

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/11/08 Wednesday evening

Old Testament Survey—Amos

Today is 9-11, a day that seven years ago changed our country and in many ways our world. I still remember being in the jungles of PNG in November 2001, just two months after the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon, and talking with nationals there at Amanab who could not even fathom towers large enough to hold four thousand people, let alone visual them crashing to the ground. But they, living in the remote jungles of western PNG, expressed their concern to me for my country and people.

It's important that we recognize that God is the God of the whole world. He has an agenda that is much bigger than just what we can see and experience here. He is forming a people for Himself, through the work of His Son Jesus Christ, taken from every nation and tribe.

One of things that strikes me when I read the prophets of Israel is their global perspective. They talked about the nations. They talked about God's intent for Israel in showing the nations the wonders of His glory. This evening we come to such a prophet, Amos.

Discuss: What do you know about the book of Amos?

Who wrote the book?

--Amos

Significant Information about Amos:

--His name means "to bear" or "burden-bearer."

--Before his call to prophetic ministry, Amos was a herdsman in Tekoa in Judah (1:1). Tekoa is a small town about 6 miles south of Bethlehem and 11 miles from Jerusalem.

--He was not a man of the court like Isaiah, nor a priest like Jeremiah, but a rugged outdoorsman who worked with a flock and had a sycamore-fig grove (1:1; 7:14-15). He was not schooled as a prophet but called from secular employment to bring a divine message (see 7:14-15). Possibly, he was a wealthy businessman prior to becoming a prophet.

--Though his home was in Judah, God sent him to announce judgment to the northern kingdom. He ministered for the most part at Bethel (7:10-13).

--Amos loved to speak in metaphors (as did the other prophets), and his hearers understood what he meant (our 21st century, scientific mindset does not understand figures of speech very well). For e.g.

4:1 "cows of Bashan" (refer to wives of corrupt businessmen)

4:6 "cleanness of teeth" (KJV, a reference to famine)

When was the book written?

--8th century B.C.

--Amos was a contemporary of Hosea and Jonah.

According to 1:1, Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah over Judah (792-740) and Jeroboam II over Israel (793-753). The main part of his ministry was probably carried out from 760-750.

Note: Amos had an oral ministry first, and then recorded his book later.

Discuss: What was happening in Israel at that time?

--Both kingdoms were enjoying great prosperity, politically and militarily.

--It was also a time of great idolatry, extravagant living, immorality, social corruption, oppression of the poor, and legal injustice.

--God's judgment at the hands of the Assyrians was just around the corner (722).

Why was the book written?

Theme: Amos announces that judgment will come on Israel, Judah, and the nations if they refuse to turn from their sin.

Key Problem: Israel had taken the favor of God for granted.

Discuss: How did this problem surface? It showed up in *social injustice*. Amos condemned the way wealth was being used (the people built mansions, 5:11, but ignored the poor).

See 5:24. Here is the essence of OT theology, and this is what God wants for His people, "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream." Sadly, however, in Amos' day, though there was plenty of religious formality, there was blatant social injustice (see 5:11-13).

Discuss: What are the evidences that indicate people are taking God for granted?

What is the outline of the book?

The book of Amos has the structure of a funeral dirge, a lament. It's as if he is reading their obituary to them. Amos uses this literary form to describe Israel as if she was already dead, though it had not happened yet.

I. Book of Words (chapters 1-6)

A. Judgment against the nations (1-2)

B. Sin and punishment of Israel (3-6)

II. Book of Visions (chapters 7-9)

A. Vision #1: Locusts

B. Vision #2: Fire

C. Vision #3: Plumb Line

D. Vision #4: Fruit Basket

E. Vision #5: Smitten Sanctuary

F. Messianic Blessings promised (9:11-15)

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

In the book of Amos, God condemns people who were treating other people in a way that showed their lack of appreciation for Him.

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

1. God expects social justice from all people.

To begin his book, Amos points out the sins of surrounding nations ("for three sins and for four"), and indicates that God says they've gone too far, and judgment is coming. Notice the common thread of their sins:

--Damascus (1:3) "threshed Gilead" (i.e. treated people as things)

--Gaza (1:6) sold people into slavery

--Tyre (1:9-10) disregarded a "treaty of brotherhood" (Amos assumed an unwritten law on the hearts of people).

--Edom did not show compassion to his brother (1:11)

--Ammon was cruel to Gilead, and ripped open pregnant women (1:13)

--Moab showed a disregard for people (2:1-3)

Then, after attacking the surrounding nations, Amos pointed the finger of God's judgment at Judah (2:4) and Israel (2:6). What had they done that was so bad? 2:6 "They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals..."

Note: Leon Rowland suggests from the word "shepherd" (sheep-herder) in 1:1, that this is a reference to a special kind of sheep, an expensive, long-haired sheep. He was perhaps a sheep-breeder (term used in 2 Kings 3:4). Amos may have been a wealthy businessman. As Rowland observes, "He is not a country-bumpkin attacking the city people. He is a businessman attacking the ethics of other businessmen."

Application: God holds all nations responsible for how they treat people. He doesn't tolerate indifference.

Observation by Leon Rowland: "In the NT, benevolence was not *part* of the budget; It *was* the budget." The house-churches devoted themselves to the care of people, not buildings. What does this have to say to us?

Note: Historically, social concerns came out of Christianity, not paganism. In what ways? Hospitals, schools, Red Cross, etc.

2. God hates religious activity that comes from people who are treating other people poorly.

That's what was happening in Israel (see 4:4-5). They tried to pay off God for their neglect of social responsibilities.

Q: How does God describe their singing in 5:23? It's like "noise" to Him.

Application: What does ministry in music sound like to God if the person singing has just mistreated another person?

Q: What was the attitude of the people towards worship in 8:5-6? "When will the religious holiday be over so we can cheat the poor again?" Pure materialism.

3. Amos teaches us about the Day of the Lord.

Q: What were the people doing in 5:18? Longing for the Day of the Lord. Why? They thought it would be a time of judgment on other nations, and blessing for them. Were they right?

Amos says no. Don't desire that Day. You won't escape. You will go into exile (4:2). Then hope will come (ch 9).

Note: We learn three practical responsibilities from Amos:

1. We learn we are to walk with God.
2. We learn we are to love people.
3. We learn to live within our income.