

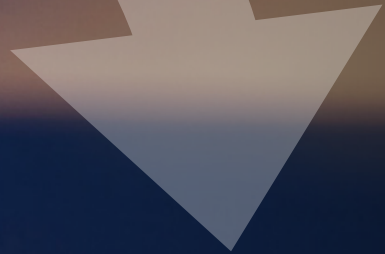
GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

MAY 17 - 21, 2021



COURSE SERMON SERIES
5/9 - 8/1
CORRECTIONS

THE MINOR PROPHETS

MONDAY

Amos 1:1 – 2:16

The Book of Amos (1:1) identifies Amos as an 8th century BC prophet, a contemporary of Isaiah. His message begins with comparing the LORD to a lion, roaring from Zion (v. 2). His roaring was directed toward Israel, the northern kingdom that had turned away from worshipping the LORD after the nation split into two kingdoms following Solomon's rule (10th Century BC). To this rebellious people, Amos proclaims judgment on the surrounding nations.

The first six oracles pronounced judgment on Israel's enemies: Aram (Damascus, vv. 3-5), northeast of Israel; Philistia (Gaza, vv. 6-8), southwest of Israel; Phoenicia (Tyre, vv. 9-10), northwest of Israel; Edom (vv. 11-12), south of Israel and Judah; Ammon (vv. 13-15), east of Israel; and Moab (2:1-3), east-southeast of Israel. All six were judged for crimes against humanity: brutality, murder, enslavement, and barbarity. No doubt Amos's hearers were uttering hearty "Amens" to such pronouncements of judgment.

Amos's next oracle (2:4-5) concerns Judah, Israel's southern neighbor and "sibling." However, Judah incurred judgment for different reasons that were religious in nature: (1) rejecting the law of the LORD and (2) following false gods. Again, Amos's audience would have affirmed Judah's punishment.

Finally, Amos turned his attention to Israel (vv. 6-16). Following the previous pattern, Amos rehearsed Israel's sins (vv. 6-8): mistreating

innocent and needy people, oppressing the poor, abusing women, and abusing people through corrupt religious rituals. What follows (vv. 9-12) is a recounting of all the things the LORD had done for Israel: bringing them out of Egypt, leading them through the wilderness, giving them the land of their enemies, and sending servants to minister among them. Israel's response had been to force the Nazarites to break their vows and to silence the prophets.

The final verses of chapter 2 (vv. 13-16) outline the inevitable and irresistible judgment that the LORD is sending on Israel: none will escape and none will be able to save his life. No doubt Amos's audience was no longer applauding the prophet's message.

Israel's sins concerned matters of social justice. Israel shared guilt with Judah for rejecting the law of the LORD, but Israel's judgment focused specifically on her mistreatment of her neighbors. The victims of Israel's sin are identified as the innocent, needy, poor, oppressed, and girls. The LORD held Israel responsible for their treatment of such people who are frequently cited in Scripture as those of special concern to the LORD. Amos affirmed that the Lord continues to watch out for the vulnerable and marginalized in society and that He expects His people to treat them with love, dignity, and kindness.

QUESTIONS

Who are the vulnerable and marginalized in our society? In our community? What is the Lord calling us to do to support them?

PRAYERS FOR AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

African Enterprise (AE) seeks to evangelize the cities of Africa through word and deed in partnership with the Church. Pray for evangelistic mission preparation in Togo, West Africa, where AE neighboring Ghana Team is reaching out this year. This has been hampered by a COVID-related state of emergency declared by the government.

TUESDAY

Amos 3:1 – 4:13

Amos's next oracle begins with an affirmation of the special relationship between the LORD and His people: "*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth*" (3:2). This is the reason given for the LORD's decision to punish Israel for their sins. Because they had been selected for special treatment by the LORD, He was not prepared to ignore their disobedience. This affirmation of a special relationship is followed by a series of rhetorical questions, the first five of which (vv. 3-5) demand a negative answer and the last two of which (v. 6) demand an affirmative answer. These questions set up Amos's defense of his message: "*The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken—who can but prophesy?*" (v. 8).

The historical context for Amos's prophecies helps one understand them better. Chapter one locates Amos's message during the reign of Jeroboam II, who reigned over Israel for 40 years (786 – 746 BC). Jeroboam enlarged Israel's borders and influence, and he and Israel's elite experienced great prosperity. It is in this context that Amos warned his hearers "*who store up in their fortresses what they have plundered and looted*" (v. 10) of the LORD's impending judgment. The LORD WILL destroy their altars (v. 14) and tear down their winter and summer houses, mansions adorned with ivory (v. 15).

