

Week 3: Amos

Introduction

Amos is a pre-exilic prophet. He prophesied around the same time as Hosea which was during the reign in Israel of Jeroboam II. So after Ahab, we had Ahaziah his son, and then Jehoram Ahab's son (since Ahaziah did not have children). Then we had Jehu and Jehoahaz and then Joash and then Jeroboam son of Joash who is Jeroboam II. All of these are evil kings.

So we said that pre-exilic prophets will be prophesying as "Return to the Lord for the exile is coming." And sometimes we see the stick and other times the carrot - "Return to the Lord lest you experience His wrath" or "Return to the Lord and you will experience His goodness and His mercy and His love." Of course, both are accurate - when I separate myself from the Lord in sin, I am separating myself from the Giver of all Good Things. And when I return to the Lord in repentance, I am returning and attaching myself to the Giver of all Good Things.

Let's talk about the person of Amos, the prophet who wrote the book.

His name means "burdened" or "bearer of a burden." The Jewish tradition says that the prophet Amos was slow of speech or slow of tongue - meaning that he was burdened by some sort of speech impediment. His name also gives us a hint about his prophecies - he will talk about the heavy burden of sin: unendurable and unacceptable to God.

He worked as a sheep herder and fruit gatherer in a small village called Tekoa. It is about 12 miles south of Jerusalem. If you have the map in your mind, you're thinking that's in Judah! And you're right! He lived in Judah. But he traveled up to Bethel (remember that's where Jeroboam I made one of his golden calves) and prophesied there against Israel.

The fact that he worked with sheep and gathered fruit, and that he was from a small village will reflect in his prophecies - we will see imagery drawn from the life of the dwellers of villages, and imagery of life in the wilderness.

During his time, Israel and Judah both saw prosperity. There was peace in the region - Assyria had conquered Aram in war, and Israel reacquired some of its land that Aram had taken. Assyria was at peace with Egypt - which was a big problem because for Assyria to go to Egypt, they had to pass through Israel. So with peace in the region, trade started to increase which led to economic growth - but usually economic growth means disparity. If people are getting rich, it means other people are getting poor. There starts to be two categories of people - the extremely rich traders, and the extremely poor farmers who were being oppressed by the rich.

In a time of economic prosperity, the rich start to see the practice of worshipping God as by giving money and sacrifices to the temple. The life of worship becomes separated from the spiritual

concept completely. Also, when there is peace in the land, people start to think it is because of their own goodness - and start to see God as "the God of Israel only" and not the God of Gentiles.

This time period that we just described is actually very similar to our time period. We live in a time of relative peace - sure, there is a war in Ukraine and Russia and another in Israel, but we are not feeling the effects of war. We are sitting comfortably in our homes in America with a roof over our head, enjoying our comforts. And we live in a time where some are wealthy and some are not. And sometimes the wealthy oppress the poor. I know if you're in college or grad school, you may not feel the wealth right now, but we live in a time where it's easy to say: "I give my tithes, and I support the church, that's enough." Or even "I go to liturgy every week... that should count for something, right?" and go and do whatever I want outside of liturgy and outside of Sunday. And we are reminded of Hosea 6:6 that verse that we memorized together - "I desire mercy and not sacrifice."

The problems in those times, which are problems that we see in our modern society, include:

- Self-centeredness
- Permissiveness (everything is permissive)
- Superficiality
- Atheism
- Materialism

So who does the Lord raise up to prophesy? Amos, raised among the poor, seeing the oppression of the rich, the empty spirituality of the rich, and proclaiming to them that God is "God of all" and does not endure sin no matter who commits it - rich or poor, Jew or Gentile. Amos will say in 9:12 "all the Gentiles are called by His name" which is also a prophesy about Christianity.

In the Old Testament you see that the authors came from all different classes or types of people. You have kings like King David and King Solomon who wrote, you have priests like Ezekiel or Ezra, you have Moses who grew up in Pharaoh's house, then lived as a shepherd, and then became leader of the nation of Israel; and then you have someone like Amos who was a shepherd and a gatherer of fruit living in a small village.

