

Amos

Is God concerned when disaster strikes?

- Is God concerned when a sparrow falls from the sky?

Let's make things a little more personal

- Is God concerned when you are mistreated?
- Is God concerned when you are sinned against?

Of course God is concerned about these things

- Jesus Himself tells us that we are of greater importance than the birds of the air or the flowers of the field

The apostle Peter tells us to cast "*all your anxiety upon Him, for He cares for you*" (1 Pet 5:7, italics mine)

- God does care

In the book of Amos, we will see that God cares

- He cares a lot more than we give Him credit for

The book of Amos is named after the prophet himself

- His name means "burden" or "burden bearer"²⁶

Amos would be given a hard message to deliver

- But the God of the universe demanded that he speak forth the truth
- Hence, there was a burden to fulfill the ministry and responsibility that God had entrusted to him

Amos was not born into a prophetic family

- "*I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. ¹⁵ But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel'*" (7:14-15)

He was "*not a prophet, nor...the son of a prophet*"

- On the contrary, he was "*a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs*"

In other words, Amos was a farmer – a layman!

- He was a man from the country
- He was not eloquent or educated
- Yet God used this simple man to speak forth a simple message

²⁶ Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 245.

But God took Him from being a farmer to being a prophet

- That's a big change!

Furthermore, he was from "Tekoa" (1:1)

- This is in Judah, near Bethlehem²⁷
- Of course, this is the southern kingdom

Yet God told him to minister to those in Israel, the northern kingdom!

- He was called to minister to a different nation than the one in which he was born!

The time in which Amos prophesied is given in chapter one, verse one, "in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake"

- During the days of Uzziah king of Judah (south)
- During the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel (north)

From what we know about the reigns of these two kings, there was a short window of time when their ministries overlapped

- 767 to 753 BC²⁸

Two natural phenomena are mentioned in this book

- "the earthquake" (1:1) – we don't know when this took place
- "I shall make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight" (8:9)

Calculations from astronomy indicate that a solar eclipse took place in Israel on June 15, 763 BC²⁹

- Without a doubt, this would have been remembered by those who listened to Amos

We must keep in mind that Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC

- That is 30-45 years away, depending on when you place the ministry of Amos
- Exile is coming soon!

Amos ministers after the time of Obadiah, Joel, and Jonah

- He ministers just before Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah³⁰

The northern kingdom was enjoying outward prosperity

- Business was booming
- Optimism was in the air
- Military victories were abundant

²⁷ Gerard Chrispin, *The Bible Panorama*, 368.

²⁸ Wilkinson & Boa, 245.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

During a time of peace and prosperity, the nation of Israel became spiritually lazy and complacent

- Materialism, immorality, injustice, and oppression became rampant

With all of the external, outward success, there was a deeper problem

- Worship had become shallow
- People had become callous to God
- God's Word was ignored

The result of this scenario was a false security

- People were trusting in the nation instead of the LORD

Israel needed to be awakened

- They needed to be shaken to the core

People found it very difficult to fathom that disaster would be coming

- But it was only a few decades until the Assyrian exile

This is where God calls Amos to be a prophet to these people

- A people who were outwardly religious
- A people who were deceptively secure
- A people who were openly arrogant

As you can imagine, Amos was not viewed as a popular speaker

- He was an outsider
- He spoke against the sins of the people
- He didn't mince words

Amos' hub of ministry was Bethel, which literally means "house of God"

- For Israel, Bethel was the king's residence
- It was also the center of idolatry

Amos speaks out against the superficial religion of those in Israel

- Of course, being an outsider from Judah didn't help much
- Amos was bold in denouncing sin

Many in the nation of Israel had adopted a ritualistic, superficial approach to religion

- They were just going through the motions
- Of course, they fully expected God to be pleased
- *But He wasn't*

Amos was used of God to point out just how much God was displeased with this heartless, superficial, ritualistic worship

The basic issue of Amos is God's judgment coming on a sinful, unrepentant nation

- Israel outwardly professed to follow the LORD
- However, they were inwardly rebellious

Here is a sampling of the sins that Israel was committing³¹

- Empty ritualism
- Oppression of the poor
- Idolatry
- Deceit
- Self-righteousness
- Arrogance
- Greed
- Materialism
- Callousness

God's mercy and love were great

- But He would also hold Israel responsible for their actions

The book of Amos breaks down into four (4) divisions³²

- Eight prophecies (1:3-2:16)
- Three sermons (3:1-6:14)
- Five visions (7:1-9:10)
- Five promises (9:11-15)

I. Eight prophecies (1:3-2:16)

Amos is called to leave his homeland, Judah

- God tells him to minister to the northern kingdom, Israel

He would not be welcomed very nicely

- Most likely, he would have been treated as an outsider

But an outsider sometimes has a clear, honest evaluation of matters

- He doesn't have the internal bias toward how things really are

Eight (8) prophecies are given in this section of the book

- The first six deal with pagan nations that surrounded Israel
- The seventh deals with Judah, the southern kingdom
- The eighth deals with Israel, the northern kingdom

³¹ Ibid., 246.

³² Ibid., 248.

In each of these eight prophecies, a common phrase is used, “for three transgressions of (a city’s name) and for four I will not revoke its punishment...”

- What does the LORD mean by this?

