

Amos, Shepherd of a Divided Fold

Commentary by Warren Wiersbe: It is about twenty-five years before the fall of Israel. We are visiting the city of Bethel, where King Jeroboam II has his private chapel and Amaziah is his priest. The nation is enjoying peace and prosperity; in fact, it is living in luxury. The impressive service is about to start, with Amaziah in charge, when we hear a commotion outside the chapel. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion," cries a voice. "God will send judgment upon this wicked nation." We rush outside, and there we find a rustic "hill preacher" from Tekoa, named Amos ("burden"). He is not a prophet in the professional sense, for his father was not a prophet nor did he attend the prophetic schools (7:10–17). But he is God's man with God's message, and he is warning that judgment is coming to Israel. He uses the word "captivity" several times (5:5, 27; 6:7; 7:17). Let's pause and listen to this shepherd-farmer and seek to understand the message he is bringing.

I. He Looks Around (1–2)

Amos begins his message by looking around at the nations and announcing eight judgments. Verse 2 makes it clear that God is roaring in wrath, like a lion leaping on his prey (see 3:8). Amos begins with Syria (1:3–5) and accuses them of awful cruelty in war. Then he points to Philistia (Gaza, 1:6–8) and condemns them for the sin of slavery. The Phoenicians are next (Tyrus, 1:9–10), and they are also judged for cruel slavery. Israel's old enemy Edom is accused of not showing pity but maintaining a constant hatred (1:11–12). Ammon is judged for bitter cruelty and selfish greed (1:13–15); Moab for cruelty to Edom (2:1–3); and Judah for rejecting the Law of God (2:4–5). It must have pleased the Israelites at Bethel to hear Amos condemn their neighbors, but Amos did not stop. Judgment #8 was reserved for—Israel. In 2:6–16 the prophet names the sins of the people: bribery, greed, adultery, immorality, selfishness, ingratitude, drunkenness (even forcing the Nazarites to drink), and rejecting God's revelation. Amos cries, "I am pressed under this burden of sin." (The name "Amos"

means "burden.") How can God ever forgive such a wicked nation? Before we condemn these nations of the past, we had better examine our own nation and our own hearts, for we may be guilty of the same sins.

II. He Looks Within (3–6)

Having announced judgment to the nations, Amos now looks within the hearts of the people and explains why this judgment is coming. Remember that Israel was enjoying a time of peace, prosperity, and "religious revival." People were attending religious services and bringing generous offerings. But the true servants of God do not look at the outward appearance; they look at the heart. In these chapters, Amos delivers three sermons, each one prefaced by, "Hear this word" (3:1; 4:1; 5:1).

A. A message of explanation (3:1–15).

"How can our God send judgment upon us?" the people were asking. "Are we not His chosen people?" But that was the very reason for the judgment. Where there is privilege, there must also be responsibility. Verses 1–2 make this clear. Amos is using an argument from cause and effect. If two people are walking together, they must have made an appointment (v. 3). If a lion roars, he has prey (v. 4). If a bird is in the trap, somebody set the trap (v. 5). If the trumpet sounds, calamity is near (v. 6). If the prophet is preaching, then God must have sent him (v. 7). Then Amos announces that the Assyrians are coming to destroy the nation (vv. 9–15), and the lovely services at Bethel will not hold them back. Alas, the summer houses and winter houses (what luxury!) will all be destroyed.

B. A message of accusation (4:1–13).

The fearless prophet "starts meddling" now and begins to name sins. He calls the women living in careless luxury "fat cows of Bashan." See them telling their husbands to bring them more drinks. Amos is not impressed with the religion at

Bethel; to him it is just another sin on their records. God had sent his warnings to them (vv. 6–11), but they would not listen. He had taken the best of their young men to die in war (4:10), but still the nation did not repent. God would no longer use natural calamities. Now He would come Himself (v. 12). “Prepare to meet your God.”

C. A message of lamentation (5:1–6:14).

Amos weeps as he contemplates the judgments coming to his nation. Verse 3 suggests that 90 percent of the people will die. Note the repetition of the word “seek” (5:4, 6, 8, 14). “Don’t seek religious services; seek the Lord!” There were some in the nation who were saying, “The day of the Lord will come and then God will deliver us” (5:18–20). They did not realize that the Day of the Lord would be a time of judgment for them as well as for their enemies. They are like Christians today who “long for” the return of Christ, yet may not be prepared to meet the Lord. In 5:24 we have the key verse of the book; read “justice” instead of “judgment.” Amos longed to see the nation obeying God and executing His justice in the land. In chapter 6 Amos continues to weep over the sins of the people: indifference and indulgence (vv. 1–6); injustice, immorality, and idolatry (vv. 7–14). “At ease in Zion” — what a description of some believers today!

III. He Looks Ahead (7–9)

In the closing part of his message, Amos beholds five visions, and from these visions he discovers what God will do to the nation.

Vision of Locusts (7:1–3)—The locusts are about to destroy the crop, but Amos intercedes and the Lord stops them.

Vision of Fire (7:4–6)—An awful drought overtakes the land; the prophet prays, and God delivers the land.

Vision of the Plumb line (7:7–9)—The Lord stands beside (not “upon”) the wall and tests it to see if it is straight. God is measuring Israel, and she does not conform to His Word; therefore, judgment is coming. At this point in the message,

the “state priest” Amaziah could take no more, and he interrupted, “You are not patriotic! Take your soapbox and go back to the hills to preach.” Amos was not afraid. He told the false priest, “God called me to preach, and I must obey. As for you, Amaziah, you will pay for your compromise and sins, because your wife will become a harlot and your family will die by the sword.”

Vision of the Summer Fruit (8:1–14)—We must take a brief lesson in Hebrew to understand this vision. The Hebrew word for “summer fruit” is hayitz, and the word for “end” in v. 2 is hatz. These words look and sound alike, and Amos used one to lead to the other. “The end is come! Israel, like summer fruit, has ripened for judgment.” Again in vv. 4–14 the prophet names the sins of the people: robbing the poor of their homes (8:4); complaining about holy days interfering with business (8:5); setting excessive prices that hurt the poor (8:6). God warns that He will send His wrath upon the people, not only in natural calamities, but in a famine for the Word of God. They would not listen to the Word when they had the opportunity; therefore, He will take His Word away from them. In that day their idols at Dan and Beersheba will do them no good (8:14). Vision at the Altar (9:1–10)—Now Amos sees the Lord Himself, and not some symbol. Why is God at the altar? Because judgment begins at the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17).

The people had been outwardly religious, but they were not sincere from the heart. God orders the doorposts to be broken —and the roof caves in. Verses 8–9 summarize what God plans to do. He compares the coming judgment to the sifting of grain (see Luke 22:31–34). The good seed (true believers, the believing remnant) will be saved, but the chaff will be burned up.

Amos closes on a note of victory, for in 9:11–15 we have the promise of future restoration. Verses 11–12 are quoted in Acts 15:14–18 at the first church conference.

Source - Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's expository outlines on the Old Testament (Am 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.