

Minor Prophets: Amos

Background

- Amos was a shepherd and grower of sycamore figs in Takoa a mountain town in Judea.
- God called him out of his lowly profession to go north to speak out against the injustice and unrighteousness of Israel.
- He prophesied during the reign of Uzziah/Azzariah king of Judah and Jeroboam II, king of Israel.
- Jeroboam II was the most successful king of the northern kingdom. He brought great wealth as well as political and military success. Israel's borders were the largest they had been since Solomon and David.
- Along with great success there was great oppression of those less fortunate.
- This places Amos prophesy around 767-753 B.C., two years before the earthquake. Josephus mentions this earthquake in his account of Uzziah in Judah.

What Does Amos Say?

Chapters 1-2: Message to the Nations and Israel

- Imagery of God being like a lion roaring
- Judgments on 7 nations other than Israel with a structure of "For three transgressions of ___ and for four..."
 - Often this structure was used in the Bible and ancient literature.
 - This x/x+1 formula is found throughout the Bible and usually follows a set pattern.
 - It is occasionally used to emphasize completeness as in [Job 40:5](#) which says, "I have spoken once, but I cannot answer; twice, but I will say no more."
 - It is sometimes used to mean "a few" - one or two of something. E.g., there were a couple of people at the meeting.
 - It is sometimes used to mean abundance - "7 even 8" is used more often to refer to that. [Micah 5:5](#)
 - Sometimes it is more literal. The second number is what is being emphasized and the phrase "3 even 4" is mostly used for poetic parallelism.
 - It can be a way of emphasizing the many transgressions
- Amos uses this to bring Israel slowly to God's judgment on them. He begins with nations they hate as enemies (Syria, Tyre, Philistia), moves to distant relatives (Edom, Amon, Moab) and then to Israel's brother, Judah. Finally, Amos levels the boom on Israel.
- Israel has been suppressing the prophets and committing injustice toward the poor.
 - They sell the righteous and the needy
 - Trample the head of the poor in to the dust and turn aside from the afflicted
 - Men and their sons engage with cult prostitutes in the worship of idols
 - While they do this they lay on garments that were taken in pledge for a loan to the poor (these weren't supposed to be kept overnight according to Ex. 22:26)
 - They have commanded the prophets to be quiet and made the Nazirites drink wine
 - Doom will come!

Chapters 3-6: Message to Israel and its Leaders

- God reminds them of His covenant with Abraham and Moses. They are His people and they have a higher standard. As a result they will be held to a higher standard.

- 3:3-6 He asks a series of rhetorical questions that all anticipate the same answer demonstrating that they are at fault for breaking the covenant with Him. He uses the lion metaphor again with beautiful parallelism.
- 3:9-12 He even invites the Philistines and Egyptians to assemble as observers in God's courtroom as He brings the judgment against Israel. They will be taken away so that what is left can be compared to the bits and pieces of a lamb that shepherd is able to tear from a lions mouth before he devours it all.
- 3:15 Amos declares judgment on the extravagancies of the Israelites.
- 4:1-5 Amos compares the women of Israel to the fine cows of Bashan. They are fat, happy and spoiled in their extravagance. To maintain this lifestyle they oppress the poor and crush the needy. Amos promises that they will be led away. Amos goes further to mock their sacrifices to God as sin.
- 4:6-13 God, in His grace, has given them hardship to call them back, but they have not responded.
- Chapter 5 has an extended Chiasmic poem.
 - A. Death is coming to Israel (vs. 1-3)
 - B. Repentance is the answer (vs. 4-6)
 - C. Israel is guilty and doomed (vs. 7)
 - D. God is the all-powerful sovereign Judge (vs. 8-9)
 - C. Israel is guilty and doomed before Him (vs. 10-13)
 - B. Repent! (vs. 14-15)
 - A. Death is around the corner (vs. 16-17)
- 5:14 God calls them to repent and He will be merciful.
- 5:18 **Woe** to those who seek the "Day of the Lord", it is judgment!
- God hates their religion. While they are practicing their oppressing the poor and practicing idolatry. He calls them to justice and righteousness.
 - **Justice:** Mishpat "actions taken to correct injustice"
 - **Righteousness:** Tzedakah "Right relationships with others in God's covenant family"
- 6:1 **Woe** to those who are at ease
- 6:4 **Woe** to those who take part in finery and leisure
 - Vs. 7 They shall be exiled first
- 6:11-14 Like a great house they will be torn down
 - Amos uses sarcasm and rhetorical questions to point out Israel's over confidence and pride
 - The result is that they will be oppressed from their northern to southern boundaries.

Chapters 7-9: Amos' Visions

- First Vision: Amos sees a horde of locusts ready to decimate everything.
 - Amos asks God to relent
 - God has mercy because of Amos' plea
- Second Vision: Amos sees a judgment of fire
 - Amos asks God to cease
 - God relents
- Third Vision: the LORD asks Amos what he sees. It is a plumb line demonstrating that Israel is not straight/upright.
 - Due to this the LORD will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword
- **Narrative Break:** Amaziah, the priest at Bethel complains to Jeroboam about Amos. He tells Amos to go back to Judah to prophesy. Amos tells God told him to come prophesy. He further tells Amaziah that his

wife will become a prostitute, his children will be killed by the sword and he will be exiled in an unclean land (especially bad for a priest).

- Fourth Vision: the LORD asks Amos what he sees. It is a basket of ripe summer fruit demonstrating that Israel has come to the end of its usefulness. There is word play here. In Hebrew the word for “summer” fruit (which was the last of the season) sounds like the Hebrew word for “end” in the next line. This is the end of the fruitfulness of Israel.
 - Again the LORD condemns them for their treatment of the poor. Even mentioning that while they celebrate Sabbath’s they plot about how they will take advantage of the poor by using dishonest weights and balances, etc.
 - The LORD uses sarcasm in swearing by the unchanging pride of Jacob, which earlier He said He “abhorred” in 6:8.
- God will bring about darkness, mourning, famine of His word (no prophesy).
- Fifth Vision: Amos sees the Lord standing by the alter in Israel’s temple (probably Samaria). He calls for the destruction of the temple, resulting in the death of the worshipers.
 - He uses **merisms** to say that there will be no escape from God’s judgment. He is the **Lord God of Hosts (armies)**. He has complete control of all things.
 - He compares them to other nations that He has moved from one land to another.
 - He will destroy them from the surface of the ground.
 -except that He promises a remnant
- He looks at a yet future day of hope
 - He will raise up David’s (Messianic reference) and rebuild it
 - He uses hyperbole to express the great abundance and blessing of this future.
 - Plowman will overtake the reaper, treader of grapes him who sows the seed
 - Fortunes will be restored
 - They will rebuild
 - They will plant vineyards
 - He will plant them and they will not be removed again

What does it mean?

God seems to care deeply about Justice and Righteousness. They are used about 3 dozen times together in the Bible and are used 3 times in Amos. Twice it is in reference to Israel making a desecration of them. Specifically they are said to be turned into wormwood which is often translated as bitterness/curse. They have thrown down justice and righteousness and replaced them with poison, bitterness and curses.

God’s people, as subjects of a theocracy in which God ruled, were to treat each other with justice and righteousness.

Psalm 68:4-5 God is the “father to the fatherless, a defender of widows.” He identifies with the powerless. Throughout the Bible he favors the younger, and the weaker. If you want to be greatest, be the least. Isaiah 1:17 “learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” The quartet of the vulnerable was the “widows, orphans, immigrants and the poor.” Laws in the Old Testament were to prevent extreme disparities between God’s people (Exodus 22:22, Deuteronomy 14:29, Deuteronomy 24:19, Jeremiah 22:3).

Israel failed miserably at following after God’s laws in respect to how they treated the marginalized, so much so that they were exiled.

Application?

The term “Social Justice” is a common and controversial one in our national conversation in both secular and sacred sectors. As Christians what do we do about the concepts of “justice and righteousness?”

- Does it mean buying commodities from “Fair Trade” and “Ethical” companies?
- Do we bring food to the homeless communities?
- Do we provide meals to the sick?
- Do we make sure that the kids at the public school all have backpacks?
- Do we need to make sure everyone is at the same economic level?
- Does every person in America need to own a house?
- Does everyone need a cell phone?

Not that these are all bad and none of them should be done, but as believers there are a few things to consider.

- In Acts 6 the Christians took care of widows, but they were “their widows.” Specifically this referred to the widows who were Christian Hellenistic Jews.
- Romans 15:26 Paul states that Macedonia and Achaia made a contribution to the “poor among the saints in Jerusalem.
- Paul says that “They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.” Galatians 2:10
- Paul says that masters need to grant justice to their slaves, know they have a heavenly Master (Col 4:1).
- Paul makes a distinction between widows. The widows the church needs to help are those who aren’t young enough to marry again and don’t have families to help them. I Timothy 5:3-16
- James makes a big deal about treating the rich man with preference over the poor man. All of this is in the context of “your assembly.”
- James says that the poor he is referring to are “heirs of the kingdom.”

After Jesus ascends to heaven, every mention of the acts of Righteousness and Justice toward the “quartet” is in the context of the believers. Remember, like the Israelites we are under a theocracy. Christ is our King (Ephesians 2:19). We are to treat the members of the body of Christ with Justice and Righteousness.

- Are there widows in our midst who need help?
- Are their children with a tenuous home situation in our congregation that may need assistance in some way?
- Is there someone who doesn’t have transportation?
- Is there someone who is out of work due to a change in circumstances?
- Is there someone experiencing difficulty with providing for family due to sudden expensive medical issues?

Does this all mean that we don’t help non-Christians? Of course not! Helping those who God puts in our path is one of the most common ways that individuals come to know the Lord. However, the priority that is set forth in the New Testament seems to be the “vulnerable” of God’s people.

Those who are characterized as **just** and **righteous** make a habit out of seeking to right the wrongs and create opportunities of mercy for those who are unable to accomplish it themselves.

Are we as God’s people, “Letting Justice flow like a river, and Righteousness like an unfailing stream?”