonah (2 Kings 14:25), Hosea (Hosea 1:1), and Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1). Amos came from Tekoa, a small town about 18km South of Jerusalem and 8km from Bethlehem. The village of Tekoa sits on an elevation of 2,700 feet overlooking the wilderness where John the Baptist, eight centuries later, grew up. As a young boy, Amos would have learned of the ministry of the prophet Jonah and he may have witnessed some of the ministry of Elijah and Elisha. Later in his ministry he would have known of the ministry of the prophet Hosea who continued his work after Amos concluded his ministry.

Humble and Bold

Amos was humble in not hiding his station in life. Amos was wise in not preaching over the heads of the people. Amos was fearless in not tickling their ears, but boldly proclaimed the truth. Amos was faithful in proclaiming the Word of God, even when it was unpalatable and unpopular to his hearers. Amos had a refreshing rugged frankness about him as he tore the blinders off peoples' eyes and showed them the inevitable consequences of their idolatry and injustice.

When Was Amos Written?

The Book of Amos was written in the mid-eighth century B.C. during the reigns of King Uzziah of Judah (790-739 B.C.) and King Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 B.C.). Two years before an earthquake (1:1; Zechariah 14:5) about 760 B.C.

Comparing Hosea and Amos

There are some remarkable contrasts between the ministries of Hosea and Amos.

While Hosea was an urban Northerner, Amos was a rural Southerner.

While Hosea wooed the people, Amos warned them.

Hosea made a tender appeal. Amos presented tough accusations.

Hosea focused on the mercy of God. Amos emphasized the justice of God.

While Hosea spoke much of God's love, Amos proclaimed God's wrath.

Hosea emphasized God's pity, while Amos emphasized His purity.

Hosea dealt with spiritual sin, whereas Amos dealt primarily with social sin.

Hosea targeted idolatry. Amos targeted injustice.

Hosea was mostly national in his focus. Amos was international.

The key words in Hosea were: **know God**. The main emphasis of Amos was: **seek God**.

Called and Commissioned

Although Amos had no religious training and was one of the poorest kind of farmers, God spoke to him and, as he so eloquently put it, *"when a lion roars, who can but fear! When the Lord God speaks, who can but proclaim His message?"* (Amos 3:8). God called Amos while he was occupied with his daily work and sent him, with shepherd's crook in hand, to gather his straying people. In much the same way, God had called Gideon while he was busy at the threshing floor and David while he was caring for sheep.

Judean Layman

Amos was not a man of the court like Isaiah, nor a priest like Jeremiah or Ezekiel. He was, in our modern terms, a layman. Although he was a Judean, he was called to minister to the Northern kingdom of Israel. Following the ministry of Amos, Isaiah and Micah continued to faithfully proclaim God's Word.

A Time of Peace and Prosperity

Amos ministered while Uzziah was on the throne of Judah and Jeroboam II was king of Israel. It was a time of great prosperity. Because of the successful ministry of Jonah to Nineveh, the two kingdoms were at peace and reached the summit of their prosperity (2 Chronicles 26; 2 Kings 14). Assyria had not yet risen as a great power and there seemed no significant threat that the people of Israel needed to worry about. God used Amos and Hosea to alert His people to their danger.

God is a Lion

Amos feared God and no one else. His ministry burst upon the people of Israel: *"The Lord roars..."* (1:2). God is portrayed as a great and powerful Lion. His Word is compared to the roaring of the lion. God was known as the Shepherd of Israel, so it must have been quite a shock for them to hear Him being depicted as a lion who would tear them to pieces and all that will be left of Israel will be an ear and a couple of legs.

Idolatry in Bethel

Amos began his ministry in Bethel. Bethel was the religious capital of the Northern kingdom of Israel. There king Jeroboam had set up golden calves for the people to worship (1 Kings 12:25-33).

God Judges Nations

Amos began his preaching to the assembled crowds at Bethel on a sacred feast day by proclaiming God's judgment upon the neighbouring nations of Damascus (Syria), Gaza (Philistia), Tyre (Phoenicia), Edom, Ammon and Moab.

