

## **A WORD FROM AMOS**

The Old Testament prophet, Amos, was an unlikely choice to be God's preacher to his people. He was a poor shepherd and tree farmer from the backwater village of Tekoa. He had no training as a prophet, yet God called him anyway to speak His Word to the wealthy, urbane ruling class of the tribes of Israel to convict them over their hypocrisy and apathy. Predictably, his message was not received well (7:10-13), but Amos spoke his word from the Lord anyway.

He prophesied during prosperous times (around 761 B.C approximately the same time as Hosea's ministry)—which was part of the problem. Jeroboam II was ruling over Israel and Uzziah was the king of Judah. Both had long, relatively peaceful and prosperous reigns. This did not translate into more faithfulness to Jehovah or justice to one another, however. Instead idolatry actually increased, as did greed, materialism and injustice. As their wealth increased, the elites increasingly oppressed the poor by exploiting the legal rights of those they considered socially inferior. Their worship of Jehovah became a mockery—strict observance of religious forms—but making zero difference in their lifestyles.

So into this steps Amos—an outsider challenging the status quo—speaking a word from the Lord to convict, correct, warn about coming judgment (“the day of the Lord”), while also offering a glimpse of better days ahead for God's kingdom. He speaks judgments not just upon Israel and Judah, but also upon other nations surrounding them. He makes it crystal clear that God is not happy with what he sees and will not continue to tolerate their behavior. There are a great many contemporary messages for us in a word from Amos.

### **A Word to Us from Amos**

The best way to frame his contemporary messages is to see the progression of problems he dealt with in Israel and Judah—and recognize how these can ensnare us as well.

- Prosperity can be a problem. Israel had experienced an influx of wealth during the lifetime of Amos, but only the ruling class enjoyed it. He portrayed some of the wealthy women as “cows of Bashan” basking in luxury (4:1). They did not use this prosperity to honor God and serve others. It only led to greed and more sin. This mirrors New Testament warnings about trusting in wealth and loving money (Matthew 6:24; Mark 10:17-27; I Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5). We are a prosperous people. Let's not allow it to become a problem.
- Pride is a powerful drug. Their prosperity bred a prideful self-assurance (6:8). They did not listen to God's prophets (2:12). They had it all figured out. Jehovah was to serve them, not the other way around. The Bible is full of texts that expose the sin of pride and the trouble it brings (Proverbs 11:2; 13:10; 16:18; Philippians 2:3; James 4:6). Pride can flow from prosperity. It did then and can now. It is not a good progression and it usually does not stop there.
- Apathy is not acceptable. And yet, it frequently results from the other two on this list. It was one of the sins of Israel to which Amos spoke (6:1). Israel's relationship to God had become stale. Their worship was reduced to empty ritual—meaningless to affect revival or transformation. Rather, they became self-serving excuses in which to boast and glory in excess—not in God (4:4-5). Their hearts were in all the wrong places. Worship was about them not God—for him they had no zeal, just apathy. God detests this attitude (Revelation

3:16). It never produces anything positive or praiseworthy. It led them away from God to idols.

- Hypocrisy happens and it is not pretty. This is the result of the apathy, which flourished as a consequence of the other sins. Israel took their turn at the altars—giving a show of worship, but their daily lives demonstrated no connection to it and no hint of a relationship with Jehovah. Amos strongly condemned this and God rejected their worship as a result (5:21-23). Hypocrisy is always ugly (Matthew 6:1; Mark 7:6; Luke 6:46) and undermines any kind of faith witness. It does great harm.
- Injustice and oppression—partners in crimes against God. The final result of the progression of problems within Israel and Judah was the exploitation of and injustice towards the poor. Incredibly, the wealthy skirted the legal rights of those indebted to them, selling them into slavery, using them as they saw fit and bringing further oppression upon them (2:6-8). Consider the cruel irony of Israel selling others into slavery—the very nation God had delivered from Egyptian bondage. This was the polar opposite of whom they were to be—a light to the surrounding nations; a community where God’s justice and mercy defined their government; a place where the common practices of oppression and exploitation of the poor were to be eradicated—not promoted or even tolerated. Amos spoke truth boldly into this. He spoke of letting “justice roll on like a river” and “righteousness like a never failing stream” (5:24). Righteousness being the making of right and equitable relationships regardless of differences. Justice being the actions taken to correct injustice and create righteousness. This was not occurring in either Israel or Judah, so a great judgment was coming—the day of the Lord unlike any they had ever anticipated (5:18). Injustice and oppression remain partners in crimes against God. Woe to us, if we remain at ease in Zion while not attending to the poverty and inequity around us; while not promoting righteousness. It can be quite easy to fall into this snare—of comfort and apathy and of practicing a religion that is more about self-serving ritual than honoring God. Amos speaks a word to all of this—even now.

### **Judgment and Hope**

Amos spoke about the day of the Lord and it came—first against Israel and then Judah. God’s judgment remains for us—as the word of the Lord continues to be spoken to teach, rebuke, warn, admonish and encourage us. Amos also spoke of hope—of restoration (9:11-15). It was the remnant of Israel who were restored after the Babylonian captivity. But he also gives a glimpse beyond—to a time when all nations would bear his name—a time when justice, mercy, and righteousness will indeed roll on like a mighty river and we will enjoy it all in the very presence of God. Let’s be sure to listen as Amos speaks.