

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Amos Speaks Today: Introduction - Amos 1:1-2:16

Introduction

Good morning. We start today a series of talks on the prophet Amos. Due to time constraints, I will not be able to read all the verses from Amos 1:1-2:16. I suggest that after the talk you read for yourself Amos 1:1-2:16. The next two talks will cover Amos 3:1-6:14 and Amos 7:1-9:15 respectively. Should you intend listening to these then, you may like to read the relevant chapters beforehand to help you follow the talks.

Before we start looking at the book of Amos, it will be helpful to consider the prophet himself. We need to read from Amos 7 to gain an understanding of the man and his background. Amos 7:14-15 state, *"Then Amos answered, and said to Amaziah: 'I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a sheep breeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'"*

From these verses we understand that Amos was chosen by the LORD to be a prophet. Amos, by occupation, was a sheep breeder and may well have been the owner of one or more flocks. Amos was also involved in harvesting sycamore fruit, a type of fig, (*Bible Plants, Fruits & Products*: Ratcliffe, TH, pages 226-228).

Both these occupations required patience especially tending this type of fig. Each fruit needed to be pierced in order to help them ripen. The need for patience was essential in preaching God's message to wayward and rebellious nations.

From Amos 1:1 it appears that Amos lived in or around Tekoa, *"The words of Amos, who was among the sheep breeders 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."*

Tekoa was a town south of Jerusalem and in an area only suitable for animals to graze. The town of Tekoa has an interesting history. In 2 Samuel 14:2 we find that the town had a wise woman who was used by Joab to wrongly influence King David which eventually turned into a tragedy. This highlights the need for God's guidance and not to be influenced by others.

In 1 Chronicles 27:9, we read that one of David's mighty men came from Tekoa and reached the rank of captain. David's mighty men earned their reputation by the deeds they accomplished and the courage they showed.

During the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah 3, *"The Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord"* (Nehemiah 3:5) It would seem that the ordinary people had a zeal and attitude to work but not the upper class in their society. So much was their zeal that they repair an additional section of the wall.

Amos had no training as a prophet. It was the practical things of life that moulded the character of Amos. He became the type of person that God could use as a prophet. He was given an important and dangerous task of going out with the message of judgement. At the time when Amos prophesied, neither Israel (the ten tribes) nor Judah had gone into captivity. Amos 1:1 gives us the reigning kings of this divided nation, Uzziah and Jeroboam the son of Joash. For the kings and their respective peoples, there was still time for repentance, to truly seek the LORD with all their heart. Amos also had messages for the surrounding nations and in Amos chapters 1 and 2 we will consider what the LORD has to say to each. Amos 1:2 states, *"The LORD roars from Zion, and utters His voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers."* The message from Amos was to be spoken openly. The message would cause sadness and dismay (mourn and withers) when it was proclaimed. The mention of Carmel would remind Israel of the time when Elijah had defeated the prophets of Baal there (1 Kings 18:20-40).

The message to Damascus

In Amos 1:3-2:16 we have six nations prophesied against by Amos plus Judah and Israel. Each judgement is preceded with the statement, *"Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of ..., and for four, I will not turn away its punishment'"*, with the appropriate name added. There is a general acceptance that when the Scriptures say *"and for*

four" it is implied that this is the final "straw" in a long list of transgressions rather than just the fourth transgression. We commence with the surrounding Gentile nations starting with Damascus, the capital of Syria.

Amos 1:3-5 states, "*Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron. But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad. I will also break the gate bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the Valley of Aven, and the one who holds the sceptre from Beth Eden. The people of Syria shall go captive to Kir,' says the LORD.*"

The Syrians had, with unnecessary cruelty, oppressed the people of Israel who lived in the area of Gilead. It was this final act of barbarity that brings forth this promised judgement on the Syrian nation. God's patience with Damascus is exhausted. The prophetic word of judgement goes out against the nation, no more mercy. As I prepare this radio talk, the country of Syria is in turmoil with a savage civil war. At the same time it is an enemy of Israel.

Hazael was an officer in the army of the Syrian king, Ben-Hadad. Hazael kills the king and reigns in his place. Hazael becomes a constant enemy of Israel and is used by God to punish that wayward nation but he goes beyond what is required and he, too, must suffer the consequences. Eventually Syria is absorbed into the Assyrian empire. God's intention was to cause Israel to repent and turn back to Himself, but they would not. They stubbornly maintained their evil ways until dispersed throughout the Assyrian empire.

