

Handouts

Notes & Questions



**AMOS,
When religion isn't
enough**

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Amos, when religion isn't enough, the importance of justice in serving God

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The prophet Amos and his message

- Has captivated preachers, reformers, Christian leaders from the earliest days it was preached until today particularly with its emphasis on justice—2 examples:
- Martin Luther King used it in his I Have a Dream speech where he quoted the verse *“Let justice roll down...”*
- And just this week Pope Francis chose *“let justice and peace flow”* (citing the book of Amos) as the theme for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, which will be on Sept. 1
- **An important starting question is, What is justice?**

A definition of justice

From Relevant magazine:

- *The Hebrew word for “justice,” mishpat, occurs in its various forms more than 200 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. Its most basic meaning is to treat people equitably. It means acquitting or punishing every person on the merits of the case, regardless of race or social status. Anyone who does the same wrong should be given the same penalty. [which was extremely rare in the ancient world and foundation in the Law]*
- *But mishpat means more than just the punishment of wrongdoing. It also means giving people their rights.*
- **Mishpat, then, is giving people what they are due, whether punishment or protection or care.**

The definition continues

- *This is why, if you look at every place the word is used in the Old Testament, several classes of persons continually come up. Over and over again, mishpat describes taking up the care and cause of widows, orphans, immigrants and the poor—those who have been called “the quartet of the vulnerable.”*
- *In premodern, agrarian societies, these four groups had no social power. They lived at subsistence level and were only days from starvation if there was any famine, invasion or even minor social unrest. Today, this quartet would be expanded to include the refugee, the migrant worker, the homeless and many single parents and elderly people.*
- <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/practical-faith/what-biblical-justice#1o8p9RjzBSqF0seW.99>

With the challenge of Justice as the theme of the book

- Let's look at it more closely for how we can apply it to our lives
- Remembering always the reminder that *“all scripture isuseful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- And that the messages of the prophets are not merely historical rantings or puzzles to figure out, but messages from our God for us today.

Let's start with a solid grounding in the historical reality of Amos

- **Most of the prophetic books we will study clearly identify when they took place.**
- Far from fairy tales or vague spiritual histories, (as is the case with

most other religions) many Biblical books start with statements like this:

- ***The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel. Amos 1:1***
- The listing of kings and/or specific events is why I was able to put together a timeline that would line up with history and give you the proper context of the prophet's message.

Real people in identifiable history

- Where we are in AMOS—see chart at www.Bible805.com.
- Previous preaching primarily to the Northern Kingdom of Israel by some of the most powerful prophets in human history, Elijah and Elisha—but after about 60 years there was little godly living left in the land.
- Jonah, the first prophet with a book bearing his name has preached to Nineveh and disappeared. (see additional lesson on Bible805 and [YouTube.com/Bible805](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bible805) on this).
- God, in His mercy sends Israel two more prophets, Amos and Hosea warning them of the consequences of not obeying the covenant they promised to obey.
- Real people, living in real times, with messages of real consequences.

Archeological verification for the setting of Amos

- Evidence of the earthquake Amos describes:
- *Archaeologists have found massive amounts of earthquake damage in sites throughout the ancient kingdoms of Judah, Israel and the Philistines. This earthquake damage dates to around 760 B.C.E., right around the latter third of Uzziah's reign. Tilted walls, collapsed floors and more are attributed to this earthquake. So great is the amount of evidence, that scientists have been able to determine the epicenter was likely in Lebanon, and that its strength was probably around a magnitude 8.2 and lasted 90 seconds*
- <https://watchjerusalem.co.il/479-uziah-uncovering-a-king-of-judah>

Also discovered seals and plaque with Uzziah's, (Azariah's) name

Important as this is, this isn't an archeology lesson

- But again, an emphasis that the Bible speaks to us in real-life situations.
- The times were ones of political turmoil.
- In a relatively wealthy, prosperous nation.
- Ecological disaster-earthquake.
- Spiritual decline.
- Sounds familiar, doesn't it?
- Human nature remarkably consistent through time.