Damascus

"Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron..."

Gaza

"For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they took captive the whole captivity to deliver them up to Edom..."

Tyre

"For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom and did not remember the Covenant of brotherhood..."

Edom

"For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity; his anger tore perpetually and he kept his wrath forever..."

Ammon

"For three transgressions of the people of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead..." Amos 1:3-15

Moab

"For three transgressions of the people of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime..." Amos 2:1

Justice

Here Amos proclaims God's justice to the nations. God sees and abhors cruelty, vindictiveness, treachery and failure to respect the remains of the deceased. Ripping open a pregnant woman and killing her child will kindle a fire which the Lord shall send to *"devour its palaces..."* (1:14).

Cremation

It is notable that Moab is condemned for burning the bones of the king of Edom. This failure to respect even the remains of the dead will cause the Lord to *"send a fire upon Moab and it shall devour the palaces..."* (2:2). Cremation of the dead was common practice amongst the ancient Greeks, Romans and Vikings. However, once these nations were converted to Christ they ceased to cremate their dead and began the practise of Christian burial. The Patriarchs in Genesis all practised burial (Genesis 47:29-30). Abraham purchased a cave in which to bury his beloved wife Sarah. Joseph gave specific instructions that his bones were to be brought back to be buried in Israel (Genesis 50:25-26). In the Exodus the children of Israel remembered to take the bones of Joseph back to bury them respectfully in the land of his birth (Exodus 13:19). Our Lord's followers buried Him in the tomb following His crucifixion. Burial is a distinctly Christian practice which proclaims the Christian conviction of the resurrection of the body from the dead.

Judah

Amos was probably well received as he proclaimed judgment against the six neighbouring nations surrounding Israel. However, he then came closer to home and pronounced judgment against the Southern kingdom of Judah. *"Because they despised the Law of the Lord, and have not kept His Commandments. Their lies lead them astray... but I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem"* (2:4-5).

Israel

Then Amos proclaimed God's judgment against the Northern kingdom of Israel itself: *"Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth... and pervert the way of the humble... to defile My Holy Name... and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god... Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorites before them... it was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you 40 years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. I raised up some of your sons as prophets, and some of your young men as Nazirites... but you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying, do not prophesy! Behold I am weighed down by you... therefore flight shall perish from the swift, the strong shall not strengthen his power, nor shall the mighty deliver himself; he shall not stand who handles the bow, the swift of foot shall not escape, nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself. The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day, says the Lord."* Amos 2:6-16

Defeat and Disgrace

Jeroboam's stalwart archers will not be able to stand on the day that the Lord sends judgment upon Israel. Israel's fleet-footed runners will try to run away from the battle. The cavalry will gallop to escape from the battle.

Cows of Bashan

Amos denounced the careless ease and immoral lifestyle of the people of Israel. The women of Israel are condemned as *"cows of Bashan... who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say*

to your husbands, 'bring wine, let us drink!' the Lord God has sworn by His holiness: 'Behold the day shall come upon you when He will take you away with fishhooks...' (4:1-2).

With Privilege Comes Responsibility

The people of Israel defended and excused themselves on the grounds that they were God's *chosen people*. Amos reminded them that this made their sin greater. To whom much is given, much is required. To whom much more is given, much more is required.

Houses of Ivory Condemned

"Hear and testify against the house of Jacob', says the Lord God, the God of hosts, 'That in the day I punish Israel for their transgressions, I will also visit destruction on the altars of Bethel... the houses of ivory shall perish...' says the Lord." Amos 3:13-15

Corruption and Injustice Condemned

"They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly. Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him... I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: Afflicting the just and taking bribes; diverting the poor from justice at the gate... it is an evil time. **Seek good and not evil, that you may live... 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." Amos 5:10-15

Religious Hypocrisy Condemned

"I hate, I despise your feast days... though you offer Me burnt offerings... I will not accept them... take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. **But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.**" Amos 5:21-24

Pride Condemned

"The Lord God has sworn by Himself, the Lord God of Hosts says: 'I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his palaces; therefore I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.'" Amos 6:8

The Power of Prayer

His preaching angered men, but his prayers affected God. God showed Amos a vision of swarms of **locusts destroying the land**. Amos prayed: "O Lord God, forgive, I pray!... so the Lord relented concerning this. 'It shall not be' said the Lord." Amos 7:1-3.