Chapter 4 continues this theme with a focus on the wealthy women of Samaria. Amos does not mince words when he calls them "cows

of Bashan” (i.e., well-fed cows) “who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, ‘Bring us some drinks!’” (v. 1). Their religious practices of sacrifices and tithing (vv. 4-5) will not deter the LORD’s judgment. Amos notes the many things the LORD had done to get their attention (vv. 7-11): sending famine, locusts, and plagues; withholding rain; overthrowing their armies. But the common refrain is “‘yet you have not returned to me,’ declares the LORD” (five times in vv. 6-11). In the midst of their prosperity, the people of Israel had turned away from the LORD, mistreating the poor among them. The LORD’s response to them was that they should prepare to meet their God (v. 12), followed by a reminder of just how awesome their God was (v. 13).

QUESTIONS

We live in the midst of one of the most affluent countries of the world and in a very affluent part of that country. Has our affluence and prosperity dulled our ears to the cries of the poor around us? To what extent do we justify ourselves based on our religious practices (i.e., reading the Bible, attending church, giving) instead of our relationship with the Almighty Sovereign LORD? Are we truly prepared to meet our God?

PRAYERS FOR AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

African Enterprise has spearheaded a continent-wide evangelists’ gathering called Proclaim, with more than 1,500 leaders from 54 countries. It was to be held in-person in Nairobi last December, but was organized via Zoom. It will meet again in December 2021. Pray for these evangelists to be able to gather in person at the right time.

WEDNESDAY

Amos 5:1-27 (and 6:1-14 for additional reading)

Amos 5 begins with a lament for fallen Israel (vv. 1-2) and a threat of the destruction of 90% of Israel's armies (3). To the people living under the threat of judgment, the LORD says: "Seek me and live" (vv. 4, 6). What does it mean to seek the LORD? The answer is presented when Amos proclaims, "Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say He is" (v. 14). This command is restated in the next verse (v. 15), "Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts." So seeking the LORD means seeking good, hating evil, and maintaining justice. In other words, it is acting as the LORD acts.

This lack of justice is also found in Amos's accusations of the audience as those who:

- "turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground" (v. 7).
- "hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth" (v. 10).
- "oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts" (v. 12).

Amos's message of judgment was for those who had built stone mansions and planted vineyards (v. 11), in other words, the elite aristocracy who controlled the economy and the courts.

Apparently, such people believed the day of the LORD would bring them His favor. But Amos warned his readers that the day of the LORD will be a day of darkness, not light (vv. 18, 20), a day of escaping one danger only to find another in a presumed place of safety (v. 19). They thought their religiosity would impress the LORD, but the LORD responds that their assemblies stink. Instead of trying to impress the LORD with sacrifices, offerings, and worship music, they should “*let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!*” (v. 24).

This recurring theme of justice in Amos underscores what is truly important to the LORD. Although the law regulated the sacrifices and offerings that please the LORD, what pleases Him most is one’s heart response to Him and to His people, particularly the vulnerable. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), after all, are focused primarily on what it means to love God and love others. The command to “*love your neighbor as yourself*” (Leviticus 19:18) is a natural outworking of who the LORD is, the One who “*defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing*” (Deuteronomy 10:18).

QUESTIONS

Most Christians long for our Lord Jesus’ return. Do we, like the Israelite elite, think that our religious practices please Him? Will He find us faithful, fighting for justice and righteousness, and loving our neighbors as ourselves?

PRAYERS FOR AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

Give praise for the more than 6 million people who heard the Gospel in 2020 via African Enterprise’s Home-Based Evangelism (HBE) strategy, which was adopted due to the COVID pandemic and allows for communicating the Gospel via digital means into homes where small groups gather. Pray for continued Gospel fruit via HBE in 2021.

THURSDAY

Amos 7:1 – 8:14

Amos 7 and 8 focus on a series of visions the LORD gave to Amos regarding the nature of the impending judgment He plans to bring on Israel and His willingness to revise His plans based on Amos's intercession. The first vision (7:1-3) showed an invasion of locusts that threatened to strip the land bare of crops (remember Joel's vision last week). Amos pleaded that Israel (Jacob) is so small that it would not survive and the LORD relented (v. 3). The second (vv. 4-6) presented a devastating fire. Once again, Amos pleaded and the LORD relented. The third (vv. 7-9) showed a plumb line, the type of tool used to ensure that a wall or doorway is vertically straight. The LORD promised to set Israel straight by destroying the places of worship to false gods and destroying the royal dynasty that had led them astray (v. 9).

In chapter 8 the fourth vision (vv. 1-2) portrayed a basket of ripe fruit, indicating that the time was ripe for judgment on Israel. This vision was followed by a litany of Israel's misdeeds (vv. 3-6): abusing the poor and needy, unfair pricing and selling practices, selling diluted products, and slave-trading. Because of such behavior, the LORD would bring judgment that resulted in weeping, humiliation, and a famine of hearing the words of the LORD (vv. 9-12). Given the many ways the LORD had spoken to Israel through Moses and the prophets over hundreds of years, this final judgment was especially grievous.

In the midst of these four visions is a brief narrative of an interaction between Amos and Amaziah, a priest in Bethel (7:10-17). Amaziah complained to Jeroboam that Amos's message presented a threat of conspiracy and then ordered Amos to go back home to Judah, taking his prophetic message with him. Amos responded by reaffirming his call from a vocation as a farmer by the LORD to deliver his message to Israel. He then proceeded to deliver a very specific message of judgment from the LORD upon Amaziah: his wife would become a prostitute, his children would die by the sword, his land would be divided up, and he would die in exile, just as surely as Israel would go into exile.

This brief vignette provides the backdrop for the prophetic announcement after the fourth vision that the LORD would bring a famine of hearing His words. Amaziah represents those in Israel who had already refused to listen to the LORD's message. The coming famine would simply confirm what the people had already chosen for themselves.

QUESTIONS

How attentive are we to the LORD's message to us, communicated via Scripture and the Spirit? How has the LORD been calling you to respond to Him lately? What actions do you need to take?

PRAYERS FOR AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

Pray for the provision of new, reliable used vehicles for African Enterprise's Teams in Ethiopia and Zambia so that they can meet with church leaders and lay people and carry out AE's evangelistic ministries effectively.

FRIDAY

Amos 9:1-15

Amos recorded a final vision in chapter 9, one of the LORD standing beside the altar and bringing judgment upon His sinful people. The words of this vision pointed to the inevitability and inescapability of this judgment: “Not one will get away, none will escape” (v. 1). From wherever the people might attempt to flee—the depths, the heavens, the mountain tops, the bottom of the sea, even in exile—the LORD would execute His judgment.

The center of this vision (vv. 5-6) is an affirmation of the LORD Almighty’s awesome majesty: He touches the earth and it melts (v. 5). Yet the LORD affirms that He will not execute judgment indiscriminately. *“Yet I will not totally destroy the descendants of Jacob,” declares the LORD.... ‘All the sinners among my people will die by the sword, all those who say, “Disaster will not overtake or meet us”’* (vv. 8, 10). Even in the midst of judgment, the LORD demonstrates that He is a righteous Judge who ensures that He demonstrates the justice He expects of His people.

Chapter 9 closes with a promise of salvation. After judgment has been executed, the LORD promises to *“restore David’s fallen shelter”* (v. 11), apparently a reference to a reestablished Davidic kingdom. The coming days are marked with unheard abundance. The crops produce so much that harvesters cannot keep up (v. 13). Instead of a land flowing with milk and honey, the restored land of Israel will drip and flow with wine, a symbol of joy and bountifulness.

The highlight of this promised restoration is the LORD's promise: *"I will bring my people Israel back from exile ... never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them"* (vv. 14, 15). They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them; plant vineyards and drink their wine; and make gardens and enjoy their fruit. Amos's audience would have recognized this as a fulfillment of the LORD's promised blessings to His people in Deuteronomy 28, conditioned on their obedience to God's commands.

Our society has problems with the idea of a God who judges people, for which the church is likely partly to blame for too often focusing on sinful behavior rather than sins of the heart. If we, the church, were as serious about matters of injustice and greed in our midst as we are about substance abuse and sexual immorality, perhaps people would have a more positive view of God as Judge.

QUESTIONS

How can we demonstrate to a watching world that our God is a just and merciful Judge? Which sins do we deem most shockingly bad? How do those align with the sins Amos highlighted? How can we be merciful as our Father is merciful (Luke 6:36)?

PRAYERS FOR AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

Too many young people in Africa are being lost to drugs, alcoholism, occult practices and sexual immorality. Pray for AE's Foxfire Youth Empowerment program as it trains young people in evangelism, discipleship and counseling so they can reach their peers in schools and in evangelistic missions through music, dance, drama and biblical life-skills training.



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