

Prayer

We praise You Lord God, for You have empowered Your church to declare the truth of Salvation throughout the ages. Enemies have attempted to destroy the Gospel from outside the church and from within, but You have guided it through the perils of human history to enable more and more people to be saved and be restored in You. May we be committed to the eternal truth of Your Gospel, through Jesus Christ our Lord: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Health

Give thanks to God for the many doctors, nurses and associated professions throughout your own country and the world, who serve people without distinction and for the good of all.

On-going prayers

- *Give glory to God for the seasons; and the sun, rain and the weather*
- *Pray about the issue of 'renewable' energy and its possible benefits*
- *Pray for Iran a country increasingly divided within itself*

Meditation

Listen carefully;

Hear the voice of the Lord, and determine to walk in His ways.

Learn intelligently;

Know what God has required of you; this is a light to your path.

Plan realistically;

Measure yourself against the Gospel, and the path of discipleship.

Work diligently;

Give your all for the Kingdom of God and its fruitfulness on earth.

Evaluate shrewdly;

Seek to discern right from wrong, good from evil, and act accordingly.

Share generously;

For the Lord has told His people to love one another without exception.

And speak boldly;

Preach the Gospel by every means available to you, and be blessed!

Bible Study - Amos 2:1-5

¹ This is what the LORD says: For three crimes of Moab, and for four, I will not withdraw the punishment, because he burned to ashes the bones of the king of Edom. ² So I will send a fire upon Moab, and it will consume the strongholds of Kerioth, and Moab will meet death in the midst of the tumult of war, of the shouts and trumpet sounds; ³ I will root out the leader at the heart of the nation and will kill all its princes with him,' says the LORD.

⁴ This is what the LORD says: 'For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not withdraw the punishment, because they have rejected the law of the LORD. They have not kept His statutes, but have been led astray by the same lies their fathers believed. ⁵ So I will send a fire upon Judah, and it will consume the strongholds of Jerusalem.'

Review

If you have followed these readings from Amos, you will know that these are the sixth and seventh short prophecies given by Amos after initially declaring that he had a word from the Lord to say to the northern people of Israel. Amos was a mere shepherd from the southern town of Tekoa (1:1), and few would have listened to him and thought of him as a prophet. Any crowd who gathered to hear him speak would find what he said entertaining, but they would have been sceptical about his claim to speak God's words, even though he declared; 'this is what the Lord says ...'

The sixth prophecy against Moab (2:1-3) is very similar to the previous prophecies recorded in chapter one of Amos. God's people of Israel and Judah were long time enemies of the Moabites, partly because they were descendents of Lot by incest (see Genesis 19:30-38), and they opposed Israel when they sought to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 22,23). Also, their religious practices may, at some time in their past, have involved the sacrifice of children (Judges 3:6f.). This was particularly obnoxious to the Israelites, and Scripture describes many wars between Israel and Moab. The crime that stirred up Amos to prophesy was a military defeat of Edom by Moab, in which they had sought to destabilise the region by rooting out and killing the entire ruling family of Edom (2:1-3), and although Israel and Judah had little love for Edom, the crime was heinous and politically dangerous.

Amos then came to his seventh prophecy. Knowing that numbers were an important factor in the thought patterns of ancient people, the seventh prophecy was clearly going to be important. At this point, I ask you to imagine the scene that I began to paint in yesterday's study. Amos was a Judean from the south, and a shepherd from the town of Tekoa who went to the northern Israelite town of Bethel to raise a crowd by declaring these prophecies, probably in the open air. The first six prophecies were delivered against the surrounding nations of both Israel and Judah, and each would have raised a cheer from any crowd he gathered. Suddenly however, for his seventh prophecy, Amos rounded on the country of His birth, Judah, and he did it in front of a crowd of northern people from Bethel in Israel!

At the time Amos was prophesying, Judah and Israel were not the best of friends (2 Kings 124:8-16), and they existed as completely separate nations. Indeed, there is evidence in Scripture of on-going hatred between the two nations. Imagine therefore what the northern Israelite crowd gathered by Amos thought of his denunciation of the evils happening in Jerusalem (2:4), the capital of the southern nation of Judah! Amos spoke about how the worship of God in Jerusalem had become corrupted, mentioning the sins and 'lies which their fathers followed', which was a coded way of saying that even in the Temple of Jerusalem, people were worshipping other gods as an alternative to the Lord! The northern Israelites would have been highly amused to hear such condemnation from the lips of a southerner, and they would have raised their loudest cheer when he spoke against Judah, because they hated Judah and Jerusalem as much if not more than other nations! Furthermore, the heart of the disputes between northern Israelites and southern Judeans concerned the issue of 'who worshipped God properly'; each nation believed that it retained the proper heritage of Moses and the forefathers.

Now, Amos had keyed straight into the natural prejudices of his audience, and he certainly had their attention! However, just beneath the surface of Amos' words, there was a hint of what was to come. Remember, Amos had declared firstly, in a rather coded prophecy, that he had a message from the Lord for the north (1:1,2). Secondly, notice how Amos said 'for three crimes ... and for four ...' in each prophecy. By adding one more than the 'perfect' number three, Amos indicated that the nations he condemned had gone beyond the bounds of what was right before God. Amos had now delivered a perfect 'seven' prophecies, and if you have followed Amos' method and his logic, you will be thinking about what Amos is about to say next. What will he say next; what will his eighth prophecy be, and what heinous crime will it condemn? We will find out in the next study!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In your group, discuss your reaction to the picture painted by the study and the thoughts of the crowd listening to Amos
2. To what extent do you feel that Amos' prophecy against Judah and Jerusalem could also be a condemnation of false religion today?
3. How would you define a prophet? What does a prophet say and do, and does Amos fit this stereotype?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I find it fascinating to watch how Amos uses technique to get across his message. He spoke nearly 2,800 years ago, and yet from scripture we can understand what he says and why. It is a remarkable testimony from a remarkable man. I am tempted to wonder how I would fare today if I spoke deviously to a group of people whilst 'battering them up' to condemn them! Certainly the task of prophecy required a fair amount of bravery, and God needs brave people today to do His will.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *This passage contains a condemnation of false religiosity (2:4,5). Try to find a friend in your own church, or elsewhere, with whom you can discuss the nature of good practice within the church today and the nature of bad practice. Remember, Amos indicates that the past can be an example of what is bad as well as what is good!*
- *Pray for those who are trapped by false forms of religion and never have the chance of learning about the Gospel of Jesus. Ask the Lord God to break down the barriers that prevent people from learning more about the truth of Jesus Christ.*

Final Prayer

You are our healer, Lord Jesus. You made each one of us and You know everything about us. We commit ourselves into Your hands and we ask You to heal our damaged bodies and our wounded souls, so that we might have peace with ourselves, with others and with You. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN
