

Prayer

Lord God and great Creator, You are the most powerful influence upon our lives. You have structured our lives, given us a time and place in which to live, and opened out before us all the possibilities of life. Give us the grace to accept how You have made us and what You have given us, so that we might live in joy and contentment all our lives. Thanks be to God: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Health

Pray for the management of hospitals in your country; the way they are run reflects national attitudes to health care. Pray for Christians who work and witness within hospitals.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about the tourism industry, its evils as well as its benefits*
- *Give glory to God for the seasons, the sun, the rain and the weather*
- *Pray about the issue of 'renewable' energy and its possible benefits*

Meditation

Lord Jesus, when dread silence descends upon our souls;
We call on You to fill the emptiness that comes to us unwanted

When something we have done for You goes wrong;
When the prayers we offer feel like groping in the dark;
When others we respect reject the work we do for You;
When sin raises its ugly head within us, when least expected;
When the enemy finds a way to hurt someone we love;
When situations unfold which compromise our faith;
When people we love and trust let us down badly;
When we let down badly those we love and trust;

We call on You, Lord Jesus, to fill our emptiness with Your Spirit;
Break the silence of our pain with Your eternal Word of Love.

Bible Study - Amos 2:6-11

⁶ Thus says the LORD: 'For three crimes of Israel, and for four, I will not withdraw the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. ⁷ They trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and force the humble out of the way; Father and son go in to the same prostitute, profaning my Holy Name; ⁸ and they recline beside every altar on clothing taken in pledge, and they drink the wine of those who have been fined in the house of their God!

⁹ 'Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, who were as tall as cedars and strong as oaks; I destroyed the fruit above and the roots beneath. ¹⁰ And it was also I who brought you up out of Egypt and led you through the desert for forty years to give you possession of the Amorite land. ¹¹ And I raised up prophets from amongst your sons, and Nazirites from among your young men. Is this not so, O people of Israel?' says the LORD.

Review

Quite unexpectedly, the prophecy of Amos suddenly roars into life with this stunning denunciation of the people of Israel! Good people were sold or corrupted, the poor were disadvantaged, abused and ignored (2:6,7), and religious abuses went hand in hand with prostitution (2:7,8)! Furthermore, all this was happening amongst a people God had blessed and favoured (2:9,10); what could be more terrible than this? Even though we who read this passage today are not necessarily familiar with some of the things mentioned here by Amos, the gist of the passage is very clear. Socially and religiously, the evil and injustice described here makes us wince (2:7).

If you have been following this series of studies, you will know that Amos was a man from Judea (in the south) who prophesies to people in the northern Israelite town of Bethel (see 1:2, 3:14, 7:10,13 etc.). In the previous studies, I painted a picture of Amos raising a crowd of people and delivering prophecies which, at first, spoke out against the surrounding nations of Damascus (Syria), Gaza, Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites, and Moab. It is not too difficult to see how Amos raised a cheer for each prophecy as he spoke 'the Word of the Lord' against people who were considered enemies by the Israelites.

After attacking these nations, Amos completed what he had to say with a seventh prophecy, against Judah (2:4,5); this was his own home country, which at that time was hated by the Israelites of the north. This prophecy would have raised an even louder cheer from his audience. It would have immediately caught their attention; they would have heartily agreed with his condemnation of Judah! But then, completely unexpectedly, he gave an eighth prophecy, one more than people would have expected. At the height of the crowd's interest, Amos turned against the very people who were listening to Him, whose enthusiasm he had just whipped up, and declared the wrath of God against them! He accused them of appalling moral and spiritual crimes against God and against humanity!

Amos employed this devastating technique in order to drive home forcibly the message God had given him. He was a southerner, who spoke the Word of the Lord to the Israelites in the north, and he did all this to get himself heard, and it was very successful. As you read the prophecy, you can almost feel the mood of the crowd, shocked that this man had the audacity to prophesy against them! Yet Amos was right. At that period in the life of Israel, the gap between rich and poor had grown so wide that those who were well off felt they had the right to abuse the ancient traditions of God's people, developed from the laws of Moses. For example, only a generation or two earlier, the Israelite King Ahab had abused the ancient land rights of Israel by taking possession of a neighbour's vineyard (Naboth's vineyard) after having him killed (1 Kings 21). It was a flagrant violation of God's law to protect the poor, and Amos was clearly very concerned for the poor of the land (2:6,7). As a shepherd, he was not wealthy himself, and he knew what the people of his own day suffered at the hands of the rich, both in Judea and Israel.

Amos also accused Israel of the disgusting practice of ritual prostitution (2:7). What had happened was this; Ahab's wife Jezebel had introduced into Israel the worship of Ba'als (fertility gods) alongside the worship of the Lord God. Consequently, when people who came to the great shrines of Israelite religion (such as Bethel where Amos preached) they would both bring sacrifices for the Lord and also worship 'Ba'al'. It sounds particularly disgusting to us, but such 'worship' entailed having sex with a temple prostitute in order to please the Ba'als, and supposedly increase the fertility of their lands, or so they believed. It seems inconceivable to us; but there are plenty of Scriptures which illustrate these practices (e.g. Hosea 1,2,3)

For the first time in the history of God's people since Elijah and Elisha, almost a century before, God laid His hand on someone to prophesy to His people. The kings of Israel were living in denial of their heritage (see 2:9-11) and as a consequence, they stood condemned before God (see Deuteronomy 28:15f.) God chose Amos, and as we will soon find out, he had much more to say to the Israelites.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Read through verses 6 and 7 and identify the social evils within Israel condemned by Amos. What are the social evils of today?
2. To what extent do people worship both God and other 'gods' as well, even now?
3. How does God speak to the world about its sins today? Does He use prophets, and if so who are they? Does He speak to us in other ways?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Amos had the gift of drawing a crowd and delivering a message. The whole story makes me wonder whether I would be as faithful to the Lord in such dangerous circumstances. Would I be as brave and as persistent, and would I make sure the message was heard by using every technique available to me? Or would I have a go and give up if the going became tough and people did not listen? One of the differences between then and now is that in Amos' day someone could get an audience in the streets by speaking out loud. Nowadays, this is not possible, so we must try and use other means to broadcast our message.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Most people like to be able to criticise their own church, but in all honesty, what can you say about what is wrong with your own church and others? Would you be prepared to take a stand for God and broadcast this. If not, perhaps your criticism should not be held or told to others at all'.*
- *Pray for all who seek to speak God's Word in difficult circumstances, sometimes at the cost of their lives. Pray that the Lord will guide His people concerning what is right, and about what should be said or done in His name.*

Final Prayer

Your love beckons us onwards, dear Lord. Surround us with such an assurance of our salvation that we are content to do Your will and proclaim Your salvation in whatever circumstance You require of us. May our hearts reflect Your great love, so that others will find You through us. AMEN