Let’s say upfront what it does not mean

- It does not imply that God will overlook three sins but not four
- It is not a counting issue

God intends to say that the sins of these people groups are not being overlooked by God

- He is not blind to their sin
- Rather, He knows exactly what is taking place

You might say that this phrase refers to “the last straw”

- God has had enough!

Notice that Amos begins with those nations that surround Israel

- Then he begins to get closer and closer, narrowing the focus
- He ends up focusing on Israel herself
- He spends the most time on Israel’s sins

Seven times, the Lord says that He will send “fire” upon these nations (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5)

- The only exception is Israel herself

Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab were judged by the LORD

- In other words, no one is exempt from God’s oversight and accountability

“The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; and His sovereignty rules over all” (Ps 103:19)

- Even those who aren’t God’s people will still have to answer to Him one day³³

II. Three sermons (3:1-6:14)

After giving eight (8) prophecies in the first two chapters, Amos moves on to deliver three (3) sermons over the next four chapters

- These sermons focus on Israel’s present, past, and future sins
- The basic message is that Israel deserves her punishment

Three times in Amos 3-6 the phrase, “Hear this word” is used

- In other words, Israel had better listen to what the prophet of the LORD is saying!
- This isn’t just a farmer speaking; these are the words of God Himself!

³³ Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament*, 727.

Chapter 4 is a blistering attack on the outward superficiality of Israel

- Amos was using straightforward language that penetrated beyond the outward façade

He refers to some of the women as “cows of Bashan” (4:1)

- This particular region was known for its lush, green valleys
- In other words, the cattle there had plenty of food to eat

Amos refers to some of these women who had prospered at the expense of others as “cows” (4:1)

- They had oppressed the poor
- They had crushed the needy
- They had demanded things from their husbands

The prophet tries to capture the heart of God in the middle of chapter 4

- God has given Israel so much
- But the return from the nation is nothing but more sin

On five occasions, the LORD says, “Yet you have not returned to Me”

- “But I gave you also cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places, yet you have not returned to Me,’ declares the LORD” (4:6, emphasis mine)
- “So two or three cities would stagger to another city to drink water, but would not be satisfied; yet you have not returned to Me,’ declares the LORD.” (4:8, emphasis mine)
- “I smote you with scorching *wind* and mildew; and the caterpillar was devouring your many gardens and vineyards, fig trees and olive trees; yet you have not returned to Me,’ declares the LORD” (4:9, emphasis mine)
- “I sent a plague among you after the manner of Egypt; I slew your young men by the sword along with your captured horses, and I made the stench of your camp rise up in your nostrils; yet you have not returned to Me,’ declares the LORD” (4:10, emphasis mine)
- “I overthrew you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze; yet you have not returned to Me,’ declares the LORD” (4:11, emphasis mine)

Have you experienced ungratefulness from your children?

- You provide for them
- You give things to them
- But sometimes they respond with a very selfish, ungrateful attitude

That is how Israel was responding to the LORD

- What did they need that God did not provide?
- Yet they responded with ungratefulness, hypocrisy, and more sin

III. Five visions (7:1-9:10)

It is fairly common for visions to occur in prophetic passages

- Visions are God-ordained means of communicating truth in a graphic, visual manner

There are five (5) visions of judgment given in this section

- Locusts
- Fire
- Plumb line
- Summer fruit
- Doorposts

Amos intercedes for the first two – locusts and fire

- And the LORD prevents those judgments from taking place

The third is a vision of a plumb line

- A plumb line is used to test how true and straight a wall is
- It was used during construction to ensure that the walls were straight³⁴

Notice that the plumb line is not set against the other pagan nations

- It is not even set against Judah
- It is set against Israel

Israel discovers that they are lacking

- God will bring destruction and judgment

There is a short interlude about Amaziah speaking to Amos (7:10-17)

- Amaziah basically distorts the words of Amos to the king
- But God will have the final word – His truth will be made known

The fourth vision is found in chapter 8

- It is the vision of a basket of rotting fruit

In other words, Israel is overripe for judgment

- Rotting fruit is not appealing any longer
- Neither is the nation Israel

The fifth vision is that of the doorposts in the first part of chapter 9

- The omniscience of God is put on display – He sees and knows everything that Israel has been doing
- God's judgment for sin was inevitable!

³⁴ Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 113.

IV. Five promises (9:11-15)

The entire book has been about coming judgment and devastation because of the sinfulness of Israel

- But the book ends on a positive note

Despite Israel's great sins and hypocrisy, the LORD will have compassion on the nation

- This hint of restoration is real

“In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old; **12** that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name,’ declares the LORD who does this.

13 ‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; when the mountains will drip sweet wine and all the hills will be dissolved. **14** Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live *in them*; they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit.

15 I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them,’ says the LORD your God.”

These verses are amazing in and of themselves

- However, when we examine them against the dark backdrop of the rest of Amos, they seem to accentuate God's grace even more

These promises are given by the LORD

- Not because Israel deserved to be restored
- But because of the compassion of the LORD

God has a wonderful promise for the future

- All of the Davidic and Abrahamic covenant blessings will come true

The future will be a time of exponential blessing and fruitfulness

- God's people will be back in the land flowing with milk and honey
- They will never again be removed from that land

Amos prophesied during a time in which God's people were growing complacent

- Financial prosperity
- Absence of war

Our generation has a lot in common with the audience of Amos

- I pray that we will take this message to heart

Any questions?

Next time, we will be studying three more minor prophets

- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah