

Amos-by Tommy Lee

Chapter 1

As we approach the book of Amos, let's pause at the beginning and give thanks for the miraculous "inspiration" of the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3.16,17). What you will read in Amos is clearly the Word of the Lord (see throughout, but some examples: 1.3,6; 3.1,11; 5.1,4; 9.11-15). **But!** Amos did not at all lose his own personality (see 1.1) when he became the vehicle of the Lord's Word. *"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1.21). Amos begins his messages to the northern kingdom of Israel by declaring God's judgment upon enemy nations. This would have made him very popular. But don't worry, it won't last. The developing message of God's wrath starts with pagan nations, like Damascus (1.3). Then it moves toward "cousin" nations, like Edom (1.11, see Genesis 36.1, Edom descends from Esau, Jacob/Israel's brother). Then—as we will see tomorrow—it moves to the southern kingdom of Israel's "sister" nation, Judah (2.4). And then... oh no.

Chapter 2

As we said yesterday, Amos' messages of God's judgment were circling down from sheer pagan nations... to cousin nations... to the sister nation of Judah... and then, beginning with 2.6, to the northern kingdom of Israel itself—the *very people to whom Amos is preaching*. No wonder the prophets were hated (see what Jesus said happened to the prophets, in Matthew 23.29-37). Notice a really big thing we learn about God's judgment in Amos 1 and 2. The "other" nations are all being brought to trial and judged for what we might call "crimes against humanity"—wicked evils that their God-given consciences should have warned them against (see examples in 1.3,6,9,11,13, and 2.1). But with the people of God—both Judah and Israel—the basis of judgment is different. They are judged for abandoning revealed truth that the Lord graciously gave them (see Judah's sin in 2.4 and Israel's sin in 2.11-12). As God's people (today, the church), our *chief sin* is always found in departing from God's Word. Our *chief virtue* is always found in hearing and obeying God's Word.

Chapter 3

Back in seminary, my Hebrew professor made us memorize Amos 3.1-2, in Hebrew. (Don't ask me to demonstrate... long gone.) But his purpose in doing so wasn't merely linguistic; it was for our own personal good. *"Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: [In 2.4-5 the Lord was speaking against Judah. In 2.6-16 the Lord was speaking against Israel. But together, they are one family whom the Lord rescued from Egyptian slavery and called to himself. And now comes God's Word to his people:] 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; [What a unique position and beautiful privilege is theirs! And yet, remember what Jesus said in Luke 12.48: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required." Privilege is not a shelter. It is a responsibility and treasure for which we will have to give an account...] therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."* This is really the very heart of Amos' message. And it still applies today.

Chapter 4

Back in 3.11, we read this: *"An adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you, and your strongholds shall be plundered."* Looking forward, in 6.14, the Lord says

this: "*For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel,' declares the Lord, the God of hosts; 'and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of the Arabah.'"* Those are the bookends, stating the theme of this whole section of Amos. Within the bookends God is explaining *why* he is sending an enemy against his people. **In 4.1-3**, Amos provides a particular example of the general charge made against Israel in 3.9-15. The leading women are using their influence to "*oppress the poor*" and "*crush the needy*." Amos—quite dangerously it seems to me—compares them to the "*cows of Bashan*" (an area known as cattle country, see Psalm 22.12), being fattened for slaughter. **In 4.4-13**, Amos centers in on the very heart of Israel's offenses: given *repeated* opportunities and invitations to repent, they stubbornly refuse to do so. Empty, self-serving religion.

Chapter 5

In this section, as we saw yesterday, the Lord is *explaining why he is sending an enemy against his own people*. And the heart of it is, as we saw yesterday, that God has given Israel repeated opportunities and invitations to repent, but Israel has stubbornly refused to do so. Chapter 5 bears the same witness. In **vs.4-6**, see the appeals God made to Israel: "*Seek me and live.... Seek the Lord and live.*" In **vs.14&15**, see the Lord calling them to reformation of their society: "*Seek good.... Hate evil.... establish justice.*" In **vs.21-25**, God summons them to spiritual renewal: "*let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness?*" But notice that all of these appeals are bracketed by affirmations that disaster is coming: **vs.1-3** and **vs.26-27**. And sprinkled throughout are several sad statements of spiritual diagnosis: see **vs.7,10-13,16-20**. The God who stands in the midst of all this—revealed in **vs.8&9**—is not mocked. Never squander an opportunity to repent!

Chapter 6

Remember back in chapter 4, when Amos—living dangerously—referred to the leading women of Israel as "*cows of Bashan*"? Well, that reckless word to the ladies is now balanced by an equally precarious word to the gentlemen. (Being a faithful prophet of the Lord in the midst of a fallen culture was a risky vocation!) In **vs.1-7**, the "*notable men*" (v.1) are addressed. If the women were like "*cows*" thoughtlessly indulging themselves, the men are living "high on the hog" (as we might say), in a lordly pride which can find no fault with itself. They love to be "*first*" in every way (the Hebrew word "first" appears in v.1 and is translated that way in the ESV for us; it appears again in v.6, translated as "finest"; and the sense of putting oneself "first" is found in every description), so in v.7 the Lord says they will be first! "*The first of those who go into exile.*" In **vs.8-14** this section is concluded with final words of warning concerning pride (v.8), moral indifference (v.12), the self-absorbed conceit of self-love (v.13), and also describes the dreadful end thereof: exile (vs.9-11,14).

Chapter 7

We now enter into the final section of Amos' prophesies. It begins with two judgments that, in the Lord's mercy, will *not* materialize (7.1-6), and it ends with a hope that *will* one day materialize—through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ (9.11-15). In these final three chapters God's exalted name and title, "The Sovereign Yahweh," (translated here as "the Lord GOD") will occur *eleven* times. It only occurred *nine* times in the previous six chapters. May our attention be appropriately grabbed! In **vs.1-6**, Amos intercedes twice for sinful Israel; God hears and relents. In **vs.7&9**, the Lord shows Amos a third vision of judgment, and to this one Amos offers no prayer. Why? Because in the earlier two visions, survival was not possible. But in this one, the Lord is simply inspecting and evaluating his people to see if they are living as the true and faithful people of the Holy One. Against this no argument can be made. In **vs.10-17**, the

faithless priest Amaziah tries to rid the land of Amos and his message. But the message ultimately comes from God. It cannot be escaped.

Chapter 8

In **vs.1&2**, the Lord gives Amos a vision of "*summer fruit*"... or, to understand the meaning we might say, "ripe fruit." A crop of fruit is ready to be harvested when its own inner development has "ripened." Well, as the Lord here looks upon his people he says, "*The end has come upon my people Israel*" (v.2). Or, to get the meaning, "The time has come; according to their own inner development, they are now ripe for judgment." That vision of judgment is then developed by four brief messages about the "*day*" or "*days*" (see vs.3,9,11,13) of judgment. The first message (**vs.3-8**) explains—*again*—why this judgement will happen; the second message (**vs.9-10**) pictures the judgment in terms that remind us of God's judgment on Egypt; the third message (**vs.11-12**) shows how a people who ignore and neglect the Word of God will wander everywhere in a spiritual famine, but—in their pride—still will not go to Jerusalem, where the Word can be found; the fourth message (**vs.13-14**) shows the final fall—the full apostasy of the next generation into empty lies.

Chapter 9

The final chapter of Amos has three themes: the inescapable judgment of the Sovereign Lord (**vs.1-6**); the discriminating nature of his judgment, which will shake Israel as with a sieve, so that the complacent and uncaring are destroyed but those who cling to the Lord are spared (**vs.7-10**); and finally, the hope of restoration (**vs.11-15**). Here, at the end, the Lord graciously reaffirms the glorious promises he has made over his true and faithful people. In v.11 God assures us that the seemingly-demolished promises to David of an eternal kingdom will be renewed—in *the kingdom of great David's Greater Son, Jesus*. In v.12 the nation Edom represents all the enmity of the world against God's Promised King, *but Christ will have dominion*. In v.13 the bounty of the Lord's blessing is pictured in such prosperous terms that last year's harvest is still being reaped while this year's harvest work begins; *the True King has returned and creation itself is set free of the curse (see Romans 8.18-25)*. In the final two verses *all that we lost in Adam is regained in Jesus*.

-Reflecting on Amos-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Amos. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Amos before we move forward?

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." John 7.38