

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



JUST A COUNTRY PREACHER

AMOS

God used all kinds of individuals to preach to God's people. We've learned that He used men who were groomed for ministry, He has used men who were from wealthy aristocratic backgrounds, he has used intellectuals, and in this case, God used an old country farmer to preach to God's people. Amos was a man who was a farmer and a shepherd and lived just South of Bethlehem, in a land called "Tekoa", but was called to move up North to preach to the nation of Israel.

The name Amos means "Burden" and that describes the task of his ministry perfectly. When God called him to preach to the northern kingdom, it is obvious that he made it his business to be involved with current affairs, the state of the nation, and the state of the surrounding nations.

As his message amplified and became more and more personal, he began to be abused and discredited by those leaders who heard him, to which Amos kindly reminded them that he had no agenda to the message he presented. He told the leaders basically that he was minding his own business, and was happy to do so, until God called him to preach the messages he was presenting.

However, this wasn't always the case when he first started preaching. He begins this prophecy by calling out the surrounding nations. He starts by denouncing the problems of the surrounding nations; and when God's people who heard his message, especially Judah, loved it. Then Amos moved to the northern kingdom itself. Once again, praise came from Judah. And then Amos' message turned toward Judah, and suddenly, this was too much to bear. The message was now too personal. The message was too offensive for God's people and their sensitive ears and this left Amos as a lone preacher.

His message was one of detailing the social and moral evils of the world's nations— including Israel and Judah. And if there is one thing that remains true about humanity, they hate to be told they are wrong. Further, this hatred is only compounded when they are told that judgment will follow because of moral ineptness.

How to Think About Amos

The book of Amos is nine chapters long and consists of three major sections. What you are first reading when taking in this prophecy is the announcement of the eight burdens. This occurs in chapters 1 and 2, and there is a phrase that continues to surface as God has Amos detail the national indictments, and that is the phrase, "For three transgressions... and for four..." This is a figure of speech that you are reading. This is God saying to each group of people, "You've gone too far."

The second major section occurs in chapters 3 through 6, which consists of a series of sermons delivered by Amos. Each one is fairly easy to identify because as a sermon introduction, Amos uses the words “Hear this word...” as you sift through these chapters.

The third major section is found in the remaining chapters of 7 through 9 and in these verses, you find five visions. Let’s see if we can learn a bit more from each of these sections.

Eight Burdens (Chapters 1-2)— Once again, these are a list of indictments that God cites against the different nations.

Burden 1— Damascus (1:5): The judgment falls against this nation as God tells these people that they would soon be in the captivity of Kir.

Burden 2— Gaza (1:7): This judgment has to do with the way they treated their captives. It was a moral crime against their treatment of other people.

Burden 3— Tyre (1:9): Once again a moral indictment against their treatment of the people of other nations.

Burden 4— Edom (1:11): Apparently, these people refused to forgive others and allowed their un-forgiveness to turn to hatred. As a result, this led to immoral violent behavior.

Burden 5— Ammon (1:13): This judgment came because of crimes against humanity because of greed. It is clear that they were merciless and the evidence of this is cited as even killing the woman with child.

Burden 6— Moab (2:1): Another immoral charge handed down because of the way these people treated their captives.

Burden 7— Judah (2:4): This judgment comes by way of unfaithfulness to God’s law.

Burden 8— Israel (2:6): Here we find the devaluing of human life. The way they bought and sold people was deplorable. The end of verse 6 read, “... because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes.”

Three Sermons (Chapters 3-6)— In these chapters, you find not only the problems of God’s people but as always, God mingles His messages with an admonition to respond in repentance.

Sermon 1 (3:1-15): The first sermon given is against the entire house of Israel. Here God reminds the people of the history of their birth as a nation. Therefore, God holds them to an extreme measure of accountability and is now looking at them as an opposing force, and telling everyone to get ready for judgment.

Sermon 2 (4:1-1-13): This sermon starts off with the accusation that there were certain rich women that were causing a tremendous amount of oppression. They are called the “kine of Bashan” or in other words, he calls them cows.

