

Background to the book of Amos

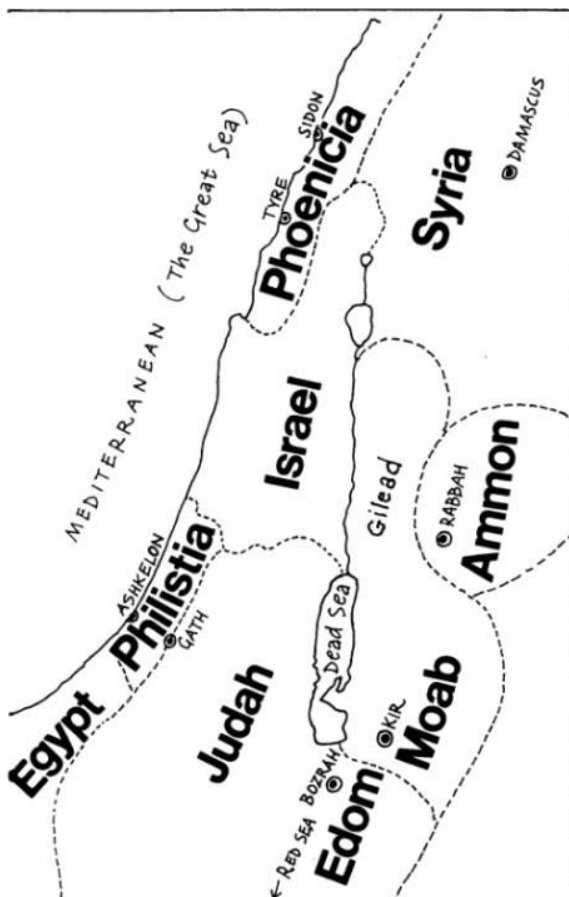
Amos 1:1 tells us these words were spoken in the days of Uzzaiah king of Judah and Jereboam II, the son of Joash, king of Israel. This dates it between 792 and 753 BC, roughly 150 years after the nation of Israel split in two.

Israel (the Northern kingdom) was enjoying a period of political stability, military expansion and economic growth. Times were good!

However the religious syncretism and idolatry introduced when Israel first separated from Judah had only grown worse. Although they were a fervently religious people, they did not truly worship God or walk in his ways.

Amos was himself a shepherd from the southern kingdom of Judah.

Israel, Judah and the surrounding nations



*Nations around Israel concerning which the prophet speaks
in Chapters 1 and 2.*

Study 1: The Lord Roars

Read Amos 1:1-2

1. Who is this prophesy for?
2. From this introduction, what kind of message are you expecting?

Read Amos 1:3-2:3

Damascus was the capital of Syria; Ben-Hadad, son of Hazael, was the king.

Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron were the main Philistine cities.

Tyre was a major city of Phoenecia. Tyre had been an ally of Israel during the time of David and Solomon.

Edom was the nation descended from Esau. Teman and Bozrah were its main cities.

The nation of Ammon was descended from Abraham's nephew, Lot. Its capital city was Rabbah.

The Moabites were also descended from Lot, and Kerioth was the capital city.

3. What have the nations surrounding Israel done wrong?
4. What is God's response?
5. The charge against each nation follows a similar pattern. What is the effect of this repetition as you hear it again and again?
6. As an Israelite listening to this word of judgement coming upon each of your enemies in turn, how would you feel?
7. ***What does this judgement upon the nations tell us about the extent of God's rule?***

Read Amos 2:4-5

8. What has Judah done wrong?
9. Does this seem as serious a wrongdoing as the violent abuses of the surrounding nations?
10. How do you feel about Judah receiving the same punishment as the nations?
11. What does God's response show us about how he measures their sin?

Read Amos 2:6-16

12. What has Israel done wrong? (v6-8,12)
13. What has God done for Israel in the past? (v9-11)
14. Why do you think God reminds them of their past?
15. When God judges them, what will it be like?

These opening chapters show God judging both the nations, and his own people.