Into this world God sends His Prophet: Amos

- Name means: Burden-bearer, he was from Judah, sent north to Israel.
- He was not formally trained; he was a shepherd and farmer.
- But because of the power of his preaching, he has been called "the first Great Reformer."
- ***APPLICATION: God's calls can be unpredictable and if He called you to something, He believes you can do it, and that is the only thing that matters.***
- ***Today anyone can start a podcast, a blog, do you YouTube videos to share God's message to our world.***

- ***Your audience may not be large and you most likely won't make much of an income, but if you feel called, go for it!***

Jerry Bridges—a modern example

- Not pastor of a mega-church or a great speaker; not on social media or television.
- Not trained as a theologian but as an engineer; served in the Navy.
- Joined Navigator staff after receiving training from them, and LeRoy Eims said to him one day, "You ought to try writing."
- He went on to write over 20 books that have sold millions of copies, blessed, and encouraged many.
- *"You have to be amazed at what God has done for a cross-eyed, partially deaf boy growing up in poverty alongside the railroad tracks,"* he wrote in his biography.
- Each of us has the same God—and we have incredible tools to share His message.

Back to Amos—the Book begins with Judgment on surrounding nations

- Damascus, for cruelty in war
- Tyre, sold 'brothers'
- Gaza, slave traffic
- Ammon, excessive cruelty in war
- Edom, anger, fury to brother
- Moab, excessive vengeance
- Judah, idolatry
- **A reminder that all are accountable, Rom. 1**
- **God' expectations of humanity are universal—there are no excuses for cruelty to others.**

Now to Israel

- Because they were chosen by God, they deserve greater judgment, ***"You I have chosen" Amos 3:2 "therefore I will punish"***
- ***Similar to the NT reminder "To whom much is given, much is required" Luke 12:48,*** as a nation they were wealthy and strong, chosen by God to share his message and yet....
- Their wrongs are listed c in. 2,3
 - Trample poor, Injustice in many areas
 - Idol worship, Forbid prophets to speak
 - Excessive drinking, Self-indulgence
- *Amos 4: 1 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, "Bring us some drinks!"*

Verses that list their sins

- *Amos 2:6 "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. ⁷They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.. . . ⁸They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.*
- ⁹*"Yet I destroyed the Amorites before them,....*
- ¹⁰*I brought you up out of Egypt...*
- ¹¹*"I also raised up prophets from among your children and Nazirites from among your youths. Is this not true, people of Israel?" declares the Lord. ¹²"But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy—*

And because they silenced the Prophets

- *These are the words of my Master God.
“I’ll send a famine through the whole country.
It won’t be food or water that’s lacking, but my Word.
People will drift from one end of the country to the other,
roam to the north, wander to the east.
They’ll go anywhere, listen to anyone,
hoping to hear God’s Word—but they won’t hear it.” Amos 8:11-12*

Sadly, in many places it is here now

- We need God’s Word, more than ever in our churches, in small groups, in the hearts of God’s people.
- Because we have lost the true leavening of the Word in public discourse, in schools, everywhere.
- Not that long ago society was based on Christian values.
- It simply isn’t any longer.
- And the problem isn’t only in the society.

I think most Christians sincerely want to please God

- But they simply don’t know how to do it from a religious diet of mostly scattered bits of verses out of context with heavy application on what it can do for you.
- Or as a current Christian commentator summed it up as “the Life Coach” approach to Christianity—using the faith to become a better version of YOU!
- But that is not what you are about – all of you who have understand the very challenging adventure of reading through God’s Word, the whole thing, to understand His entire message.
- This is so important, because remember.....