On the surface, it may sound as if this is an insult, but it is actually a compliment. These were the best cows and were treated in the best way. What Amos is explaining is that women were rising to the heights of power and influence, but were using this gift to oppress the needy, and support their drinking problem.

The sermon continues with a citation of other blessings God has given and how these gifts were abused. Therefore, God tells them that He would strip everything from them that made them successful.

Sermon 3 (Chapters 5-6): This is a cry for the loss of the greatness of Israel. God provides a glimpse into the future and it is full of tears as He tells them it will never be the same again.

Five Pictures (Chapters 7-9)— The conclusion of Amos’ prophecy is a series of illustrations that are used so that God’s people not only hear the message but are able to use their minds and see exactly what God is talking about.

Picture 1— The Grasshoppers (7:1-3): God showed Amos that He would soon be raising up grasshoppers to eat the grass of the land and leave it destitute. Amos then calls out for mercy to God, and God grants it.

Picture 2— The Plague of Fire (7:4-6): Amos is then shown an immensely large fire that consumes everything. Amos sees the destruction this will cause and pleads for mercy, and God stays His hand for this outcome as well.

Picture 3— The Plumb-line (7:7-9): God shows Amos a plumb-line that would be set to show the off-set nature of Israel. And because they did not measure up, God told Amos that He would cause the land to be desolate.

Picture 4— The Basket of Summer Fruit (8:1-3): This is a picture indicating that Israel's sins were ripe and ready to be consumed.

Picture 5— The Shaken Pillars (9:1-10): God shows Amos the posts of the doors of the nation being stricken and causing them to fall on the occupants and that no one will be able to escape was is to come.

What to Look for in Amos

Themes

God's Standard of Holiness— The entire reason this prophecy exists is because God expects holiness from His people. Therefore, this is a prominent theme throughout the message of Amos. God's people do not like it. God's people do not want to hear it and try to silence the message, but no matter how they try to ignore this fact God still holds people accountable according to His Holiness. This is made abundantly clear in 4:2 where we read, "The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks."

God's Requirement of Justice— God's holiness and justice cannot be separated. These divine attributes do not operate independently of one another. In relation to the above text in Amos 4:2, it is chilling to note that this was the means of terror used by the Assyrian Empire when they conquered a people. When leading them away, hooks would be placed through the nose of their victims, and they would lead the people away in a chain line drawn by the nose. And this is the very empire that took captive the northern kingdom.

God's Hope of Restoration— At the conclusion of the prophecy, we find an amazing end that is directed for Israel. Some attempt to apply this prophecy to all of God's people, but this is simply not the case as it relates to this particular prophecy. There will be a time when Israel will be restored to the land.

What to Gain from Amos

There is a Limit to God's Patience with Sin— God will only allow so much from our rebellion before ultimately pouring out His judgment. You'll notice that sown in these verses are calls to God's people from God to change course, but there eventually came a time when God removed that option from them.

There Is No One Who Can Withstand God's Judgment— One of the calls of Amos for God to relent His judgment came from Amos witnessing the 'consuming fire' mentioned in Chapter 7:4. The picture here is more than just fire, but appears to be nearly atomic in nature. Horrified at the sheer power of God, Amos makes a plea to God realizing that there was no person or nation who could withstand this kind of force, and says, in verse 5, "Then said I, O Lord GOD, cease, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small." The nation thought they could stand on their own without God, but what Amos saw, he realized that there would be nothing left of anyone if this was the judgment selected.

And this is the way it ultimately is for all of us. There is none who can stand before God. We become really good convincing ourselves otherwise, but if we saw the reality of what Amos did, we would come to the same conclusion. That were are small compared to God and there would be no saving us if God determined in His mind to turn His hand against us. None can withstand His judgment.

There Is Hope in Knowing that to Choose God Is to Choose Life— Much of this book is filled with horrible signs of warning, but once again, there are calls in this book to choose God. For instance, in Chapter 5:6 we read, “Seek the LORD, and ye shall live;” Come back to God! Straighten out your life! Start walking on the paths He has laid out before you! Live! God’s message still brings life.



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