

THOSE WEIRD LITTLE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS - AMOS

Many people gloss over the prophetic books of the bible because they do not want to hear about the judgement. However, *prophecy is not there to scare us but prepare us* and we need to look at these books to see what messages God would be saying to us now, in 2021! One of the key verses that challenged me in Amos was Ch 5:21-24 (Look up) ²⁴ ***Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living.*** God isn't against worship – he was against the heart of their worship, their pretences, facades and motives. This challenged me because I know there have been times that I have been just like them, going through the motions but not allowing the Father heart of God to change me in my day to day actions and interactions. And I wonder if you ever struggle in that area too? So I want to give an overview of the book of Amos and see what lessons we can learn from the message that God gave this minor prophet over 2500 years ago and how we can apply those lessons to our day to day lives.

Context - Who was Amos? Not an educated scholar or son of a priest or prophet but instead he was a humble shepherd and in his humility he heard God's calling and was obedient to it. (Amos 7:14).

When did he live? Amos was a prophet who prophesied in the northern kingdom 170 years after the nation of Israel had divided into two – with 10 tribes residing in the northern Kingdom (referred to as Israel) and two tribes residing in the southern kingdom – referred to as Judah. Amos himself came from Tekoa, a village in Judah ten miles south of Jerusalem. Amos' ministry covered a two year period during the reign of King Jereboam II of Israel - somewhere between 765-760BC. According to the Book of Kings, King Jereboam II was an evil King and did what was right in his own eyes. He reigned for 41 years. He was not devoted to God yet during his reign Israel enjoyed military and political strength and material prosperity. They were rich and at peace. However, Jeroboam's administration ignored policies of justice and fairness and so the rich got richer and the poor got poorer. The people became self-centred and complacent relying more on their own power, security and possessions than on God. Sadly their lives and worship of God reflected that.

Brief overview of the Book of Amos

Chapter 1-2 Amos pronounces God's judgement on Israel's neighbours & Israel itself, brutally denouncing sin and warning them of the consequences.

Chapters 3-6 Amos gives reason for God's judgement and shows the true Father heart of God with his love and desire that the people of Israel would hear his warnings and return to him.

Chapters 7-9 In addition to his sermons Amos receives a number of visions that graphically portray the coming end of Israel. In the first two visions (Ch 7:1-6) Amos delays God's judgement of a locust plague and a huge fire by interceding for the people of Israel, extending God's mercy so Israel would have another chance to respond to God. However eventually judgement came and two years after Amos's prophetic message was given a big earthquake hit the nation of Israel and 40 years later they were over run by the Assyrians and taken into exile. Despite God's judgement the book of Amos does not finish with doom and gloom but instead concludes with hope as God promises the restoration of Israel.

The Purpose of the book of Amos was to warn the Israelites of God's pending judgement and highlight what they were doing wrong. All this was in the hope that everyone would change their ways and return to God. This may be an Old Testament book, but it is just as relevant to us today. I want to unpack five things that the book of Amos raises, and see what we can learn from this.

1. EVERYONE ANSWERS TO GOD This may have come as a shock to Israel because they believed they were God's "chosen" people and they may have believed that the peace and prosperity they lived in was evidence of God's blessing. God judges all people fairly and impartially and everyone is answerable to God. Like Israel we too can feel we are immune. We are good people; we go to church! However, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. (Romans 14:12) To those who know Christ personally – judgement has been dealt with at the cross; to those who don't know Christ personally there is a very different outcome. If you don't know Christ, I would encourage you to talk with someone here today before you leave.

2. COMPLACENCY: In all their comfort and luxury the rich had become self-sufficient, complacent and had a false sense of security in their own wealth and ability. Again, I think this is an issue that many can struggle with today. *"You may assume we are blessed when life goes well and cursed when it does not. But trouble is a blessing when it makes us stronger in God and prosperity is a curse if it entices us away from Him."* Amos' warnings of coming judgement were to rouse these people out of their complacency. But sadly many did not listen or even think they had a problem!

3. OPPRESSING THE POOR & NEEDY: Amos draws the attention of the wealthy to the injustices they are perpetrating and although their actions may have been acceptable to the culture of the day, clearly it was not acceptable to God. God sees both the seen and the unseen – he knows our true hearts and motives;



Look up **Amos 8:4-6** God made all people therefore to ignore the poor is to ignore those who God loves & Christ came to save. **Proverbs 17:5** *Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who rejoice at the misfortune of others will be punished.*

God's heart is that we would go beyond feeling bad for the poor & oppressed and instead act compassionately to stop injustice and to help care for those in need.