Amos has many good qualities that we can learn from:

- Humility: "I was no prophet, nor a son of a prophet, but I was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock." (Amos 7:14-15) - He was not ashamed to reveal his lowly and humble beginnings/profession.
- Courage: He will go before Amaziah - the chief priest of Bethel - without fear or faltering. He will prophesy in front of him about the devastation of his house and will testify to the truth.
- Wisdom: He speaks in a way that applies to everyone - rulers and elite, but also to those who are poor and living as farmers in the wilderness. His words are applicable to all for repentance
- Meditative: He contemplates on the atmosphere that he lives in, on nature around him, and lives this life of contemplation and it's reflected in his prophesies.

Amos dies by being clubbed to death by the priests of Bethel.

The Book is split into three sections:

- Chapter 1-2: Judgment of the Gentiles
- Chapter 3-6: Sermons to Israel
- Chapters 7-9: Visions and Promises of Salvation

Chapter 1-2

Chapter 1 opens with "The Lord Roars" - Amos is a shepherd and shepherds in those days in Israel would sometimes have to deal with lions. We remember King David and the lion. We remember Samson and the lion. The imagery here with roars is the Lord as a roaring lion. And a roaring lion strikes fear in the shepherd. Despite being a prophet who is maybe small in status, Amos' prophecies by the Lord are heavy. Like a lion's roar. And if we take them on ourselves, we will feel this roaring lion.

Chapter 1 and 2 are the Lord's charges and judgments against the nations.

Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah and Israel all get the same formula.

Amos is showing here that it doesn't matter who sinned, all sin is corruption and the Lord hates all sin. The Lord does not have preferential treatment or conditional love... we will see that even Nineveh, an Assyrian city, will be prophesied to and saved from destruction because they had a heart open to repentance. God is God of the whole earth, even if they don't all worship Him. He cares for all, judges all, condemns all.

Before getting to Israel's sin, he starts with the other nations. Sometimes we justify our sin with "well everyone is doing it" or "this guy did it and he turned out ok... nothing happened to him." So the Lord starts with those who are not his people so that the Israelites can know that there are consequences for sin.

Each nation's judgment is structured the same way "Thus says the Lord: For three sins of <place> and for four, I shall not turn away from it. For they did <this and that>. So I shall bring fire on them."

What does "For three sins and for four" mean? The Fathers express their comments on this a little bit differently from each other, reaching at least two conclusions that are complementary and beneficial for us. "For three sins and for four" refers to the maturity of the sin. St Jerome says that sin has evolved into its third and fourth generation. You can think of the first generation as "thinking of evil" - it starts in the mind. Then we progress to the second generation "doing the evil." The third generation is "continuing to do the evil" to where it becomes a habit, and specifically not repenting of it. The fourth generation is "preaching the evil." The Lord says you accepted evil in your mind, and I forgave you. You did the evil and I forgave you. You did not repent, and kept doing, and still I forgave you. But now will you preach it as well??

It's like if I first think about money, and then I steal, and then I don't repent, and then I tell people how easy it was. Or I think about money and then I gamble on sports or on the stock market or on crypto, and then I don't repent and then I start teaching people how to gamble on sports and stocks and crypto.

St Augustine comments on these numbers differently... St Augustine loves numerology and symbolism of numbers. He says that three represents the human soul - because in Genesis 1, we are created in the Image of God, according to His Likeness. And God is Trinity. But four represents the body, since the body comes from the dust of the earth (and usually earth is represented by number 4 because of the four directions NSEW). So for three sins and for four refers to our mental sins (like pride, hate, etc.) and our physical sins (like gluttony, carnal lusts, etc.). So God will judge us for those sins that we commit in our mind, and those that we commit with our hands.

So the prophet Amos expresses what he saw that the Lord showed him in this way, and he does it for each of these eight nations. Let's go through the eight nations and see what their sin is and how we can take it as a message to ourselves.

Damascus

- Damascus would go around fighting everyone and starting wars. They thought they couldn't be beaten and they were the best.
- This is the sin of Pride - the mother of all sins; the first sin
- Pride messes with the mind, emotions, body and spirit. Someone might get used to pride - used to thinking they are better or that others are worse, used to sitting in the first spot or walking in the door first, used to being the center of attention.

Gaza of the Philistines

- They would kidnap people and then sell them as slaves
- if you sell people for money, then what do you see as more valuable? Their sin is the love of money
- Love of money makes me look at money before my fellow brother
- Starts in the mind, then with doing - what am I forsaking for the sake of acquiring more money. Then I have a continual focus on money - whether obtained by cheating, by stealing, by gambling, sabotaging others, or maybe it's obtained in a lawful way, but at the expense of time with my family, or spiritual life.

