

introduction

amos

Head on over to the book of Amos in the Old Testament. You'll find it between Joel and Obadiah.

This morning we embark on a new series of studies. We like to do different things at our different services. On Sunday mornings we're in Genesis looking at Abraham. On Wednesday nights we're moving through Romans, an epistle. Just over a month ago we finished a study through the Gospel of Mark, so it's time for some prophecy.

Like with the Gospel of Mark, we're going to take this book chapter by chapter and take each passage devotionally and try to pull out a few things.

Both as a book and as a man, Amos is very interesting. If you're like me, it's easy to get to Isaiah in the Old Testament and sort of take a deep breath in and think, "Ok, we've got like 600 pages of judgment and woe coming." And, certainly, the theme of coming judgment and coming destruction is common to both the Minor and Major prophets, however there's really a lot we can understand from these books both for our own lives and to learn about the nature of God. To see His heart and understand how He feels about us and our lives.

Amos is no exception. In fact, compared to many of the other prophets we're given a lot of information about who he was and where he was from. Which is really helpful for us as we read his book more than 2,500 years after it was written.

It was the time of the divided kingdom, before the Babylonian captivity, in what we might call the Assyrian age. Which was the years around the time of the Assyrian captivity of Israel in 722BC. Amos was sent by God about the same time that Jonah was sent to Nineveh to preach the Gospel. During this general time period, God raised up 5 specific prophets whose books we have in the Bible. Jonah to the Assyrians. To Judah, the kingdom in the south, and Israel, the kingdom in the north, God sent Micah, Isaiah, Hosea and Amos. All between about 770BC and 690BC.

Here's what we learn about Amos in verse 1 of chapter 1:

Amos 1.1 - The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

Now drop down all the way to verse 14 of chapter 7. We learn a little more detail about Amos. There we read:

Amos 7.14-15 - Then Amos answered [the wicked priest] and said, "I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then

the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to My people Israel.’”

This is interesting information. First of all, we learn that Amos was a man from Judah who worked as a shepherd and fruit farmer. One day the Lord called him out to deliver a message to the people of Israel.

Now, it's often said that Amos' prophecies were for the northern kingdom of Israel, based upon the fact that the longest portion of his prophecy at the beginning of the book concerns the 10 tribes in the northern kingdom. However, I'd have to disagree with the idea that his message was for Israel in the divided kingdom sense. They were a focus of the message, but the Lord gave him words to speak to a number of nations around the Israelites. And, his message was for *all* God's people.

Look at verse 1 of chapter 3:

Amos 3.1 - Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt...

Amos was called out by God right where he was and given a message to people both near and far. Brothers and strangers. Jews and Gentiles. We'll find that his message is both poetic and systematic. It speaks to whole kingdoms but also to individuals. It reveals the fact that God is a God of justice and vengeance, but also that He is a God of personal mercy and grace. And one angle we want to take when we look at these chapters is Amos as a messenger. Learning from his faithfulness and his dedication to the word of God. Seeing how God used this shepherd for 9 years to bring His truth into the world and warn people of the result of their sin. Amos' name means 'the burden-bearer' and everything we learn about him reminds us of the calling we've received as Christians. To carry the word and sow it as we are going through life. To deliver the message of God's righteousness, even when it's incredibly unpopular. Being willing to go where He sends and do what He says. Having compassion on those who are headed toward judgment. All of these things we see in this faithful messenger who was called out by God from the life he was living to do a great and spiritual work.

But the other side of this book that we need to deal with in these studies is the message itself. Because God was bringing a very personal and very intense message to His people. They had moved into sin as a nation (as *two* nations, really) and as individuals they were also not honoring the Lord. And He speaks to them about these sins, both corporate and personal.

Throughout the book there is a theme of how God's people are to treat the poor around them. But this isn't just a message about how God views the impoverished, but it also talks to us about our other practices and principles as Believers. How we worship. How we conduct business. The things going on in our private lives and the responsibility we have to pursue God's justice and God's calling.