The Lord showed Amos **a consuming fire** so terrible that it would consume the waters and the land. Amos prayed: "O Lord God, cease, I pray! ...so the Lord relented concerning this. 'This also shall not be', said the Lord God." Amos 7:4-6

The Plumb-line

Then the Lord showed Amos a wall made with a plumb-line: "Behold, I am setting a plumb-line in the midst of My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore. 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... Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive from their own land." Amos 7:7-11. Samaria, the capital of the Northern kingdom of Israel, was situated on a hill, 300 feet high, surrounded on three sides by mountains, seemingly impregnable. Living in luxury, insensible to the warnings about their religious hypocrisy, idolatry, inter-faith, immorality and injustice, God's prophet informed them that they were being measured up according to God's plumb-line and the time was ripe for judgment.

Make the Crooked Straight

The Word of God is the plumb-line. Our lives must measure up to God's standard, or He will break down the wall and rebuild it in a straight line. When John the Baptist came he proclaimed in the words of Isaiah the prophet: ***"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make His path straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill will be brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the Salvation of God."*** Luke 3:4-6

"Therefore the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by Faith."
Galatians 3:24

False Weights and Deceitful Scales

Amos condemns the money changers and merchants of Israel: *"When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit, that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals - even sell the bad wheat?"* Amos 8:5-6

Question

"Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" Amos 3:3

Rotten Fruit

Amos sees a vision of summer fruit that is so ripe that it is on the verge of going rotten. Israel was ripe for judgment. Israel, like a basket of overripe fruit, looked fine outwardly, but was rotten at the core. The people of Israel had become corrupt in materialism and brazen in idolatry. The land reeked with moral rottenness. Israel was a land of cursing, theft, injustice, crime, adultery and murder. They had adopted much of the pagan practices of the Baal worshippers and they were ignoring the warnings of the prophets of God in their self-destructive mad rush to ruin.

Covenant Blessings and Curses

The Covenant spelled out the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. Israel could be blessed more than any other nation, or cursed more severely. Extra privileges brings greater responsibility. **Religious rituals are no substitute for righteousness. Sacrifice is no substitute for Sanctification.** *"For surely I will command, and will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve... All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, who say, 'The calamity shall not overtake nor confront us'."* Amos 9:9-10

A Famine of the Word of God

"Behold the days are coming, says the Lord God, that 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." Amos 8:11. Because, during their times of prosperity, the nation had rejected the prophets, they would go through a time of spiritual famine when the Lord would not talk to them.

Prepare to Meet Your God

"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. Though they dig into hell, from there My hand shall take them... though they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword, and it shall slay them. I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good'." Amos 9:1-4

Restoration

"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... the remnant... and all the Gentiles who are called by My name..." Amos 9:11-12. These prophetic words were quoted 800 years later in Acts 15, when the Council of Jerusalem met to consider the grounds for admission of Gentiles to the Church *"And with this the Words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return and will rebuild the Tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My Name, says the Lord who does all these things.'"* (Acts 15:15-17)

The Legalism of Judaizers Rejected

When the Judaizers tried to insist that Gentiles need to become Jews and adhere to the Law of Moses in order to be accepted into the Church, the first Church Council, at Jerusalem, in Acts 15, quoted from Amos, and other prophets, to show that God had promised that He would restore the Tabernacle of David and bring the Gentiles in. No, one does not need to become a Jew in order to be a Christian. The Hebrew Roots movement and other modern-day Judaizers would do well to read again the Books of Hebrews, Galatians and Acts 15.

Jesus in Amos

David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, will guarantee the Redeemed permanent blessedness. The Promised Land is a type of the life of the believer in Christ. It points towards the Heavenly Jerusalem. Jesus Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He will rule the nations. Christ comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found.

The Coming Harvest

"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. 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." Amos 9:13-14

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