Tyre

- They are like Gaza, except they took people from a nation that they had a covenant with. So they broke their treaty.
- Their sin is the breaking of an oath
- How many times have we broken our promises? Or our covenant with God? We have a covenant with God, which is baptism - are we careful not to break it? If I have an oath with God through my Father of Confession for a spiritual canon, am I breaking my oath? Or am I faithful to my canon?

Edom

- Edom pursued his brother with a sword and ravaged the womb on the earth.
- Edom is Esau, the brother of Jacob from the book of Genesis. And since the time when Jacob took the blessing, the descendants of Esau (who are called Edom) hated the descendants of Jacob (who are called Israel).
- Hatred and lack of mercy
- There is a natural love and dealing with mercy between brothers and when this breaks, we can become like animals - not even recognizing the person in front of us. A hatred that fills someone to the point where they would be happy if something bad happened to the one they hate... we see this today in how some behave with politics.

Ammon

- The Ammonites come from the descendants of Ammon who was the son born to Lot's younger daughter. If you remember in Genesis, Lot's daughters just escaped from Sodom by the angel, and in Sodom all they know is sexual immorality. So now, thinking the whole world was destroyed, and only their father is left, they both decide to go in to him and bear children by him. The elder daughter bore Moab and the younger daughter bore Ammon. And both of them became great nations that were thorns in Israel's flesh for hundreds of years. And they were both brutal.
- Ammonites represent brutality based on greed - to expand their territory, they even attacked and killed the helpless - women who were pregnant and their babies.
- Greed starts in the mind and leads to a brutality of doing whatever it takes to get what I want

Moab

- The Moabites represent brutality based on revenge. They burned the bones of the king of Edom to ashes. It's not enough that he is dead, but also to burn his bones...
- You might think - well king of Edom was an evil king, we just heard a judgment about him! Shouldn't God be happy?! No! Because now on top of the sin of the king of Edom, there is another sin of the Moabites.
- Vengeance starts in the mind and leads to brutality of doing whatever it takes to get what I think I deserve

Judah

- Judah... although being God's people who have the Temple and have the Law... the same language. For three sins of Judah and for four. I shall send a fire. Same language. Same fire.
- Why? They have despised the law of the Lord. For the other nations it's all the "big sins" but this nation is different - this nation received the Law of God... and despised it.
Reminds me of Romans 1
 - Romans 1:28-32 NKJV
[28] And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; [29] being filled

with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, [30] backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, [31] undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; [32] who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

- The Lord says "these were lies their fathers followed."
 - Although we have the Law of God, sometimes we follow a lie like "just do whatever you want and confess it after" - that's a lie!

Israel

- And now Israel... the same language.
- "they sell the righteous for silver" - what does this remind you of? It's a prophecy of Judas who will sell the righteous Lord Jesus Christ for 30 pieces of silver. But also in those days, they would take the poor of their brethren and sell them for silver or even (as seen in the next verse) for a pair of sandals.
- "the poor for a pair of sandals"
 - The poor represent the heavenly - the Lord says: "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven"
 - The sandals represent the earthly since they walk on the earth and touch the earth. That's why when Moses approached the Lord, He told him to remove his sandals.
 - So here, Israel sold the heavenly for the earthly.
 - In the time of the Prophet Samuel, they had God as their king. A Heavenly King... but they wanted an earthly king. And giving up their heavenly king for an earthly king, is what started this whole mess with the divided kingdom.
 - In the time of the Lord Jesus, Pontius Pilate asked Him "are you the King of the Jews" and He responded "you have said so." And He told Pilate "My Kingdom is not of this world." - but they didn't want a Kingdom out of this world. They wanted one in this world that would defeat the Roman oppressors... so they crucified Him.
- Other sins
 - "They trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn away the afflicted and pervert the way of the humble."
 - "A son and his father go in to the same handmaiden in order to profane the name of their God"
 - "And having bound their clothes with cords, they made curtains by the altar"
 - "and they drank wine gained through false accusations in the house of their God"
 - Love of money, forsaking the poor, adultery, idolatry, drunkenness, etc.
- Before telling them their punishment, and their fire, He reminds them of what He has done for them
 - Destroyed the Amorites
 - Brought you up from slavery in the land of Egypt
 - Gave you the land to possess that you now possess
 - It's a message for us