Read Hebrews 10:19-34

- 16. What is our confidence on the day of judgement?***
- 17. What is required of us as God's people?***
- 18. What is the warning for us?***
- 19. How can we be helping each other hold fast and live out our faith in Christ?***

Study 2: Prepare to meet your God

Read Amos chapters 3 and 4

1. What is God planning to do to Israel? (3:2,11; 4:4-5)
2. Why do you think this word of judgement begins with the reminder of who Israel is to God?
3. How is it possible that God's people do not know how to do right (v10)?
4. How does the series of questions in 3:3-6 prepare them to respond to the questions of verse 8?
5. Look again at 3:15- 4:1. What kinds of people are being described?
6. What judgement will come upon them?
7. ***Read James 4:13- 5:6. Is there a word of warning we need to hear?***
8. Bethel and Gilgal were centres of worship. Read Amos 4:4-5. What does God think of their religious activity?
9. What will happen to them on the day of judgement? (See 3:13-14)
10. ***How can we ensure our religious activity is actually pleasing to God?***

Read again Amos 4:6-13

11. What had Israel experienced recently?

12. What has been God's purpose in this?

13. Why do you think this section finishes the way it does?

**14. Does God still use disasters to call people to repent?
(See also Luke 13:1-5, Hebrews 12:3-11.)**

15. What have you been most challenged by from Amos today?

16. When the Lord, the God of hosts convicts us of sin, how are we to respond? (See 1 John 1:8-9).

Study 3: Alas! The Day of the Lord!

Read Amos 5:1-17

1. If this section was put to music, what kind of music would it be?(v1-3,16-17)
2. Why will there be such sorrow? (See also Deuteronomy 28:15,30,39.)
3. Where is their only hope to be found? (v5-6)
4. ***Where do we seek God and find life today? (See John 10:10; 14:6)***
5. “The gate” was the place where disputes were settled and judgements given. What was the state of justice in the land? (v7,10-12)
6. What does Amos plead with them to do? (v14-15)
7. What is the connection between seeking the Lord (v5-6) and seeking/loving good?
8. At the centre of this section (v8-9) is a description of God. What about God is being highlighted? Is this a comfort or a threat?
9. ***Why is God so concerned for justice and righteousness?***
10. ***As God’s people today, we look forward to the return of Christ when he will rule the new creation with true justice and righteousness. Does this mean we don’t need to worry about injustice in our society? What does it look like to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt 6:33)?***

Recall Exodus 12:12-13. This time rather than passing over his people, God says he will pass through their midst (v17).

Read Amos 5:18-27

11. Amos uses vivid pictures to describe the day of the Lord. What will it be like for the Israelites when he comes? Why?

12. How does God feel about their religious activities? Why does God refuse to accept them?

13. Consider the language of verse 24. What picture does it paint?

14. Sikkuth and Kiyyun were Assyrian gods. What is God saying will happen to the Israelites?

Just 30 years after Amos prophesied, Israel was overrun by the Assyrians. The day of the Lord came for that generation.

Read 2 Peter 3:10-14,18

15. What can we expect on the final day of the Lord?

16. Where is our assurance to be found?

17. How can we help each other to be diligent and to grow in the grace and knowledge of our lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

Study 4: How Comfortable Are You?

Read Amos 6

1. Who is the Lord particularly targeting in this chapter?
2. Calneh, Hamath and Gath were foreign towns recently captured by Israel. What point is being made by the sarcastic questions in verse 2 & 3?
3. Consider the images piled up in verses 4-6. What kind of lifestyle is being pictured here?
4. What does God have in store for them?
5. God had promised to bless his people in the land (Deuteronomy 28:1-8), so what's the problem?
6. What do verses 9-11 say about the thoroughness of the coming judgement?

7. Lo-debar and Karnaim were small border cities, also recently recaptured by Israel. Changing one vowel in the Hebrew changes the word to mean 'nothing'. What is God's assessment of their boast?

8. At the heart of this chapter is verse 8. What is the underlying attitude that provokes this destruction?

9. ***What danger does prosperity have for God's people? (See Mark 8:36, Luke 12:13-21, 1 Timothy 6:6-10)***

10. ***Compared to many, we are wealthy and secure. How do we live rightly with these privileges?***

11. ***How do we helpfully respond to those who measure God's blessing in material terms?***

12. ***As a community here at St Mary's, what might we be tempted to take pride and boast in?***

13. ***How can we celebrate the good things God is doing for us without becoming complacent or proud?***

Study 5: Prayers and Proclamation

Read Amos 7:1-9

1. What do the three visions have in common?

2. What would have been the result of the plague of locusts?

3. Why does God relent?

4. What would have been the effect of the fire?

5. Why does God relent?

6. ***Who intercedes for us before God? (See Romans 8:26-27,34)***

7. ***What difference do our prayers make? (See 1 Timothy 2:1-6, James 5:13-16)***

8. A plumb line is used to ensure a building is constructed properly. What in particular is God measuring in verses 8-9? What is his assessment?

Read Amos 7:10-17

9. Where does opposition to Amos come from? Is this surprising?

10. How does Amos defend himself?

11. How does God endorse Amos?

- 12. Are we ever like Amaziah, not wanting to listen when God's word is hard?**

- 13. Should it surprise us when God's word is rejected and God's messengers are attacked?**

- 14. See John 15:18-16:4 and Acts 4:18-20, 29-31. What encouragement is there here for us to keep speaking the word of God in the face of opposition?**

- 15. How can we encourage one another to keep praying and proclaiming?**

Study 6: The Time is Ripe

Read Amos 8

The NIV picks up the word play in verse 2:

What do you see, Amos?" he asked.

"A basket of ripe fruit," I answered.

Then the Lord said to me, "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

1. How do the images of judgement in verses 3 & 8 make you feel?
2. Who is the focus of God's anger? (v4-6)
3. An ephah is a measurement of volume, the shekel a weight of money. What have the traders been doing?
4. Why is God so angry about this?
5. ***Do you think it matters to God how honest we are in our business dealings?***
6. What will it be like for the people of Israel when God's judgement comes? (v9-10,13-14)

7. Why is silence from God likened to a famine? (See also Matthew 4:4)

8. These people have been refusing to listen and obey anyway. What difference will it make when God stops speaking?

9. ***Read Mark 15:33-34 and Luke 23:44-48. How does Amos 8:9-10 help us appreciate what was happening at the cross?***

10. ***In Amos 8:7, God says he will never forget their deeds. How can we be confident God will not remember our sins? (See Col 2:13-15)***

11. ***The people of Amos' time would have known scriptures like Psalm 103, and assumed it applied to them. How can we help one another to not presume upon the mercy and grace of God?***

Study 7: The End?

Read Amos 9:1-8

1. When the end comes, where does judgement begin? (v1)
2. Compare verses 2-4 with Psalm 139:8-10. How is the fact that they are always in God's sight now terrifying for Israel?
3. As in chapter 5, the verses at the centre of this section describe God himself. What about God is being highlighted?
4. Read Deuteronomy 7:6. Can you imagine how devastating Amos 9:7 would have been to Israel? What is God saying about their status before him?
5. Now read on in Deuteronomy 7:7-11. Why should we not be surprised by God's judgement and mercy in Amos 9:8?

Read Amos 9:9-15

6. When the nation is sifted who is killed? Who survives?
7. Israel had rebelled against the rule of David's descendants. Why is David mentioned here? (Hint: Recall 2 Sam 7:16)

8. Why is judgement not the end?

9. Consider the images used to describe the restoration of Israel. How do these communicate God's blessing?

10. Is this the end you expected for the book of Amos?

Read 1 Peter 2:9-12

11. Who are we, and how are we to live?

Read Hebrews 12:25-13:5

12. What kind of kingdom are we part of and how are we to live?

Read Matthew 25:31-46

13. How are we to live?

Share how you have been challenged and encouraged from our study of the book of Amos?