

Israel's punishment declared: Amos 3

Read Amos 3

Last week Granville gave an introduction to Amos and the first two chapters.

I will not repeat that but in case you missed it, here is a **brief rundown**.

Amos was a agricultural man, a shepherd and a keeper of fig trees. He came from Tekoa, near Bethlehem and therefore was from Judah. But he prophesied in Northern Israel, not Judah. Amos was active c. 750 BC during the reign of Jeroboam II (788–747 BC) of Samaria (aka. Northern Israel), making Amos the first prophetic book of the Bible to be written. See 2Kings 14-15 for details of the period. It appears to be a time of relative success for the Northern Kingdom although what followed was a series of assassinations.

Anyway, enough history, Amos was a foreign labourer! Not the type to be invited to speak. But God gave him a message. When God speaks, we need to pay attention!

What is recorded of Amos's message falls into two groups of mini- poems which, given their prophetic nature we call oracles.

Title 1:1

First group of oracles 1:2-6:14

YHWH roars Desolation 1:2

3s & 4s: Judgement for International and Israelite atrocities 1:3-2:16

Covenantal accountability 3:1-2

A poem of inseparables 3:3-8

Four oracles of punishment 3:9-4:3

Past Punishments are sample, NOW prepare to meet your God 4:4-13

A lament for Israel 5:1-17

The day of the Lord 5:18-27

A Lament for the wealthy 6:1-7
A complete defeat 6:8-14

In the middle is a series of visions and a confrontation with Amaziah, priest of Bethel.

Visions and narrative 7:1-8:3

Visions of Locusts; Fire; Plumb-line 7:1-9
Amos v Amaziah 7:10-17
Visions of a basket of summer fruit 8:1-3

Second group of oracles 8:4-9:15

Hypocrisy and punishment 8:4-14
No escape from God's wrath 9:1-10
Restoration, replanting and rebuilding 9:11-15

Our attention this morning is on chapter 3.

Chapters 1 and 2 have dramatically prophesied judgement on the surrounding nations and then God has turned his attention on Israel. Israel, God's people, are judged for failing to be God's people.

In Chapter 3 Amos is explicit. ² "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.". They were the ones who God brought out of slavery in Egypt, God chose them above all nations to love them and protect them and for them to be an example of godliness among the nations. But they were no different to the nations around them.

We have been chosen by God and offered salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus. He love us and will protect us. But **are we any different to the people around us?** Does your salvation change the way you live? Or are you living with a foot in both camps, being holy on Sundays but enjoying the same things as our neighbours the rest of the week?

You can sense Amos's audience don't like what he is saying so Amos follows with a **poem of inseparables**.

³ Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?

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

Does he growl in his den when he has caught nothing?

⁵ Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground where no snare has been set?

Does a trap spring up from the earth when there is nothing to catch?

⁶ When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble?

You can't have one without the other.

Appointments don't happen unless you book them, lions don't just roar for the fun of it, you don't trap a bird without a trap, nor does a trap spring without prey. Fire alarms raise your anxiety levels.

And the point of the poem is

When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?

⁷ *Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.*

⁸ *The lion has roared -- who will not fear?*

The Sovereign LORD has spoken -- who can but prophesy?

The point being God has spoken what else can Amos do but prophesy.

Amos is working his analogy of God as a lion here in ch1:2 God has roared, here we understand the reaction – who will not fear! In the Narnia Series of books, C.S.Lewis describes Jesus as a lion, but not a tame lion. He is safe because he loves you not because he is a soft touch.

So this morning the first challenge is has the Sovereign LORD spoken? There are two answers to that. First Yes he has and we have his words written up in what we call the Bible. I labelled mine 'God has spoken' to remind myself this is no ordinary book. It is the word of God written down. The second answer to the question 'has the Sovereign LORD spoken?' is yes. Jesus is the word of God and he has sent his Holy Spirit to speak to us. The Holy Spirit also speaks through his people. So we have the written word and the Holy Spirit.