- I defeated Satan before you
- I took you out of slavery in baptism
- I gave you possession with Me by My Holy Spirit
- But what did you do?
- Israel rejected the word of truth and those who spoke to them the truth - Nazirites and Prophets.
- “Behold, I am weighed down by you,
As a cart full of sheaves is weighed down.
 - Our sin is heavy on the Lord
 - Let us strive to be light as a cloud that carries the Lord

In the next several chapters, the Lord will continue His message to Israel through the prophet Amos.

Chapter 3

"O house of Israel, hear this word the Lord has spoken against you, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, 'Out of all the families of the earth, I have especially known you. Therefore I shall exact vengeance upon you for all your sins.'"

The Lord starts Chapter 3 by reminding Israel that they are not like the other nations, but they are chosen by God to know Him closely. He made them His children - so their sins will be punished more than other nations. And the same goes for us - we as Christians, we know the fullness of the truth. We are sons of God by adoption through our baptism. We know God's commandments, we know His goodness, we know Him - so there is a higher standard for us to live according to His word.

God chose Israel as His people not because He loves them more - He loves all equally, but so that they can be a light to the other nations. We also are called to be light - let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify who? Your Father in heaven.

We might think that this is a scary message, or even that the Lord is being harsh here... but He goes on to ask 7 questions which show His mercy. And the answer to these questions will be no.

"Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" - if two people have different goals, direction, purpose, pace, understanding, can they walk together? No - naturally, they will split ways.

"Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?
Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?"

A lion cries out with a roar when he has caught his prey - so you know something happened. There's a reason for his roaring. What about the roaring voice of the Lord (callback to Chapter 1) - don't you think there's a reason for it?

"Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it?
Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing at all?
If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid?"

If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done *it?*"

We are seeing here again Amos' proclivity to using nature to deliver his prophecy! These questions represent for us two ideas:

1. That we are in trouble - we are prey with a lion, caught in a lion's den, birds fallen in a snare (and whenever we see snare, we think of the snare of Satan). We are in trouble and the Lord is our salvation. A bird cannot save himself from a trap. A lion's prey cannot save himself from the lion's mouth or the lion's den. The Lord is our salvation.
2. The Lord does not punish without giving a chance for repentance. He declares His word through Prophets and warnings and messages but only when those messages are ignored, will the Lord take action. There's a trumpet blown in a city so that the people would be afraid, and repent. The roar of a lion strikes fear in the shepherds hearts so that they know a lion is coming. The words of the prophet Amos are spoken to Israel so that they repent. Always think back to Nineveh - although they were a city great in sin, the Lord did not take action with them until at least Jonah went there and preached. And even when Jonah didn't want to and escaped and went the other way, the Lord didn't set His sights on Nineveh, but on Jonah so that His message would reach Nineveh and they would have the opportunity to repent - and they did.

"Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." - it reminds us of Sodom and Gomorrah those evil and wicked cities, that even them the Lord did not destroy before consulting with Abraham and giving Abraham a chance to intercede for them. Would you destroy them if there were 50 righteous? No not for 50. What about 45? Not for 45. What about 40? Not for 40. What about 30? Not for 30. What about 20? Not for 20. What about 10? Not for 10. And the Lord didn't even find 10. But for the sake of Abraham, the one who he found - Lot - who had even just a little bit of righteousness, even just the potential to be righteous, just a small part of his uncle Abraham's hospitality and righteousness, the Lord delivers him out first. Do you see the love and mercy of our God?

These few chapters and indeed most of the minor prophets are sounding the alarm about sin, and we can take the message for ourselves. And as I was reviewing the last several chapters of Hosea and Amos that we read, and the voice messages that I sent, they sounded kind of depressing - we sinned in this way and that way and we will be judged, etc. But look at God's mercy and His goodness - even to the evil, even to the wicked, even to us sinners who reject Him daily. But let us live a life of repentance.