And, it's quite interesting to see how the Lord structures His message to His people. He begins by going through 6 different kingdoms outside of Israel, exposing their sin and talking about their coming judgment. Things God's people would doubtlessly have nodded their heads in agreement to. God talks about what these different kingdoms had done to the Jews and how they were worthy of destruction. Moab and Tyre and Edom and Ammon and these other

nations. But, with each kingdom, the Lord moves closer and closer geographically to Israel and Judah. And after exposing what the kingdoms of the world had done, He looks at His own people and says, “You guys too. Your sin is destroying you. But the difference is I have to bring discipline on you in order to correct what’s going on. I tried tactic after tactic to get your attention. I tried method after method to convince you to return to Me, but you continued building up a crooked kingdom.”

And in this book God explains how, as H.A. Ironside puts it, *responsibility flows from relationship*.

Because of the relationship that God has with His people, He must keep them from building a crooked life.

Amos 3.2 - You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

God doesn’t delight in punishing His people. Again and again He said to them “turn to Me and live, turn to Me and live, turn away from your sin,” but His people continually built crookedly, they continually moved away from Him and into iniquity, all while they were still bringing songs and sacrifices and tithes into the Temple.

God said:

Amos 2.10-13 - It was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. I raised up some of your sons as prophets, and some of your young men as Nazirites. Is it not so, O you children of Israel?” Says the Lord. “But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying, ‘Do not prophesy!’ “Behold, I am weighed down by you, as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down.

In many ways, what the Lord is describing in this book reminds me of the parable of the two men who built houses, one on the rock and one on the sand. The problem is, we as God’s people sometimes give in to sin and start building our lives on the sand. When that happens, because the Lord loves us, He’s going to chasten us. He’s going to correct us. Because His desire is that we walk with Him. And as He says in Amos 3.3:

Amos 3.3 - Can two walk together unless they are agreed?

And so, the message that Amos delivers is all about being aligned with God. Literally. At one point, we read this:

Amos 7.7-8 - Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. And the Lord said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said: “Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore.

I love this image. Because God has a wall there, a picture of the life we're constructing. And in the midst of His people, God drops His plumb line. He says, "It's there. I'm leaving My standard right in front of you to measure with."

And in this picture we see that God is giving us a direction and an alignment to build our lives. Plumb-lines determine what is truly vertical. And they determine if that vertical line is being built straight or if it isn't true. God's plumb-line will show me if I'm building upward toward Him or if I'm building outward on the earth for myself. And that's what God's people were doing. They were prosperous. They were strong from an earthly perspective. They were enterprising and lucrative. You can read about it in 2 Chronicles chapter 26. But there was nothing vertical about their lives. There was no depth to this relationship they had with God.

When used on ships, a plumb-line was cast to determine the depth of the water. And the Israelites had taken all that God had said and all that God had done and all that God desired for their lives and their witness and their spiritual activity and they had tossed it all aside in favor of luxury and personal wealth and earthly pleasures. And, after long suffering and after extending His grace again and again it got to the point where the Lord said, "We can't walk together anymore. You're moving in a completely different direction than I've called you to and I've got to shake you from what you've done to yourself."

So, while our first purpose is to be stirred up by the example of Amos the messenger, we also want to be submitted to the message he was given. Allowing God to drop His plumb-line into our lives and evaluate our vertical build. Because we've been called out and raised up by God, just like Amos. A guy who spent time with sheep and sycamore trees but was made a prophet in God's Kingdom. Reminds me a lot of the guys Jesus called out and said, "I'm going to make you fishers of men."

We'll see that God has invited us into a special relationship. But with that relationship comes a responsibility to walk with God and make straight the ways of the Lord. To see how diverting sin is in our lives and how to align ourselves with the line God has drawn and set before us.

We want to be plumb. God has given us a direction to build and an alignment to guide us. He's taken us out of the lives we had so that we can bear His message to those near and far. We are called by His name and we must build vertically toward Him today. Amos is going to show us how. And we'll begin with chapter 1 next week.