If, as Christians, we pursue a life style that is inconsistent with our confession of accepting Christ as Saviour, we can expect troubles and difficulties which God may use as a wake up call. We have a choice to either continue a selfish life style keeping God outside or we can change and mend our ways.

The message to Gaza

Let us read Amos 1:6-8, "*Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they took captive the whole captivity to deliver them up to Edom. But I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza, which shall devour its palaces. I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and the one who holds the sceptre from Ashkelon; I will turn My hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish,' says the Lord GOD.*"

Gaza now becomes the focus of attention by Amos. Gaza is one of five royal Philistine cities. From our verses above, it seems that the Philistines took Israelite prisoners and sold them to the nation of Edom. Edomites were a distant relative of Israel. Esau was the father of the Edomites and twin brother of Jacob, a founding father of the nation of Israel. What a humiliating experience for these captives! Captured by idolatrous Philistines and then sold as slaves to the Edomites! There could surely be no more shameful experience for God's people than to be treated in this way. The Philistine nation could only expect God's heavy hand in judgement to fall upon them.

There is a very real danger for believers today. Time and again the New Testament warns of the dangers of being led astray. Christians always need to verify what they hear by reference to the Bible. The Bible must always be the final authority for guidance.

The message to Tyre

Amos 1:9-10 state, "*Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. But I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, which shall devour its palaces.'*"

This nation, in the days of David and Solomon, was friendly to Israel. Solomon especially utilised the resources and skills of this nation for his building projects which included the temple. However, the people of Tyre were a seafaring nation totally involved in commerce. Money and wealth dominated their lives. There had been agreements between Tyre and Israel in the past but now they were broken. Consider the wording at the end of Amos 1:9, "*the covenant of brotherhood*". The bond had been more than a simple trade agreement. The covenant was counted as nothing in these difficult days but God does not forget. Like the Philistines, they preyed on the nation of Israel and sold the captives to the Edomites. With this warning God is looking for a truly repentant heart but, when this does not happen, then judgement will come. Not all the wealth in the world will save a person or nation from God's judgement.

As with the people of Tyre, so it is today. If we leave God and Christ entirely outside of our lives then some day God will say "*Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?*" (Luke 12:20).

The message to Edom

The Edomite nation is characterised by hatred for Israel. The hatred commenced in Genesis 27 and has been continuous in Scripture apart from a few brief occasions. This is the nation who took slaves from Tyre and Gaza. Let us read Amos 1:11-12, *“Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity; his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever. But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah.’”* There are four specific things mentioned in Amos 1:11 about Edom:

- *“he pursued his brother with the sword,”*
- *“[he] cast off all pity,”*
- *“his anger tore perpetually,”* and
- *“he kept his wrath forever.”*

Edomites waged a relentless war; there was no pity even when Israel was suffering from other nations. The Edomites were consumed with anger, like a never dying fire. In today’s terms these people needed counselling for anger management.

Christians should have a different attitude, as the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5:44, *“Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”* The world may hate but the Christian is to be marked by love. The book of Obadiah gives further details of God’s judgement on Edom. There is a *Truth for Today* radio talk, number 441 on the book of the prophet Obadiah.

The message to Ammon

Amos 1:13-15 state, *“Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions of the people of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead, that they might enlarge their territory. But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour its palaces, amid shouting in the day of battle, and a tempest in the day of the whirlwind. Their king shall go into captivity, he and his princes together,’ says the LORD.”*

Ben-Ammi was the founding father of this nation, a son by an incestuous relationship between Lot and his youngest daughter. See Genesis 19 for a full account of this sad episode in the life of Lot, Abraham’s nephew.

Ammon and Israel had a mixed relationship. Sometimes it was good and at other times bad. There were individuals who demonstrated friendship. There was Zelek an Ammonite who was one of David’s mighty men (2 Samuel 23:37). Also, when David suffered at the hand of his son Absalom, Shobi from Rabbah provided provisions (2 Samuel 17:27-29). It is the same today; individuals in nations accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour but the nation as a whole may be mainly ungodly. Sadly we now see this trend in our own country.

From Amos 1:13-15 we see that the Ammonites were not content to defeat Israel in battle but perpetrated atrocities against pregnant women. This was solely for territorial gain. It appears from Amos 1:14 that God’s judgement is more severe on Ammon than the previous nations considered.

We have not learned from history. Today, armies and terrorists commit atrocities against their so called “enemies” and “innocent” civilians. In Galatians 6:7, we are told, *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”* This principle applies to both Christians and non-Christians; it cannot be avoided!

The message to Moab

In Amos 2 we have the last prophecy against the Gentile nations that Amos brings to our attention. It is the nation of Moab. Moab, like Ammon, is the product of an incestuous relationship, Lot and his eldest daughter (see Genesis 19:36-37). Let us read Amos 2:1-3, *“Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime. But I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth; Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting and trumpet sound. And I will cut off the judge from its midst, and slay all its princes with him,’ says the LORD.”*

The final transgression that is held against Moab is not what they have done to Israel but the idolatrous heathen crime of human sacrifice, see 2 Kings 3:27 which clarifies Amos 2:1. This practice was an affront against God.

In general terms people are precious to God. The human race was made in the image and likeness of God, see Genesis 1:26. That is why bloodshed is abhorrent to God and capital punishment was specified for murderers. The fact that capital punishment is no longer lawful in this and many other countries around the world does not invalidate

God's standard. We have seen in our country how time and again a murderer serves a few years in prison and is then set free only to perpetrate the same monstrous crime again. There is usually an outcry in the media but nothing is done to re-align our laws to God's.

The message to Judah

We now come to God's people, the nations of Judah and Israel. Judah, the southern kingdom of God's people, was initially godly. Israel, however, set up an idolatrous system of worship, replacing God completely. In the nation of Judah, as king succeeded king, there was a general deterioration as they moved away from God. God required the people to hold fast and obey His word. Amos 2:4-5 state, "*Thus says the LORD: 'For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, lies which their fathers followed. But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.'*" God pinpoints the failure. They despised the law, as found in the writings of Moses and would not keep specific commandments. If, in a general way, the whole of God's law was too much for them to understand then they should have been able to obey the clear and simple commands contained within the law. But even these were not kept.

Is this not a challenge to all Christians? We might not understand the whole Bible but there are many simple specific "commands" that we have from the Lord Jesus and other New Testament writers, for example "*love one another*" (John 13:34). Yet our churches and fellowships are often marred by unloving words and behaviour. Then there are those things that are pursued which are contrary to God's word. There is a current debate in some Christian circles regarding bishops. It is clear in 1 Timothy 3:2, "*A bishop then must be blameless, **the husband of one wife**, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach.*" I refer to only one verse which is the start of a list of seventeen qualifications (see 1 Timothy 3:2-7). All are required not just a majority. I might upset some Christians by saying this, but how much more is God upset when we disregard His word. God's judgement upon Judah shows how much He cares about His word. Disregarding God's word sends the message that we do not care what God thinks and says.

The message to Israel

The Lord has more to say regarding Israel (the ten tribes) than about either Judah or the surrounding Gentile nations. Time does not permit the reading of Amos 2:6-16, so please read them later. The opening words are the same as for all other nations upon whom the Lord has pronounced judgement. This is followed by a long list of their failures. They disregarded and sold into bondage the poor and those who endeavoured to live righteously. They kept garments given as a pledge instead of returning them by evening as prescribed in the law. They engaged in idolatrous revelry. It is here where God seeks to remind them of His past protection when He brought them out of Egypt to this land. God raised up Nazarites and prophets as a testimony but the nation ignored them. Finally, God exclaims that He is feeling the pressure of their rejection as does a cart loaded with sheaves. So the only remedy is judgement and Israel will fall before the onslaught that is coming.

In closing, a quote from HA Ironside, "God has no delight in judgement, for His heart goes out to all men everywhere. He desires '*all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*' (1 Timothy 2:4, King James Version). God says, '*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live*' (Ezekiel 33:11, King James Version). But if men refuse God's mercy and spurn His loving kindness, then in righteousness He must deal with them in judgement. Judgement is His '*strange work*' the '*strange act*' of Isaiah 28:21 (King James Version). God would far rather show mercy and save than condemn and punish. However, He respects the sanctity of the human will and if men will not turn to Him to find life, they themselves deliberately choose death whether they realise it or not" (*Isaiah, Ironside Commentaries* by Ironside, HA).

As individuals and as a nation we make the choice and we must live with the consequences!

Thank you for listening.

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