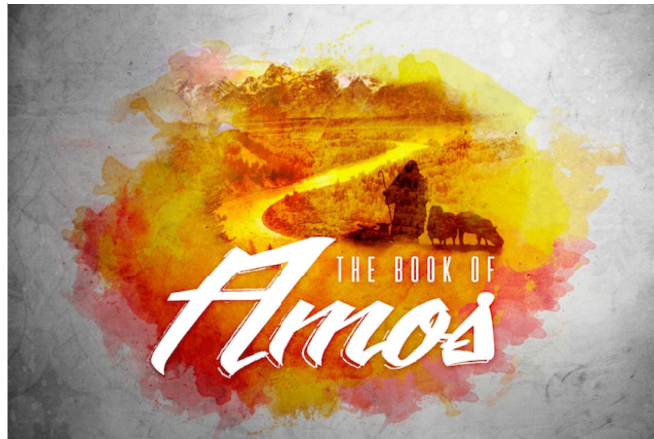


The Book of Amos



Introduction

The book of Amos may have been written nearly 3000 years ago, but the relevance of His message to today's world, in which the gap between rich and poor seems to be ever widening, is obvious. Amos is known as the prophet of social justice. He calls for a change of heart and a return to a genuine religious spirit not based simply in cult or worship of God but in moral and ethical goodness, fairness and justice for all.

Background

In about the 10th century BCE there was a big split, which in due course divided a once united people into the kingdoms of Israel and of Judah.

"And when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David."

...So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day."

There had been simmering unrest in Israel, the nation chosen by God, for many years, but this all came to a head after Solomon's death, when his son Rehoboam was set to become the next king. Jeroboam, a rebel, returned from exile in Egypt and led a group of people to confront Rehoboam with a demand for a lighter tax burden. When Rehoboam refused the demand, ten of the tribes rejected Rehoboam and also David's dynasty. Only Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam and became the southern Kingdom of Judah. The northern tribes crowned Jeroboam as their king and kept the name of Israel. The twelve tribes of Jacob were now two separate nations.

The prophets wept over the fate of the two nations - they were all the people of God, but their pride and hunger for power took over and the result was division, which ultimately led to weakness. Sadly, both Israel and Judah fell into captivity, although to different powers and at different times. God sent the Babylonians to capture Judah, and He sent the Assyrians to conquer Israel. While the Babylonian captivity of Judah lasted for a period of 70 years, Israel never fully overcame the Assyrian captivity.

Amos prophesied after Israel had split in two, during the reigns of Uzziah over Judah (2 Kings 15:1-7 and 2 Chronicles 26) and Jeroboam II over Israel (2 Kings 14:23-29). This was a time of political and financial prosperity for both kingdoms. However, they were times of moral bankruptcy. 2 Kings 14:24 records that Jeroboam II *“did evil in the eyes of the LORD,”* and 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 records how Uzziah was struck with leprosy as punishment for his sin and pride. So Amos prophesied during this time of physical bounty and spiritual famine.

Amos

Amos was from Tekoa, a small Judean town south of Bethlehem. He worked as a shepherd and took care of fig-trees (Amos 1:1 and Amos 7:14-15). We don't know much about his social status, whether he owned flocks and groves or simply worked as a hired hand, but his depth of knowledge and the way his book is written suggest that he was educated. Though he lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, he was sent to the northern kingdom of Israel to prophesy. So the book of Amos is a book of prophecy. In it, the Lord speaks through Amos to let Israel and other nations know what they're doing wrong, what will happen to them as a result, and what His eventual plan is to bring them back to Him.

His Message

His message may be summed up in four themes:

Materialism - Amos spoke to a materially prosperous society that struggled with true justice and righteousness, instead settling for great shows of worship while oppressing the poor and downtrodden. There are some brutally blunt statements from God, especially against the materialistic culture in Israel. *“You put off the day of disaster and bring near a reign of terror. You lie on beds adorned with ivory and lounge on your couches. You*

dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end” (Amos 6:3-7). God’s disgust with the materialism and the lack of concern for true worship and for justice is expressed even more harshly in Amos 4:1-2: *“Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, ‘Bring us some drinks!’ The Sovereign Lord has sworn by his holiness: ‘The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks.’”* Though many in Israel considered their wealth a sign of thriving and God’s approval, this was met only with His scorn and anger. Success for God was measured in terms of justice and righteousness, not material terms.

Worship - We might think that going to church or outward signs of devotion is enough. Amos shows that God is concerned with all aspects of our lives. *“I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them... Away with the noise of your songs!”* He says in Amos 5:21-23. Basically if we’re unwilling to do what pleases God in the way that we live our lives, we can’t expect to please Him with fancy worship.

Leadership – In many places Amos address the corruption of Israel’s leadership. Especially in a country that was supposed to be run in accordance with God’s laws. God was angry with the corruption, Amos 5:10-15 says, *“There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth...There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts... Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.”* The prophesy is against the lack of justice, and what appears to be a system that favoured the rich over the poor. The phrase *“then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is”* (Amos 5:14) is especially harsh. The leaders of Amos’ day may have claimed they were working under the blessing of the Lord, but God was displeased with them and their lack of justice.

The Poor and the Oppressed - Amos shows the depth of God's passion for justice and care for the downtrodden. Amos 4:1, which addresses materialism, shows God's anger with the materialism that flows from the rich's indifference toward the needy: *"Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, 'Bring us some drinks!'"* In Amos 5:12, in addressing corruption, God specifically calls out the courts for oppressing the poor: *"For I know how many are your offences and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts."*

And in expressing His distaste for the Israelites' *false worship*, God told them what He truly wanted: *"But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"* Amos 5:24.

Structure

The structure is fairly straight-forward, written to denounce the inequities and infidelities of Israel, to call the people to repentance and a change of life, to warn them of impending disaster but also to reassure them that whilst God would surely pass judgment on them, all hope was not lost.

- Introduction to Amos's Message (1:1-2)
- Oracles against the Nations, including Judah and Israel (1:3 - 2:16)
- Further Oracles against Israel (3:1 - 5:17)
- Announcements of Exile (5:18 - 6:14)
- Visions of Divine Retribution (7:1 - 9:10)
- Israel's Blessed Future Restored (9:11-15)

Study Sessions

In our study will split this structure into three sections:

1. **Background (1 Kings 11:1-36)**
Introduction and Judgments against the nations (1:1–3:11)
2. **Oracles of judgment (4:1–5:17) and**
Oracles of woe (5:18–6:14) against Israel (and Judah)
3. **Visions of judgment (7:1–9:10) and**
The promise of restoration (9:11–15)