



Amos

Transcript

Introduction

00:00-01:24

The book of the prophet Amos. Amos was a shepherd and a fig tree farmer who lived right near the border between northern Israel and southern Judah. Now, the north had seized its independence about 150 years earlier—remember 1 Kings chapter 12—and it was currently being ruled by Jeroboam II, a successful military leader. He won lots of battles and new territory for Israel, and he generated lots of wealth, but in the eyes of the prophets, he was one of the worst kings ever. His wealth had led to apathy, and he allowed idol worship for the gods of Canaan, which in turn led to injustice and the neglect of the poor.

And it got to the point where Amos couldn't take it anymore. He sensed God calling him to go trek up north to Bethel, an important city that had a large temple, and start announcing God's word to the people. And this book is a collection of his sermons and poems and visions uttered over the years. They were compiled later to give God's people a sense of his divine message to the Northern Kingdom, and it's a message we still need to hear today.

The book has a fairly clear design. Chapters 1 and 2 are a series of messages to the nations and Israel. Then, chapters 3-6 are a collection of poems that express Amos' message to the people of Israel and its leaders. Chapters 7-9 contain a series of visions that Amos experienced that depict God's coming judgment on Israel. Let's just dive in.

Chapters 1-2

01:25-02:29

So the book opens with a series of short poems that accuse all of Israel's neighbors of violence and injustice. And this is kind of odd because the book's opening line said that Amos was going to speak against Israel. But watch how this works.

As Amos is naming all of these neighboring nations, you can go look at a map and see that he's creating a circle. And when he's done, Israel lies right in the center, like a target in the crosshairs. And on Israel, Amos unleashes a poetic accusation that's three times longer and more intense than any of these others.

He accuses Israel's wealthy of ignoring the poor and allowing grave injustice in their land, specifically by allowing the poor to be sold into debt slavery and then going on to deny any of these people legal representation. And this, Amos asks, is this the family that was once denied justice and enslaved in Egypt? The family that God rescued from oppression and slavery? "The party's over," Amos says. "God is done putting up with you!" And so the opening of the next section explains why.

Chapters 3-6

02:29-05:29

God says, "I chose you, Israel, from among all of the families of the earth!" This is an allusion to Genesis 12, how God had called the family of Abraham to become God's blessing to all of the nations. And so then God says, "So this is why I will punish you for all of your sin." Israel had a great calling, which came with great responsibility, and so their sin and rebellion brings great consequences. Now, this section brings together a lot of Amos' poems. And you'll see a few key themes repeated over and over.

So first, he's constantly exposing the religious hypocrisy of Israel's wealthy and their leaders. And he describes how they faithfully attend the religious gatherings, giving offerings and sacrifices, all the while neglecting the poor and ignoring injustice. And Amos says it's all a sham, that God actually hates their worship because it's totally disconnected from how they treat people. God says a real relationship with him will transform a person's relationships. And so Amos' call to true worship is to "let justice flow like a river and righteousness like a never failing stream."

Now these two words, they're super important for Amos and actually all of the prophets. So "righteousness," or in Hebrew, *tsedeqah*, refers to a standard of right, equitable relationships between people, no matter their social differences. "Injustice," or in Hebrew, *mishpat*, refers to concrete actions that you take to correct injustice and create righteousness. And so both of these are to permeate the life of God's covenant people like a rushing stream fills a dry riverbed.

The next theme is Amos' repeated accusations of Israel's idolatry. So remember, when the Northern Kingdom broke away from southern Judah, their king built two new temples to rival Solomon's in Jerusalem, and he placed a golden calf in each. (Remember 1 Kings chapter 12.) Since then, Israel had only accumulated more idols, worshipping the gods of sex and weather and war. And in the prophets' view, the worship of these gods always led to injustice because these gods don't require the

same degree of justice and righteousness as the God of Israel. Not to mention that these gods were immoral themselves. Not the God of Israel; he's different. So he can say in one place, "Seek me, that you may live." And then right after that say to Israel, "Seek good, not evil, that you may live." So true worship of the creator God of Israel, it's synonymous with doing good, with generosity, and with justice.

And so the final theme in these chapters is that because Israel and its king have rejected Amos and the other prophets, God will send the Day of the Lord. This is a great and terrible act of justice on Israel. And specifically, Amos predicts that a powerful nation will come and conquer and decimate their cities and take the people away into exile. And we know his prediction came true. Some 40 years later, the Assyrian Empire swooped in and did exactly as Amos had said.

Chapters 7-9

05:29-06:29

The book closes with a series of visions that Amos experienced, and they're symbolic depictions of the coming Day of the Lord. So he sees Israel devastated by a locust swarm and then by a scorching fire, and then they're being swallowed up like overripe fruit. And in the final vision, Amos sees God violently striking the pillars of Israel's great idol temple at Bethel, and the whole building comes crumbling down. It's an image of God's justice on the leaders and the gods of Israel. Their end has finally come.

But then, all of a sudden, in the final paragraph, we see a glimmer of hope. It picks up this image of Israel as a destroyed building. And God says that out of the ruins, he will one day restore the house of David. In other words, he's going to bring the future messianic king from David's line, and he will rebuild the family of God's people, which, surprisingly, we're told is going to include people from all of the nations. All of the devastation caused by Israel's sin and God's judgment will that day be reversed.

Conclusion

06:29-07:11

Now, this final paragraph is super important. It's the only sign of hope on the other side of judgment, and it helps us see how this book is exploring the relationship between God's justice and his mercy. If God is good, he has to confront and judge evil among Israel and the nations, but his long-term purposes are to restore his world and build a new covenant family. And so through Amos' words, we still today hear his call to learn from Israel's hypocrisy and disaster and to embrace a true worship of this God, which should always lead to justice and righteousness and loving our neighbor. And that's what the book of Amos is all about.