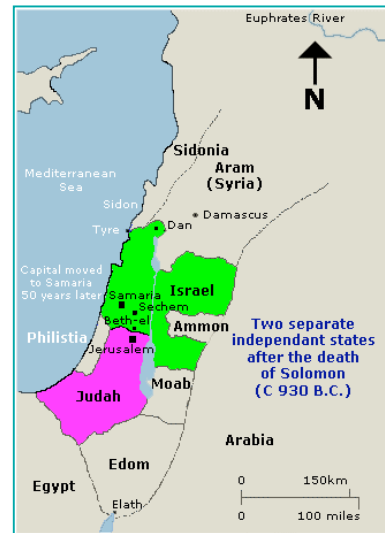


Minor Prophets #3 AMOS

HOSEA took a faithless wife and spoke of judgement, love and life
JOEL told of locust plagues The Spirit and the end of the age
AMOS left his flocks and trees to call the nation to its knees

Around 930 BC, the kingdom of Israel was divided into two – Israel and Judah

To avoid people going to Jerusalem to worship, Jeroboam set up golden calves in Bethel in the south and Dan in the north (2 Kings 12:25-33). Consult a map here to see how this worked. This was a political move, designed to remove the people of Israel from the influence of the Judaistic priesthood and Hebrew sacrificial and festal practices.



The problem

The northern kingdom became prosperous and self-reliant. So 200 years later, Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa in the south, came to call them back to God.

Eight judgements (1:3-2:16)

- Damascus (1:3-5)
- Gaza (1:6-8)
- Tyre (1:9-10-)
- Edom (1:11-12),
- Ammon (1:13-15)
- Moab (2:1-3)
- Judah (2:4-5)

One can imagine the people of Samaria, the capital of Israel, being very pleased at these denunciations of all the nations surrounding them. But then he homed in on Israel – the eighth judgement (1:1-2:16).

Three Words (3:1; 4:1; 5:1)

Then follow three ‘words’ which all begin with the phrase ‘hear this word...’

- Against the idolatry of calf-worship (3:1-15)
- Against oppression (4:1-13)
- Against injustice (5:1-17)

Two woes (5:18-6:14)

- Woe to those who desire the day of the Lord (5:18-27)
- Woe to those who are complacent (6:1-14)

Five visions (7:1-9:10)

- Locusts (7:1-3) – impending devastation
- Fire (7:4-6) – impending devastation
- A plumbline (7:7-9) – Israel did not measure up
- A bowl of ripe fruit (8:1-2) – ripe for judgement
- The Lord by the altar (9:1-10) – no escape

Restoration (9:11-15)

Nevertheless at the end of the day, God would rebuild the house of David

Several important lessons can be learned from this short book.

1. Privilege implies responsibility (Amos 3:2, 14)

One would expect part b of verse two to be positive, not negative. That God would bless them, not punish them. The principle is that privilege implies responsibility.

The sin of Moses was small – in justifiable frustration, he lost his temper (Numbers 20:12). But it was enough to keep him out of the Promised Land. What others can do, leaders cannot do.

Jesus made this plain – from those to whom much is given, much is required. Read the context in Luke 12:42-48.

2. God is patient with His people (Amos 4:6-11)

Five times he warns the people to give them an opportunity to return to him. Read 4:6-11.

He is a God of the second (and third, and fourth...) chance!

Eg Jonah; Peter

3. The day of the Lord is a dark day (Amos 5:18-20)

It is vain to hope for the day of the Lord if we are not prepared. Escape is vain – we may elude a lion but we confront a bear; we may elude a bear but we are struck by a snake.

The day of the Lord is one of great joy for those who love the Lord but of great terror for those who do not. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Rev 6:15-17.

4. Justice is more important than worship (Amos 5:21-24)

Read 5:11-12; 6:12; 8:4-6.