"A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?" - The prophets spoke the word of Truth; they spoke God's words. God spoke, they heard it and repeated it. That's all they can do. And you know... we can take any message from our fathers the priests and bishops especially - as a message from God. If our fathers the priests and bishops see clothing being worn by Christians outside and inside the Church is not befitting to them and does not please the Lord, they should speak out. When they see haircuts people walking around with not pleasing to the Lord who made us in His image, they should speak up. When they see that we are slacking in our spiritual life or in our service or our church life, they speak up. What is our response? Do we

recognize this as a message from God? Do we recognize him as a messenger for God? Or do we persecute and kill them like the Jews killed the Prophets? "Oh that Abouna is strict. That Abouna is old-fashioned. That's just Abouna's opinion. I wish this Abouna would stop talking about that." - like in Chapter 2 "You gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying 'Do not prophesy!'" There is an authority to the message of the men of God.

The second part of Chapter 3 is about how the Gentiles will judge God's people. In verse 9: "Proclaim in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt" - Israel was supposed to be the salt of the earth that reformed others, but "if salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men." And Amos gives a prophecy here about the Captivity:

Therefore thus says the Lord God:

"An adversary *shall be* all around the land;
He shall sap your strength from you,
And your palaces shall be plundered."

¹² Thus says the Lord:

"As a shepherd takes from the mouth of a lion
Two legs or a piece of an ear,
So shall the children of Israel be taken out
Who dwell in Samaria—
In the corner of a bed and on the edge of a couch!

¹³ Hear and testify against the house of Jacob,"

Says the Lord God, the God of hosts,

¹⁴ "That in the day I punish Israel for their transgressions,

I will also visit *destruction* on the altars of Bethel;

And the horns of the altar shall be cut off

And fall to the ground.

¹⁵ I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house;

The houses of ivory shall perish,

And the great houses shall have an end,"

Says the Lord.

The Lord is punishing here not for punishment sake, but for two reasons:

1. To wipe out idolatry ("visit destruction on the altars of Bethel")
2. To destroy the life of luxury that leads to looseness and indifference ("destroy the winter house along with the summer house, houses of ivory shall perish.")

Chapter 4

So Chapter 3 had the first sermon to the children of Israel, and now Chapter 4 will have the second sermon.

The Children of Israel are oppressing the poor and the needy. And this oppression goes hand in hand with their rejection of true worship. The very unfortunate thing is that they think they are good - they think the warnings from the prophets don't concern them. Someone might say - I go to Bethel and offer sacrifices, I present tithes, I do burnt offerings! In their eyes, they love God - but they are deceiving themselves. As we sometimes do too. I go to church, I even go to Vespers. I serve in Sunday School. I help clean the church. I attend youth meeting. I'm a deacon. I give my tithes. I'm good, right? - well... maybe... how am I like when no one is looking? Do I have a relationship with God? Or do I have obligations? Am I merciful to my neighbors? Do I love my enemy?

And the Lord tries different ways to bring them to Him:

- I gave you cleanness of teeth and a lack of bread. Yet you did not return to Me. - sometimes a lack of food gives us clarity and this is one benefit to fasting.
- I withheld rain from your city, and the crops withered. Yet, says the Lord, you did not return to me. - If there's no rain, who do I depend on? If my crops are dying, who can I turn to? Yet they did not return to Him
- I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, your olive trees, the locust devoured them, yet you have not returned to Me." - so He gave them increase in their vineyards, fig trees, gardens, olive trees and they did not turn to Him... so He tried the opposite and the locust devoured them. And still they did not turn to Him.
- "I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; Your young men I killed with a sword, Along with your captive horses; I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the Lord.
- "I overthrew *some* of you, As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, And you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning; Yet you have not returned to Me," Says the Lord.

Sometimes the Lord will give us different kinds of challenges in order that we return to him... A bad grade on a test, a sickness - even if it's just a cold at an inconvenient time, not getting into the school of my choice, failing a job interview, trials in my friendships, or more difficult things like a death in the family, or a more serious illness with someone I know, etc. Maybe I only turn to the Lord when I am failing and I feel that I need Him. Maybe I only turn to the Lord when I finally feel that something is out of my hands and there's nothing I can do about it. Maybe I only turn to the Lord when the person I usually turn to, is mad at me. So the Lord will try in different ways to divert our attention to Him, for our own sake.

Chapter 5

Revision #6

Created 11 March 2025 09:20:32 by Morcouc Wahba

Updated 14 March 2025 16:52:26 by Morcouc Wahba