

Prayer

We do not understand how You work, Lord God; or how You are able to do so much for so many within the world. We praise You for Your salvation which is always available, for the countless billions of people for whom you care, and for the control You have over time and the eternal destiny of our world. Bring all things to their conclusion in Your time, we pray, and save all those who have placed their trust in You. Thank you Lord God, AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Television

Pray that the technology of television will be used for good and not for evil, and pray against the many forms of evil that use the television will be brought down in the name of Jesus

On-going prayers

- *Pray for children, and those who teach them about the environment*
- *Give thanks for the rule of law and the security it gives people*
- *Pray for young people in prison and for those who seek to help them*

Meditation

Give me the gifts and graces I need, Lord Jesus,
To be a faithful disciple of Yours. Help me:

- To accept the limits of the life you have given me;
- To refrain from being jealous over the gifts of others;
- To hold my tongue when I am tempted to hurt others;
- To smile when I mean it, and not fake it or avoid it;
- To question my own motives first, before those of others;
- To conquer my anger before it flares and conquers me;
- To give my full attention to others, so they know they are heard;
- To strive to be a peacemaker, a person of mercy and love,

Grant me this prayer so that I may be more like You;
Jesus Christ, my inspiration, my Lord and my God.

Bible Study - Amos 3:1-8

¹ Hear this Word, you people of Israel, that the LORD has spoken against you, and against the whole family I brought up out of the land of Egypt: ² 'You alone have I known from amongst all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your crimes.

³ 'Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?

⁴ Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?

Does a young lion growl from within its den, if he has caught nothing?

⁵ Does a bird fall into a snare on the ground, when there is no bait set in it?

Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing?

⁶ Does a trumpet sound in a city, without bringing fear to the people?

Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has caused it?

⁷ 'Surely the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his intended plan to his servants the prophets. ⁸ The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?'

Review

With these words, Amos sought to justify the powerful prophetic message he had just delivered. He was not one of the professional prophets of his day who were paid to serve at one of Israel's sanctuaries, but a shepherd called by God to deliver a message. He was loyal to his task, but the message God had given him and the manner in which it had to be delivered left Amos extremely vulnerable.

In our previous studies of chapters 1 and 2, we pictured what could well have happened as Amos went about declaring God's Word. A crowd gathered to hear him as he began to speak out what God had said to him concerning the sins of Israel's enemies, and he would have been heartily cheered for his strong and authoritative condemnation of the surrounding nations (1:3 – 2:5). Then after he completed a cycle of seven prophecies, he suddenly turned on the people to whom he was speaking with a stinging and even more hostile prophecy condemning the injustice and the corrupt religious practices of their own nation, the northern Kingdom of Israel! It may be hard for us to imagine, but in an age with no television or media as we know it, a public confrontation such as this could lead a man into great trouble. The last part of Amos' prophecy against Israel said that as a punishment for their sins, they would experience the ultimate disaster of defeat in war (2:13-16). No Israelite could imagine that such a thing was thinkable or possible, because they were God's own people, protected for life!

Amos was now exposed, and in personal danger, and he needed to defend himself if at all possible. Most of what we have read today is an appeal from Amos to those who heard him, in which he called on them to accept his prophecy even though it condemned them; he begged them, 'Hear this Word, you people of Israel, that the LORD has spoken against you ...' (3:1)! Surely they knew that as the Lord's own people they were subject to the highest of standards and if they sinned, they would be held accountable and punished (3:2)?

At the heart of our passage is a brilliant 'set piece' of prophetic oratory which is quite unique in the Old Testament. Some doubt that a mere shepherd could construct such a masterpiece, but such literary arguments completely forget the power of God to inspire a man or woman to speak great things, whether constructed beforehand or inspired in the moment. Verse 3 to 6 consist of seven 'question and answer' sayings which lead the reader (hearer) progressively onwards. Surely, each question asks, this or that is not a co-incidence? Rather like the great wisdom sayings of the Old Testament, each question or saying heavily implies that there is an unseen guiding hand behind all things, a divine 'cause and effect' at work in everything that happens naturally in the world.

What Amos said with great rhetorical skill was not merely 'the Lord is behind everything'. The sixth saying spoke of a 'trumpet' sounding in a city, which was a common metaphor for the words of a prophet; then the seventh saying spoke of the Lord bringing 'disaster' to a city. Make no mistake; Amos was referring to his own prophecy and its conclusion that Israel would suffer defeat in war. What could anyone do? He asked. If such things were to happen then they would be God's will! This was a highly skilful appeal to the people of Israel to accept both him and his message. Finally, Amos said this openly and directly; surely the Israelites understood that God was always at work revealing things to His prophets (3:7), and if God had spoken (the lion in verse 8, see also 1:2), the prophet had to speak out and the people had to listen (3:8)!

We cannot know exactly how the people reacted to Amos' defence. People of ancient times were easily dazzled, and they also felt deeply about how God spoke through the prophets. But it is hard not to imagine that they remained very much on edge. Despite his subtle and clever speech, what Amos had said in his prophecy (2:6-12) was political dynamite, and his prophecy of judgement by war was something no-one would want to hear. What would become of his prophecies? We will find out next time!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What do the brief prophecies (3:3-6) teach us about what Amos came to Israel to say?
2. Discuss what you would feel if someone came to your church and prophesied strongly that it would be destroyed because of its sins!
3. Try to summarise Amos' defence of his prophecies to the Israelites.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I find this passage deeply moving. Amos was fighting for his life before a crowd of people who were distinctly hostile. He was prepared to stand up before others and face death in order to proclaim what God had said to Him. I ask myself whether I would have been prepared to do just this. The courage of the ancient prophets is awesome, and God enabled these great men (and in some cases women) to prophesy

as they did because the message they bore was more important than they could possibly understand for themselves. This is true of prophets today, and yet we do not often recognise it!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Think about what you have like when people have criticised you or have rejected the things you do, at church, at home or at work. We all have powerful emotions at such times, and we need to make sure that they are balanced by a proper understanding of God's Word and not just a result of our natural reactions. Ask the Lord for discernment that will help you know when things go wrong in your life.*
- *Pray for the life of all God's people, and pray that we will all have the courage to deal with prophets of God who tell us what has gone wrong with the church.*

Final Prayer

Dear Lord, drive away from us those spirits of despair that take advantage of our daily troubles and trap us into self pity and gloom. Liberate us by the power of Your Holy Spirit, and may our confidence in Christ be unshakable, each and every day of our lives: AMEN