Consider this updated version of 21-24—

I hate, I despise your home groups, and I take no delight in your Sunday services. 22 Even though you offer me your prayers and intercessions, I will not accept them; and the confessions of your sins, I will not look upon them. 23 Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your guitars and drums and keyboards I will not listen. 24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

There is a great need for justice. Renowned missionary pastor Oswald Smith said, ‘No one has the right to hear the gospel twice, while there remains someone who has not heard it once.’ It is unjust that so many still have not heard.

There are also other great injustices – poverty, oppression, disease, homelessness and so on. Wesley Mission has a great ministry in these areas, in reversing injustice.

5. Complacency is deceptive (Amos 6:1-4)

A warning to those who are ‘at ease in Zion’ ie comfortable in their religiousness. This passage has a remarkably contemporary feel about it – it could almost have been written yesterday.

It is easy to think all is well when it may not be. Read 1 Cor 10:11.

Recall Samson’s frightening situation: he did not know the Lord had left him! (Judges 16:20)

A great famine (Amos 8:11-12)

Amos prophesies a famine not of food and not of water but of the word of the Lord. Compare the world today. Many countries are starved of God’s Word. This is a great missionary challenge.

Restoration (Amos 9:11-15)

Nevertheless, in spite of all, God would bless them and the nation would prosper (9:13-15). And not only Israel, but ‘all the nations who are called by my name.’ *This is accomplished through the gospel* (Acts 15:13-16). In Jesus, we find new life!

Our hope

Prosperity is promised to Israel. In a spiritual sense, prosperity is promised to the church as well. As we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, we see people enjoying wonderful refreshing, deep satisfaction and spiritual nourishment –

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord,
 "when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper
 and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;
 the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
 and all the hills shall flow with it.
 [14] I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
 and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;
 they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
 and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.

Amos the man

- Concerned about people (4:1 etc)
- A poet – his prophecies are carefully constructed according to Hebrew literary practice
- Not a professional (1:1; 7:14) – he was a shepherd, called by the Lord
- Courageous (7:14) – threats could not stop him
- Obedient (7:14) – he obeyed God regardless of cost or difficulty
- Believed God's Word (7:14) – he believed the word of the Lord before everything else
- An apparent failure – at the end of the day his message was ignored. But not a failure in God's eyes as he fulfilled God's will. This is the important issue. And of course, his message still goes on today – so although he was unaware of it, he was in many ways a huge success! Jesus, too, seemed to be a failure, but what an outcome there was eventually from his ministry.

Our challenge (Amos 5:4-6)

For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel:

"Seek me and live;
 [5] but do not seek Bethel,
 and do not enter into Gilgal
 or cross over to Beersheba;
 for Gilgal shall surely go into exile,
 and Bethel shall come to nothing."
 [6] *Seek the Lord and live.*

SOMETHING TO THINK OR TALK ABOUT

Read: Relevant passages from Amos

Biblical

1. What is the main sin addressed in the latter part of chapter three?
2. What is the main issue addressed in chapter four?
3. What are the main sins addressed in chapter five? (NB vv. 4, 11, 12)
4. What would be an equivalent contemporary situation to that described in 6:1-6?
5. What does 7:1-6 tell us about God and about the power of prayer?
6. What do we learn about Amos from 7:10-17?

Personal and practical

7. What areas of injustice should we be addressing in today's world? (5:21-24)
8. If God were to set a spiritual plumbline against your life, what would it show? (7:7-9)
9. What is the warning for us today in 8:10?
10. How true is 8:11-12 to Australia today? To the world?
11. Think about the promise in 9:13. What does it mean to you in a spiritual sense?

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for the courage and faith of Amos. And thank you for your promise of restoration and blessing even to disobedient people. I praise you for the new life and refreshing I have found in Jesus. Amen.

About Dr Barry Chant

Barry Chant is Senior Pastor of the Wesley International Congregation in Sydney, Australia. He is a regular speaker at church services, seminars, conferences and conventions. Hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold around the world. He has degrees in arts, theology and ministry, a diploma in education and a PhD in history. He was the initiator and former president of Tabor College, Australia.

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