

Amos

From a fig picker to a prophet

January 7, 2010

As I've said before the Minor Prophets may be "minor" in size of their books, as compared with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but they certainly are not "minor" in their messages. In other words, they were the Minor Prophets in the Major League.

Since Amos was a contemporary of Jonah, Hosea and Micah and his message was pretty much similar as other minor prophets, we are not going to go over this Book in verse by verse method which is known as expository study. We are going to survey the Book of Amos tonight – the whole nine chapters.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

When someone mentions a prophet, what image do you have in mind? Maybe a person with a long robe with holy look on his or her face. If it is a man, he might have a beard and mustache and piercing eyes that seem to be looking right through your heart. And he probably has been a prophet all his life.

But Amos was different – totally different. Most people would say he wasn't cut out for the job. After all, he was a shepherd, for crying out loud. A farmer, he was used to working with his hands, not delivering messages from heaven. By his own admission, Amos had no formal training for this daunting task as a prophet from God.

However, Amos possessed the most important qualification – a call of God. In our environment, the people with human credentials are considered more important than the others with the call of God. How ungodly and humanistic that is!

So Amos who led flocks of his wandering sheep went to the wandering sheep of Israel, confronting them with their empty religion, oppression of the poor and total disregard for God's commands. I don't believe that time has diminished the power of the Word of God that came out of Amos' mouth, nor relevance.

His town Tekoa was located about 11 miles south of Jerusalem. He was not only a shepherd, but also a tender of sycamore fig fruit in chapter 7.

Amos 7:14-15 Then Amos answered, and said to Amaziah: "I was no prophet, Nor was I a son of a prophet, But I was a sheepbreeder And a tender of sycamore fruit. 15 Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock, And the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'

B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

Though Amos resided in Judah, his message was directed primarily to the northern kingdom of Israel. Crossing tribal boundaries to pronounce judgment, no doubt, made him even more unpopular than the average prophet. Yet Amos persisted and confronted the sinful nation, tugging around God's weighty message and living up to the Hebrew meaning of his name – "Burden-Bearer."

The theme of this Book is the coming judgment from the Lord to Israel for treating others with injustice and their unfaithfulness toward Him.

C. THE PROSPERITY THAT BROUGHT THE POVERTY

During Amos' day, both Israel and Judah enjoyed a time of great power and prosperity. The threat from surrounding enemies was at an all time low. King Uzziah of Judah, who reigned from about 790 to 739 B.C., fortified Jerusalem and subdued the Philistines, the Ammonites and the Edomites.

To the north, Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) capitalized on the lack of aggression from Assyria, Aram, Syria and Egypt to expand Israel's boundaries and increase trade. As a result, wealth began to accumulate in Israel's cities. Commerce thrived, an upper class emerged, and expensive homes were built. This new prosperity, however, only led Israel further away from the Lord which resulted in spiritual poverty.

Proverbs 30:9 Lest I be full and deny You, And say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.

As we all know not many people can handle wealth. Far more people can handle poverty with integrity than the ones with riches.

The rich people of Amos' day enjoyed a lazy, indulgent lifestyle, while the poor became targets for legal and economic exploitation. Slavery for debt was easily accepted even though the Lord strictly forbade them to do to fellow Hebrews. Standards of morality had sunk to the bottom.

Meanwhile their religious activities flourished. The people thronged to the shrines for the yearly festivals, enthusiastically offering their sacrifices which were pretty much leftovers or the ones they didn't want. They steadfastly believed that their God was with them, and considered themselves immune to disaster much like today's Americans believe that God owes something to them.

How wrong they were! Disaster – God's judgment – was on the way. Amos prophesied around 755 B.C. The Assyrians overtook Israel in 722, thirty years later.

As directed to his time as Amos' message was, his words could easily have been written to today's American church and society in general. We, too, have been blessed with prosperity, peace and power. The question is, how are we using those blessings – to honor God, or to satisfy our own passions at others' expense?

D. SURVEY OF AMOS

The bulk of this Book deals with Israel's sins and her well-deserved judgment. But God is still so merciful to let them know that He would restore their land if they repent and obey Him.

The first two chapters pronounce judgments, first against the Gentile nations, then on Judah. I am sure that the people of the northern kingdom Israel were glad to hear God's judgments against them until Amos started to mention them.

The middle section, from chapter 3 through chapter 6, Amos highlights Israel's sins against the backdrop of God's efforts to get her attention and presents true repentance as the only way to escape His wrath.

