



## Amos

### **Get Started**

Short-term missions are valuable in growing your faith and seeing God's work in you, then through you.

By "short-term mission" we usually mean a trip to another country for a week or ten days in order to establish an existing church or to offer aid in the name of Jesus Christ. It offers the average Christian an opportunity to do full-time Christian work for a period of time.

Over the years we've gone to the Philippines to do medical missions and support local churches; we've gone to Honduras to do medical missions and building projects by which to preach Jesus; we've smuggled Bibles into communist China; we've taken youth to Mexico; we've gone to support churches in Peru and in Chile. We've even stayed stateside - traveling to Bay St. Louis in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to offer Christian aid.

Amos was a short-term missionary. He did not consider himself to be a prophet by profession. "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel" (Amos 7:14-15 RSV).

For Amos, his call and his ministry rested in God's initiative and in His sustaining power: "The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?" ( Amos 3:8 RSV).

It's a point we cannot belabor enough: God uses ordinary folk. He even says that not many wise and not many noble are called. That way the glory can rest where it belongs.

God really does want to use you. Right now; i.e., right where you are at, without any further education or training.

Not to say you won't get more of both; but it isn't needed for you to be used. "The Lion has roared... The Lord God has spoken."

One thing I'd add, since God wants to use everyday, average believers, is that we start thinking of moments in our day as short-term missions excursions. It's those times when we are being sensitive to God the Holy Spirit and He encourages us to go a certain way, or say a certain thing, or strike up a conversation.

## **Get Studying**

We are Quick Starting the Minor Prophets. Neither they nor their inspired messages were minor, and they are called "minor" only because their books are far shorter than "Major Prophets" such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. So brief were their writings that all twelve were written on a single scroll. Hence, those writings were commonly known as the Book of the Twelve or The Twelve.

Although he was from the southern kingdom of Judah, Amos was called primarily to prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel. He was not very welcome in Northern Territory but he stood his ground on the Word of God.

His prophecies were not confined to the nations of Judah and Israel; he also spoke out against the surrounding Gentile nations.

God sent Amos to Bethel, the religious center of the kingdom of Israel, to preach a series of prophetic messages. Each message began with the same words; you see them eight times in chapters one and two. They are, “For three transgressions... and for four, I will not turn away punishment.” The expression is a Jewish way of saying “an indefinite number that has finally come to an end.”

Each time you read these words Amos names a nation that God was judging for their sins – eight nations in all.

The first six nations He addressed were the nations that surrounded God’s people – Syria, Philistia, Phoenicia, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. The final two were the nations God’s people were subjects of – Judah and Israel.

The six Gentile nations were disobeying what we call natural law and ignoring their conscience. The two nations of God’s people were disobeying God’s written law and were indifferent to His commandments.

- Syria, represented by Damascus, was to be judged because of its excessive cruelty in conquering Gilead, the area east of the Jordan occupied by the Jewish tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh.
- Philistia had invaded Israel and sold some of the Jews as slaves.
- Phoenicia - who we know as Tyre - also sold Jews as slaves but her sin was greater in that she had broken a treaty with Israel in so doing.
- Edom would be punished for its unrelenting hatred of the Jews.

- Ammon had committed terrible atrocities against the Jews, e.g., ripping open pregnant women with their swords.
- Moab, too, had committed atrocities, e.g., desecrating the tombs of the kings of Edom.

So far, so good; God would judge Israel's neighbors for their cruelties. Keep listening, Israel; God would not overlook your sins.

Turning to his own people in chapter two, God would judge Judah:

Amo 2:4 Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they have despised the law of the LORD, And have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, Lies which their fathers followed.

Amo 2:5 But I will send a fire upon Judah, And it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem."

This judgment was carried out by Nebuchadnezzar in his three invasions of Jerusalem in the sixth century BC.

God would judge Israel:

Amo 2:6 Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they sell the righteous for silver, And the poor for a pair of sandals.

Amo 2:7 They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, And pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, To defile My holy name.

Amo 2:8 They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, And drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.

Amo 2:9 "Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, Whose height was like the height of the cedars, And he was as strong as the oaks; Yet I destroyed his fruit above And his roots beneath.

Amo 2:10 Also 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.

Amo 2:11 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.

Amo 2:12 "But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, And commanded the prophets saying, 'Do not prophesy!'

Amo 2:13 "Behold, I am weighed down by you, As a cart full of sheaves is weighed down.

Amo 2:14 Therefore flight shall perish from the swift, The strong shall not strengthen his power, Nor shall the mighty deliver himself;

Amo 2:15 He shall not stand who handles the bow, The swift of foot shall not escape, Nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself.

Amo 2:16 The most courageous men of might Shall flee naked in that day," Says the LORD.

- Israel had perverted justice by accepting bribes.
- They had sold the poor into slavery.
- Fathers and sons were having sex with the same harlot.
- They lounged in stolen clothing from their debtors while attending religious feasts.
- They offered sacrifices of wine that had been purchased with stolen money.
- They tempted Nazirites to drink wine.

When God says He's "weighed down... as a cart full of sheaves..." it means that His people have put Him in a tight spot.

If God must judge the Gentile nations who violate natural law, how much more will He have to judge His own nation that has His written law?

This judgment was a mere thirty years away. The northern kingdom would be overrun by the Assyrian Empire and taken into a captivity from which they would not return.

Chapters three through six are three sermons addressed to Judah and Israel. God was giving them one final warning.

Amo 3:6 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?

Amo 3:7 Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.

Amo 3:8 A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?

They would not repent:

Amo 4:12 "Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; Because I will do this to you, Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"

After His final warning, **God issued another final warning:**

Amo 5:4 For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek Me and live;

Amo 5:5 But do not seek Bethel, Nor enter Gilgal, Nor pass over to Beersheba; For Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, And Bethel shall come to nothing.

Amo 5:6 Seek the LORD and live, Lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, And devour it, With no one to quench it in Bethel -

Amo 5:7 You who turn justice to wormwood, And lay righteousness to rest in the earth!"

Amo 5:8 He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning And makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the face of the earth; The LORD is His name.

Amo 5:9 He rains ruin upon the strong, So that fury comes upon the fortress.

Amo 5:10 They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, And they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.

Amo 5:11 Therefore, because you tread down the poor And take grain taxes from him, Though you have built houses of hewn stone, Yet you shall not dwell in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, But you shall not drink wine from them.

Amo 5:12 For I know your manifold transgressions And your mighty sins: Afflicting the just and taking bribes; Diverting the poor from justice at the gate.

Amo 5:13 Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, For it is an evil time.

Amo 5:14 Seek good and not evil, That you may live; So the LORD God of hosts will be with you, As you have spoken.

Amo 5:15 Hate evil, love good; Establish justice in the gate. It may be that the LORD God of hosts Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

I like simple illustrations of spiritual truth. In the last three chapters of Amos, the Jews of the Northern kingdom of Israel are compared to workers on a wall and farmers in a field whose work was being reviewed so that God could reward their faithfulness and their fruitfulness:

- In chapter seven the Jews are portrayed as workers on a wall upon God's foundation. God reviewed their work by applying a plumb-line to the wall. It was out of plumb so, instead of a reward for faithfulness, they would suffer loss.
- In chapter eight the Jews are portrayed as farmers in God's field. They produced a basket of summer fruit. God reviewed their work by testing the fruit. It was over-ripe and rotten so, instead of a reward for fruitfulness, they would suffer loss.

It sounds bleak and, for the Jews of the northern kingdom of Israel, it was bleak. The "loss" they would suffer was the destruction of their nation at the hands of the Assyrian Empire.

But all was not lost. As Amos closed his book he spoke of a future hope for the Jews when God would establish them on the earth in their land. In the next to the last verse of the book, God said,

Amos 9:14 I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.

Though they had failed as workers on God's foundation and as farmers in God's field, He would restore them. In the future they would build and plant with success and enjoy God's promised reward.

## **Get Spiritual**

I suggest that you and I find ourselves in similar circumstances even though it is some twenty-seven centuries since Amos preached this series of messages.



- You and I, as believers, are surrounded by nations that are ignoring their conscience – including, in some instances, our own nation, the United States.
- And you and I, as believers, are the subjects of what the apostle Peter called “a holy nation, His own special people... who were once not a people but are now the people of God...” (1Peter 2:9-10).

We - the church - are God's "holy nation," surrounded by other nations - even our own.

I read something this week about our place within our own nation. The comment was, "God doesn't point His finger at the White House; He points it at His house," meaning the church.

In light of what Amos said, we'd have to say that The Lord points His finger at both the White House and the church.

As the church - Are we "holy?"

We are in the sense that holy means set apart. By our very membership in the church, by being born again, we have been set apart for The Lord and are, by definition, holy.

We are also expected to pursue holiness in our lives - the practical, daily holiness of saying "Yes" to God and "No" to sin.

We are living through a time when many, if not a majority, of professing believers are choosing to live in sin. Probably the easiest example, where you see this the most, is with marriage, divorce, remarriage and sexual sin. There seems to be no fear of God among professed Christians when it comes to divorcing without biblical grounds, and in having sex outside of marriage.

Let's pursue holiness as defined and described by our loving God and Father. He knows best.