

SESSION #32

AMOS (part 2)

3. Structure

Amos was one of the first of what are called the “writing prophets”. And as a successful businessman, he was well organized in his writing. The structure of his book reflects this trait.

Chapters 1 & 2 deal with 8 messages or 8 burdens, as Amos called them, to be delivered to the people. And not just God’s people. Six of these 8 messages are pronounced against 6 surrounding nations. Then he has two final messages for God’s own people of Judah and Israel.

Let’s look at the map and get an idea of how he begins his messages to the people of that day. He begins first of all with the Gentile, heathen nations which surrounded Israel and Judah. God’s messages of judgment against them were not based on disobedience to God’s law because they didn’t know God’s written law from Moses. The judgments pronounced against them were, therefore, based on the fact that they had disobeyed their consciences – that law that God has written on the tablet of the human heart regardless of culture and background. And because these nations have disobeyed God’s laws of conscience, especially in their cruelty against other people, God judges them, nation after nation. Here is how it looks on the map.

Amos is in the city square in the capital city of Samaria and begins by pronouncing God’s judgment against the nation to the north-northeast, the nation of Syria. Then he turns to the southwest and has a message for Philistia. Then northwest against the nation of Phoenicia. Then southeast against the nation of Edom. He turns then to the east and gives a message against Ammon followed by one against Moab in the southeast. So, six nations altogether, receive one-by-one a bombshell from God, messages of judgment because of their cruelty to other people.

The sight of this farmer preaching in the middle of their sophisticated city soon attracted a crowd. Here's a guy from Judah pronouncing messages of judgment against all these 6 nations which Israel hates. They're all enemy nations and Amos is giving them bad messages which makes the growing crowd of Israelites very happy indeed!

That happiness gets even happier because message #7 is another judgment against – of all places – his own nation of Judah! And his listeners are absolutely astonished...and delighted, because Israel and Judah have been at war with one another for centuries.

Ah, but this farmer-prophet has a surprising strategy. He has been piling up message after message and growing the crowd larger and larger. By the time he finishes pronouncing God's judgment against Judah, the crowd is huge, because his messages were just the kind his listeners wanted to hear. And now that he's got their attention, what does Amos do?

Ah, he drops his nuclear bomb now – a message of judgment against Israel itself! God will judge Israel for breaking God's laws and especially for their injustice. As you can imagine, they're not happy to hear this kind of message at all.

He delivers this message to Israel in 3 sermons in what is the heart of his book, chapters 3 – 6. These are dreadful messages of judgment but deserved because Israel has been so sinful.

In chapter 3, he describes their present guilt. Yes, in spite of the fact they don't think they're guilty, God pronounces them guilty and tells them why. They had been given special privileges as the people of God and they have abused those privileges over and over again. God says that privilege always means responsibility. And because they have not carried out their responsibilities as the privileged people of God, God will have to come like a lion and judge them for those abuses. They are guilty.

Then chapter 4. He goes back into their recent history and talks about their past sins. How that God had time and time again brought famine and natural calamities (he gives a whole list of them in this chapter) in order to wake them up and bring them back to God again; to help them understand that even though they are a very religious people,

they are a sinful people. And God has been trying to get through to them in the midst of their apathy, but they simply don't want to hear what He has to say.

And so, because of those past sins and present guilt, Amos says there will be future punishment in chapters 5 and 6, as he calls them to repentance before it's too late. His tone gets increasingly more and more severe as they continue to refuse to hear the word of God.

Then after those three sermons, Amos records five visions, chapters 7 & 8 and into the first part of chapter 9. These are visions from God concerning what is going to happen.

The first vision is one of locusts. God says, *"I'm going to send a plague of locusts onto the land of Israel. They'll eat up all of their wealth."* And Amos pleads with God: *"Please don't send those things! Those locusts are horrible. Please don't do this!"* And God responds, *"Okay, I won't."* And that particular judgment is averted.

There is a second vision. Amos sees a terrific fire coming down on Israel and burning them up. And he prays again to God: *"Please don't let that happen! That's too terrible."* And God listens to the prayer of Amos – a great example of the power of intercessory prayer – as Amos pleads on behalf of those sinful people, and God restrained that particular judgment. The fire doesn't come.

Then vision #3 is a picture of God holding a plumb line, that simple construction tool used to determine if a building is being built straight. God is the construction foreman who comes along and holds up his plumb line, his standard, against the wall of the nation of Israel. And that wall is seen to be absolutely crooked. The nation is not building straight; they're off the mark compared to the standard of God. Amos doesn't pray against this one. He knows that this kind of action by God is inevitable.

God will always hold up his plumb line of divine standard against the lives of His people so that we too may know if our lives are matching up with His standard or not. And where they are not, how to repair the problem.

The plumb line seen by Amos shows that God has determined judgment against them.

The fourth vision contains a basket of fruit that is ripe; actually becoming over-ripe and starting to smell badly. Judgment is imminent, it's about to happen, it's coming soon.

Then fifthly, he sees judgment actually being executed as he sees God standing over the altar and executing judgment on the people of Israel. It is bound to happen. It's absolutely certain. And 30 years later that terrible judgment does in fact fall on the nation of Israel, just as Amos predicted.

His sermons and his visions, however, do not end on this negative note of judgment. And this is also true of most of the prophets who so often have primarily a negative message, but there's also a message that's the flipside of the coin, a message of hope.

In the case of Amos, it's the last part of chapter 9, the Messianic promise. In spite of this judgment which God will bring on His people in the very near future, in the longer-term future there is the hope of the Messiah. God will send His own Messiah as the Promised One who will come and restore God's people once again. So, that hope and promise of restoration is the note on which Amos ends his book of prophecy. It is certainly an encouraging note on which to end a very severe book indeed.

Our next book introduces us to a prophet who was given a most difficult assignment, the prophet Hosea. I invite you to join me then.