The prophet next reveals five visions of God's coming judgment in 7:1-9:10.

Finally, a picture of Israel's restoration in 9:11-15 reminds the reader that not even God's severe judgment can make Him break His promise to retain a people for Himself.

E. MANY NATIONS UNDER GOD'S WRATH – Ch. 1-2

Amos 1:1 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.

I've heard that there is nothing like an earthquake to rattle human confidence. But if that is the case, the people in California are the most humble people in the world. Either they have very short memories or it requires more than an earthquake for people to remember that our God is holy and righteous and our righteousness means nothing to Him.

In v2, Amos portrays God as a roaring lion who has begun His attack on nations that have wronged Him. From then on each pronouncement in these two chapters begins with "Thus says the Lord," emphasizing the truth of the accusations against them and the certainty of God's judgment.

Amos 1:3a Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four,

Another repeating phrase is "for three transgressions... and for four," which is a poetic device used in Scripture to convey fullness. God was judging these nations, not for one sin, but for all-the-way-to-the-core sinfulness. The specific sins mentioned were the "last straw" that pushed over God's patience.

You all know that you can divide the Ten Commandments in two: the first four commandments regarding the relationship with Him and the next six commandments for the relationship with people. When a person treats others with brutality, murder, oppression, exploitation, it brings up God's displeasure against that person. That is a theme that runs throughout the Book. In fact, it's a theme that runs throughout God's whole Book.

F. GOD'S JUDGMENT AGAINST ISRAEL – Ch. 3-6

As much as heathen nations had no special exemption from God's judgments, and Israel had no special position when it came to being spared from His judgment for their sins. Israel had no special immunity to get away from the judgment of God, rather she actually had a higher obligation for holiness because of God's dealing with her and was judged more severely for her rebellion against God's law. Other nations could play their ignorance cards, but Israel did not have that excuse.

I believe that it applies in the same way for those who have heard the Word of God, but not being obedient to the Lord. The disobedient Christians are accountable for what they know and not being obedient.

Since Israel put their focus on the material things over God, the Lord would allow Assyrians to invade Israel and ravage the people and their materialistic wealth according to Amos' prophecies in chapter 3-6. Since Americans put so much of their focus on the material things over God, the Lord allowed the greed of people to get the worst of them and allowed a financial collapse. We see the same pattern here.

Israel's disregard for God's law has surfaced in many ways. They pervert justice, exploit the poor to satisfy their lust for luxury, accept bribes, and oppress the righteous. The Day of the Lord, which Israel mistakenly assumed would bring judgment for her enemies and joy for her, would be a time of swift and decisive judgment for her as well.

Israel didn't walk with God even though He wanted them to do so. It is no wonder why they ended up in His judgment.

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

To walk with God means that I must get in harmony with Him. I must go the direction that God wants me to go.

How about you? Are you walking with God today? Or are you pulling against Him, trying to do things your own way? If so, then it's time to stop, ask God's forgiveness, and get in sync with Him once again.

G. VISIONS OF JUDGMENT – 7:1-9:10

God warns Amos of Israel's coming judgment through five visions He does not bring about the first two, locusts and fire, thanks to Amos intercessory pleading. The third vision, however, the plumb line, pictures God as measuring the sins of Israel against His perfect standards and finding the nation woefully crooked.

Amaziah who was a priest under Jeroboam II confronted Amos with his religion. While we are obedient to the Lord, it is not unusual to be confronted by the people who follow false doctrines and religions. In their minds, they are serving the Lord.

In another vision, the Lord shows Amos a basket of ripe summer fruit, showing that the time is ripe for Israel's judgment in chapter 8. Part of that judgment will be the removal of God's life-giving Word.

In the final vision, the prophet sees the Lord standing beside the altar and pouring out destruction on the Israelites. No one escapes; God seeks out and destroys all those deserving of judgment. His standing by the altar may symbolize the sacrificial atonement provided in Christ – saying, perhaps, that those who reject the grace of God must face His judgment.

H. THE PROMISE OF RESTORATION – 9:11-15

Finally, a hopeful shaft of light pierce through the darkness of the Israel kingdom reveal the never ending promise of God for them.

I. APPLICATIONS

1) God is not looking for followers who only limit themselves to play church and are not concerned about obeying Him and loving others.

1 John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

2) The more we get to know the Lord through His Word, the easier our walk is because we would resist His guidance less.