

Prayer

Lord God, Almighty Father and Great Creator:
 We give You glory for all that is beautiful, for You made it:
 We thank You for Your power to overcome all the powers of evil:
 We praise You for the hope of glory You have placed in us:
 Lord God, Almighty Father and Great Creator:
 We are Yours, for we love You: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Church Ministry

Pray for your own church ministers and the leadership teams that work with them. Pray that God will raise up leaders for this and coming generations who will honour Him above all else.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for statesmen who do their best for the good of all*
- *Give thanks for the joy of sharing meals together*
- *Pray about the divisive subject of genetically modified crops*

Meditation

Don't stand back:

Don't let others try to do for you
 what God would have you do,
 And you will grow in spiritual confidence
 as His loved and trusted servant.

Don't let your heart be distracted,
 place your trust in Jesus Christ,
 And you will draw on His amazing love
 And find your strength and guidance.

Don't let the enemy catch you out
 keep alert, keep constant watch,
 And you will have control of every sin
 that tempts you from within.

Don't let the world become your idol
 don't serve its wants and needs
 And you will be free to choose the path
 Of life, by the Word of God.

Bible Study - Amos 5:18-27

¹⁸ How desperate it is for you who long for the day of the LORD! Why would you want this day of the LORD? It is darkness, not light; ¹⁹ as if a man fled from a lion and was met by a bear, or on entering his house he placed his hand on the wall, and was bitten by a snake! ²⁰ Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

²¹ I hate, I loathe your festivals, and I take no pleasure in your religious gatherings. ²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not receive them; and I have no regard for your specially fattened fellowship offerings. ²³ Away with your noisy songs! I will not listen to the music of your instruments. ²⁴ But let justice surge down like water, and righteousness like a stream in torrent. ²⁵ Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings for the forty years you were in the wilderness, O house of Israel?

²⁶ But you are taking up your king Sakkuth and your images of Kaiwan, your star-god which you made for yourselves! ²⁷ So I will send you into exile beyond Damascus, says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.

Review

The prophecies of Amos now have an easily recognisable theme; the judgement of God upon those of His people who had followed their own ways rather than worship their God. His prophecies exposed the good life enjoyed by the rich of the northern kingdom of Israel as rotten to the core; God's people of the eighth century BC tolerated injustice towards the poor, and they had deviated from true faith by practicing foreign religions. Consequently, Amos told them that they would be judged because of their sins; it was a hard but essential message. We need to hear Amos' message even now, for it is hard for us to deny that similar injustices and irreligion lie all around us. Through Christ, we now have the gift of salvation through Christ, but if our response to the Lord is no better than the ancient Israelites, then something is very wrong. Our faith in Christ does not absolve us from the responsibility of acting justly towards other people, and worshipping Him as the one true God.

In Amos' day, people longed for the 'Day of the Lord', and they believed that God would vindicate them as a people and conquer all their enemies. Not so, said Amos (5:18), because the 'Day of the Lord ... is darkness not light ...' in other words, the Lord's 'Day' would be one of inescapable judgement which would surprise Israel just like the frightening examples given by Amos in verse 19! Such prophecies sound awful, and in the light of the Gospel we know through Christ, some wonder whether we are talking about the same God! However, there is only one God and there can only be one God, and we need to know the truth about how sin can destroy a people if we are to know the truth about how God can save a people. Sometimes Christians can give the impression that they believe they have escaped the consequences of sin because of Jesus' mercy, but this is not the best way to explain salvation. Yes, He saves us from sin, but all sin must be confessed and 'laid at the foot of the Cross' if we are to be saved; after all, He pays the full price for our sin and in His death, bears its full consequences.

In our reading, Amos speaks eloquently against the two sources of sin that afflict humanity to this day; the sin of false religion, and the sin of injustice against others. He says of religious sin; 'I loathe your festivals ... I have no regard for your ... offerings ... away with your noisy songs! I will not listen' (5:21-23). It is remarkable to read a prophecy decrying the traditional festive worship of God written more than seven centuries before the time of Christ! Of course, Jesus preached roughly the same message! However, this message is entirely consistent within the Bible, for without as Moses Himself said (Deut 6:5,6, 10:12, 26:16, 30:2f.), unless the worshipper had a heart for God, the worship had no value. In addition, if people practiced injustice in their daily lives, then this was proof that their worship of a moral God was little more than a sham. It was true in Amos' day, Christ's day, and it is true in our day; as Amos said, 'let justice surge down like water and righteousness like a stream in torrent'. Amos used this great image of rushing water in a river to illustrate the mighty power of God sweeping away all the rubbish of sin and evil described in his earlier prophecies (2:6-11, 4:1-5, etc).

Some have misunderstood Amos and suggested that he preached a message like a 'social Gospel', about practical justice in the world, but this is simply not true. He saw no difference between right action and right worship of God. He preached a full Gospel of morally responsible faith and backed this up with an example of God's dealing with His people at the time of the Exodus (5:25), and He ridiculed the gods Sakkuth and Kaiwan (5:26) worshipped by the Israelites in preference to their living God (5:26). The consequence of Israel's sin was that they would be sent 'into exile beyond Damascus' (5:27), as a consequence of war.

Surely Israel would listen to such a prophecy? But history tells us that Amos was not heard by the Israelites, and they were indeed invaded and taken away into captivity beyond Damascus in 721BC. Amos' prophecy therefore remains a moral tale of what happens when God's own people ignore right worship and just living. Today, we certainly have a Saviour in Jesus Christ, but we need this Old Testament reminder about how sin corrupts the communities of God's people. If we recognise it, then we can confess it and deal with it.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Do you look forward to the 'Day of the Lord', or do you dread it? What should a Christian expect?
2. Is it possible to attempt to worship God today, but do this in a manner that is unworthy or unacceptable to God?
3. If the Lord were to come through His people 'like a flood', what would be washed away?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Amos is a challenging prophet. He forces us back to the basics of our faith and appeals to all God's people of every age to remember that God does not tolerate either injustice in our dealings with others or false worship that is not exclusive to Him. In our world full of complexities and compromise, justice can be a hard thing to find, and exclusive allegiance to the living God is a rare personal quality. Nevertheless, we aspire to these things not out of blind faith, but out of realistic hope and expectation. For by following Christ and always being ready to confess our sin, we may follow this path even in this corrupt world.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Try writing down a list of those wrongs or sins which are still prevalent amongst God's people today, and which create injustice within the church and in society as well. How many of them are 'tolerated' and in what way are they allowed to go unchecked? Pray about how sin is dealt with in the fellowship of the church today.*
- *Pray for the Lord to raise up prophets who will reveal the Word of the Lord today, and show us the sins of our age that we so easily fail to see.*

Final Prayer

Dearest Lord, You have seen and heard Your people commit sin, struggle with sin and confess sin over centuries; come rushing through us now like a great torrent of water, and by the power of Your Holy Spirit cleanse us anew and make us victorious. Thank You Lord: AMEN