They, like many today, were outwardly very religious

- But it was a religion mixed with idolatry.
- Jeroboam set up two golden calves at Bethel and Dan, after kingdom split, where the people worshipped them as well as Jehovah and then lived how they wanted.
- God’s challenge to them through Amos:
*“I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me.
Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them.
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,
I will have no regard for them.
Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.”*

– **Amos 5:21-2**

Response God wants

*Seek good, not evil,
that you may live.
Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you,
just as you say he is.
Hate evil, love good;
maintain justice in the courts.
Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.*

Amos 5:14-15

*But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream! **Amos 5:24***

Living at the same time as Amos, but a prophet to Judah also reminds people of the need for justice

- *He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8*
- In addition to justice, mercy needed because we have been shown mercy and need to remember that when acting with justice.
- Humility needed above all, because all we have and are is because of God.
- Pride and arrogance are the opposite of justice—mercy, and humility should always be **characteristic of God's people.**

Their response—Instead of repentance—

Response by religious leader

- Amos 7:¹⁰ *Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. . . . Amaziah said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. ¹³ Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom."*
- ¹⁴ *Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. ¹⁵ But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' ¹⁶ Now then, hear the word of the LORD.*
- **People didn't want to hear messages of justice, kindness and mercy, any more than they do today.**

Amos responds with his message of judgment

- *Hear this, you who trample the needy
and do away with the poor of the land,
I will turn your religious festivals into mourning and all your singing into weeping.
I will make all of you wear sackcloth
and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day. . . .*
- **In less than 50 years, Assyria conquered them. And all the parties were over.**

Yet beyond judgment Amos prophesied

mercy & hope

- *"I will bring my people Israel back from exile*
 - *"They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.
They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;
they will make gardens and eat their fruit.
I will plant Israel in their own land,
never again to be uprooted
from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God.*
- Amos 9: 11-15
- A constant message in all the prophets is of hope and mercy after judgment—

Suggestions for how to apply the challenges of Amos

- Between you and your God—mentally or write down a time and money log.

- How much is all about YOU?
- How much is about taking in God's Word, listening, reading, thinking and praying about how you can apply it in your life?
- How much time & money is spent on YOU, how much in serving others? **Your family**, your neighborhood, your world?
- When finished, remember, not only is a focus on God, on others, on justice as a characteristic of our lives the message of Amos, the secret is.....

The more we focus on others—

- The more personal joy—in addition to the Lord's favor and eternal rewards will be ours as C.S. Lewis reminds us—
- ***Aim at heaven and get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you get neither.***
- ***Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.***

When we treat others as God's word commands

- With justice, kindness, mercy, and love.
- We become a reflection of our God who restores, who lived a life of service and sacrifice.
- Our choice which side of Amos we want to live out.
- Self-indulgence and religious showiness or sacrificial service.
- Our choice shows the object of our worship, our priorities, our focus in life—ourselves or our God.

Finally

- Living moral lives, justice, and care for others, especially the downtrodden are not optional, but a key expectation of God's people.
- Religious observances do not take the place of actions, reorienting life priorities.
- You don't have to do really big things, but we need to do whatever we can.
- God's mercy is long but should never be taken for granted.
- When we step away from daily challenges and zoom out to the eternal perspective of what God has done for us, and the incredible eternity He has planned for us, we are inspired to serve Him in every way possible!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Amos, when religion isn't enough

1. What is the Biblical definition of “justice” or the word “misphat” in both negative and positive ways?
2. What are some of the ways that prophetic books assure us that they are records of real happenings in real places?
3. How was Amos' calling to be a prophet unusual? What from his calling can inspire us in what God calls us to do today?
4. What were some of the sins that Amos accused Israel of?
5. What does it mean that God allows a “famine for the Words of the Lord?” and for them to try to silence the prophets? How are we experiencing a famine for the Words of the Lord today and what can we do about it?
6. APPLICATION—How can you apply the challenges of Amos to your life? Have you ever tried a time and money log to help you see your priorities? Any other ideas for application?