4. NO APPETITE FOR GOD'S WORD This becomes apparent in Amos 7:12-13 when Amaziah the High Priest tells Amos in no uncertain terms to go away. Because of their apathy God said he would take away even the opportunity to hear his word. **Amos 8:11 (NLT)** *"The time is surely coming," says the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread or water but of hearing the words of the LORD."*

We may not have an Amos speaking into our lives but we have the Bible. Many Christians still look everywhere for answers to life's problems **except** in scripture. Or we may read the bible, but we don't allow the bible to read us – to change us!

5. SUPERFICIAL WORSHIP Amos probed the true nature of the people's worship. It appears many people had abandoned real faith in God, they still pretended to be religious, putting their church faces on and going through the motions, yet their heart and actions were far from God. (**Amos 5:21-24**) Look up. And this brings me back to the beginning – the verse that really challenged me in this book. God hating the hypocrisy of their worship. These people appeared to be talking the talk.... But not walking the walk, in righteous living and justice for all. Interestingly the more Israel sinned the harder their hearts became and the harder it was to remember what God wanted. **Amos 3:10** *"My people have forgotten how to do right" says the Lord.* And the same can happen to us. The longer we wait to deal with sin, the greater the hold it has on us. The more we too can be deceived into rationalizing that our sin "isn't that bad... Isn't everybody doing it? And my question is – do the sermons of this prophet from the Old Testament address blind spots in our own culture and lives today? Blind spots of complacency; - Oppression and failing to help the poor and those in need; A superficial faith that gives God lip service and not heart service lived out in our day-to-day actions.

I have to confess to "Donation fatigue and ambivalence" when I have another pamphlet in the mail from World Vision or another phone call from a needy social service asking for donations. I have to confess overlooking the fact that the cheap deal I got from Briscoes or Mitre 10 may have been manufactured in a country that oppresses its poor, paying below living wages or employing children. I have to confess at times to being so moulded by the world I live in that my heart is hardened and I fail to see the

need around me. We live in a culture where many say the poor and needy are bludgers on the state. They don't deserve help – they made their bed let them lie in it! God's heart breaks when his church, his hands and feet say that. Instead break our heart for what breaks yours Lord!

This is not easy to hear but I would be remiss if I glossed over the core of this message, that sin has consequences. God considered complacency, oppressing the poor & needy and superficial worship as sin. This message applies as much to us today - giving us an opportunity to repent - to change our ways. Even in God's judgement he is merciful. I want to repeat **God's purpose in these prophetic warnings was that his people would see the error of their ways and return to Him.** Ch 4 repeats 5 times "But still you would not return to me" says the Lord. In Ch 5 twice God says, "Come back to me and live". The true heart of God is to show mercy & have people turn from there wicked ways. God loves us with an unconditional love that we often take for granted. His heart is that we would not only desire for a deeper relationship with him – but we would show that same love, compassion, justice and mercy to others. Our mission statement for the church is "LOVE GOD – LOVE OTHERS" and that is just what God was wanting the people of Israel to do. To conclude - the Israelites had lost sight of God's love and care for them. The rich were complacent and comfortable refusing to help others in need. They observed their religious rituals in hopes of appeasing God, but they did not truly love him which was evident in their actions and interactions with the people around them. We too must not assume that going to church and being "good" enough is what God wants. God knows our true heart and motives. I believe that God's heart for each of us is that our belief in him and our personal experience of his love would affect all areas of our actions and interactions with those people and circumstances that we find ourselves in every day. This prophetic book is not here to scare us, it is here to prepare us. We should let Amos's words inspire us to ask God what do we need to do differently in light of this message? *Download or listen to this message at:*

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- What are some of today's cultural norms that would not please God?
- Discuss the statement *"You may assume we are blessed when life goes well and cursed when it does not. But trouble is a blessing when it makes us stronger in God and prosperity is a curse if it entices us away from Him."*
- How do you navigate the endless requests in the mail for donations?
- What do you need to do to allow the bible to read you?



CENTRAL BAPTIST

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS