

Prayer

We offer you thanks and praise, Almighty God, for the many ways in which You help us; through Your healing and comfort, through the ways in which You challenge us and give us strength, and in countless other ways. All too often, we are not aware of Your help until after it has been given. Forgive our ignorance, and help us be sensitive to the ways in which You help us. Thank You, Almighty God and Father; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Church Unity

Pray for a movement of God's Spirit that will bring His people together from across the churches, to witness to Jesus and the power of the Gospel to change the world for the better.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for Aung San Sui, the opposition leader being tried in Burma*
- *Give thanks for the Holy Spirit and His work of renewal within you*
- *Pray for God's blessing on our endeavours to reduce waste*

Meditation

Show us Your glorious power O Lord!
Come to the help of those who really need You.

Come to the aid of the poor and disadvantaged,
Raise them up and show them Your love!
Come to the aid of Your downtrodden people,
Renew Your church and rekindle its zeal!
Come to the aid of the sick and distressed,
Restore them; touch, heal and deliver them!
Come to the aid of those who do not know You,
Rescue them, love them, and lead them to faith!
Come to the aid of Your people who wait for You,
Revive their hope and prepare them for glory!

When You act in Your glorious power, O Lord
All things are possible through Your care and love.

Bible Study - Amos 1:9-15

⁹ This is what the LORD says: 'For three crimes of Tyre and for four, I will not withdraw the punishment, because they handed over whole groups of captives to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of kinship. ¹⁰ So I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, and it will consume her strongholds.'

¹¹ This is what the LORD says: 'For three crimes of Edom and for four, I will not withdraw the punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword and threw away all pity, his anger raged continually, and he held on to his wrath forever. ¹² So I will send a fire upon Teman, and it will consume the strongholds of Bozrah.'

¹³ This is what the LORD says: 'For three crimes of the Ammonites and for four, I will not withdraw the punishment, because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, simply to enlarge their border. ¹⁴ So I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it will consume her strongholds amidst the clamour of battle and with raging anger on the day of judgement. ¹⁵ Their king shall go into exile, he and his princes together,' says the LORD.

Review

None of what we have read is easy reading, and there is no question about it, these words were meant to shock. When Amos began his prophecies (see study on Amos 1:1-8) it was clear that his original commission was to send a message from the Lord 'in Zion' to the northern people of Israel (1:2), but he began with a series of prophecies condemning other nations. This continues in today's reading, which

contains Amos' third, fourth and fifth prophecies against surrounding nations. What we must do is understand not simply the meaning of each prophecy, but why Amos was doing this. At first sight, there does not seem to be any clear message from the Lord to northern Israel, according to Amos' call.

Having begun with a prophecy against Damascus (1:3-5) and then against Gaza (1:6-8), the prophecies in today's reading continue to address states which directly border on Judah and Israel, and this time he rails against Tyre (1:9,10), Edom (1:11,12) and Ammon (1:13-15). If you have maps of Israel in your Bible (as many editions do), then you will probably find a map of Israel at the time of the 'Two Kingdoms' (Judah and Israel) in the eighth century. If you have this map, then you will find the names of these states or 'city-states' all around Israel and Judah. Indeed, the five states prophesied against so far constitute all but one of these surrounding nations. Only Moab has not yet been mentioned, and you will notice that Moab is next, at the beginning of chapter 2! The picture now becomes clearer, Amos' prophecies appear to be circling around the two nations of Israel and Judah, and it is not such a wild thought for us to guess that these are preliminary prophecies before Amos eventually delivers the real message from the Lord to the northern people of Israel. But we will have to wait a little longer for that.

Each prophecy begins with a prophetic introduction (1:3,6,9,11,13) 'this is what the Lord says!' You may know the older, well known version, 'thus says the Lord' found in some Bibles. It is a formal announcement by the prophet that he is declaring what he believes to be God's Word; and some of the prophecies (not all) close with an echo of this: '... says the Lord.' (1:5,8,15). Because Amos is the earliest of the prophets, this is the first time that it is used in Israel.

As before (1:1-8), it is impossible for us to know the details of what historical acts of war and criminal outrage are described in each of these prophecies. Clearly, the rich merchants of Tyre had broken agreements and sold people into slavery to Edom (1:9,10). Edom, as the 'brother' nation of Israel (its founder was Esau, the twin brother of Jacob), continued to raid Israel and Judah aggressively (1:11,12), and the Ammonites had committed acts of unspeakable humanitarian outrage (1:13-15). Amos' prophecies are plain. God will bring judgement on all nations who act in such ways; and there are, of course, direct comparisons to be made with the terrible and outrageous violence perpetrated by some nations even now. God's Word from Amos is for them. Their 'strongholds' will be destroyed by God.

However direct and important such messages are, God was using Amos for a more important purpose, and we will begin to discover this in the next reading and throughout chapter 2. There is clear evidence from chapter 7 (specifically 7:10-17) that all the prophecies of Amos were in fact delivered at Bethel, to people of the northern Kingdom gathered at this ancient shrine (the place where Abraham had first pitched his tent in Canaan – Genesis 12:8). As the prophecies now unfold, I will begin to sketch for you a picture of what may well have happened, and in each study, I will reveal more of it. In this way, you will gradually see how Amos' prophecies work and build up to their terrible climax. At this stage, the picture is simple. Imagine Amos standing in front of a crowd of Israelites. We can guess what they thought of what this prophet from the south said in this passage; they undoubtedly approved, applauding this denunciation of the vicious criminal acts of their enemies from neighbouring states! In this way, Amos succeeded in getting these people to listen to him. He was biding his time, and gaining an audience for a far more telling message yet to be delivered; as we will see next time!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss the features of these prophecies which most speak to our nations today.
2. These prophecies describe God acting directly in judgement. Does God do this now?
3. Is it possible for us to rid the world of inhumanity by operating good national and international politics? If not, why do we try?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

When I read about the terrible wars and war crimes in Old Testament times, I am reminded that although we have the benefits of so much technology, science and education today, we still cannot avoid confrontation and war. On any day, life might seem very peaceful for many of us who live a comfortable lifestyle in the West, but it does not take much of a search on the internet to discover the truth about the atrocities happening in our own lifetimes, and we need to ask the question, where is God in all this? Amos was prepared to see God at work in everything, even the wars of the nations around him; are we?

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Try making a list of the injustices you see around you in your own country. Imagine you are Amos, try to imagine what God must think of each situation and write down a prophecy of God in the style of Amos, which addresses each situation. You may find this exercise taxing, but it will make you think carefully about how God responds to injustice in His world.*
- *Pray for those who seek to work for justice in countries of the world where there is little respect for law. Pray for changes that will bring freedom and justice to countries that need to hear the Gospel.*

Final Prayer

Dear Lord and Father. Keep us safe from the dreadful injustices which exist in our world, even within apparently safe nations which seem to be at peace. Give us ears to hear what You would say about these, and voices to declare Your Word about them. We ask this in Your name: AMEN