The question becomes 'What are you going to do about it?' For Amos he was obliged to prophecy. And if God speaks to you, you need to share it with others. Whether it is a word from the Bible or a word from the Holy Spirit or God speaking through other Christians.

Amos had a message of disaster for Israel. He was sent to warn the Northern kingdom of coming punishment for their sins.

In 722BC Shalmaneser, king of Assyria took Samaria, the capital, and exiled 27, 290 of them to Ninevah. That was 28 years after Amos prophesied.

When God speaks, it happens. That is the story of creation. God spoke and it was so. And God has spoken through Jesus. He offers a way out of the punishment for sin through the death of Jesus. We can be sure that what God says happens. SO if you have put your faith and trust in Jesus, you can be sure of forgiveness of sins, sure of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, sure of eternal life, sure of a place in heaven. God has said it, so it is so.

God's judgement on Israel is the subject of the first of the three oracles

⁹ Proclaim to the fortresses of Ashdod and to the fortresses of Egypt: "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria; see the great unrest within her and the oppression among her people." ¹⁰ "They do not know how to do right," declares the LORD, "who hoard plunder and loot in their fortresses."

¹¹ Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "An enemy will overrun the land; he will pull down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses."

The second oracle is quite different.

¹² This is what the LORD says: "As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites be saved, those who sit in Samaria on the edge of their beds and in Damascus on their couches."

The metaphor is grisly, it sounds to me like that was the evidence the shepherd needed to provide to prove the sheep was lost to a predator. Remember Amos was a shepherd! Just enough of Israel will survive to prove they existed and were punished.

The concept of a remnant runs through the Old Testament.

God, in his mercy, will not destroy his people completely. He has made promises for his people and he will fulfil them but only for a few.

The third oracle spells out what God is planning.

¹³ *"Hear this and testify against the house of Jacob," declares the Lord, the LORD God Almighty.* ¹⁴ *"On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground.* ¹⁵ *I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished," declares the LORD.*

It was not God's intention for the Children of Israel to be divided. He had one place only for their to be an altar in his name and that was Jerusalem. Jeroboam set up two altars with golden calves at Bethel and Dan as an alternative to Jerusalem. We would call it fusion culture. Take the sacrifices, etc associated with YHWH and add the symbolism of practices of Baal. God hates that most of all. In addition Bethel had become rich as a place of pilgrimage and second homes, ivory decorations and mansions were evidence of the way they spent their money. Their wealth betrayed their turning away from God and pursuing other gods. The punishment of sin includes the destruction of all that they held dear, their false religion and their financial security.

So what do we learn then?

From these three oracles (the 4th is in chapter 4) we learn that God is not mocked. We can't assume on God's generosity forever. His love never ends but he has appointed a day when he will judge all humanity. And we are currently reaping the whirlwind in climate change and political instability. The antidote is not a new political party or a magic solution to global warming. It is turning away

from sin and seeking God. The solution to much of society's problems lies not in redefining everything but changing nothing but a turning away from adultery, deceit and lies, abuse, hatred, stealing and envy. It needs us to turn to Jesus, and throw ourselves on his mercy, putting aside those things that God says are wrong.

When God speaks, it happens. Jesus offers us salvation freely, *whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.* We love John 3:16 but the sober fact is that Jesus went on to say *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”*

So , in summary, Today's challenges are

Are you any different from the people around you?

Does the salvation Jesus offers you and the presence of the Holy Spirit affect the way that you live and mark you out as a follower of Jesus?

the Sovereign LORD has spoken,

have you listened to his voice? Have you read his word? Have you done anything about it?

When God speaks, it happens.

The God of creation is among us to bless us, but if we reject his ways, we sow the seeds of our own destruction.

What are you going to do about it?

This is a call for repentance and faith in Jesus, to seek him first and receive eternal life, then live as God would have you live.