

Amos Intro
1:1-8

Responsive Psalm 141
Jeremiah 47
Romans 2:1-16

This morning we are going to be continuing our journey through the minor prophets by picking up in the book of Amos. I have been trying to work through these minor prophets in chronological order but that proves to be a little bit of a challenge since the dating of these books are estimates, and it seems that there are a few different lists on what order they are in, but either way that is a small issue, as we are working through these prophets writings, and studying the message that God has for his people. So far we have seen a few different approaches in prophesy, in Jonah he was a messenger sent to a foreign land, he was to bring the message of God's salvation to a people who was not God's people, that is a people who were not Israelites. A message of destruction, followed by a message of hope, God is bringing destruction upon you, repent, believe, and pray that he may relent. This is not unlike the message we saw in Joel that we just finished, God had sent a great plague of locust upon the land ravishing the land, destroying the food supply and stocks, and then causing the fields and the farmlands to burn, yet as we saw last week, it ends in a blessing, it ends in a promise that there will be a land where there is no more famine, a land where the mountains shall drip with new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk.

There will be a Jerusalem which shall be holy and no strangers shall enter through her gates. Last week I argued that this wasn't a physical city built here on earth, but rather this was a foretelling of the heavenly places in the presence of God. For we know, through the teachings of Paul and others, that the people are God, are the people of faith, not the physical descendants of Abraham, but the spiritual. As Paul wrote to the Roman churches in chapter 9:6 "It is not that the word of God has taken no effect, for they are not Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham but "in Isaac your seed shall be called" That is those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as the seed." This new Jerusalem shall be inhabited by only God's people, and we know that when we who believe upon him die, and in that last day when he comes to gather his people to himself, we shall all be caught up with him into that promised land, into paradise, into that land filled with milk and honey in the very presence of God. As I had mentioned last week, the thief on the cross that was crucified next to Jesus, confessed and believed and Jesus said, "Today, you will be with me in paradise." That day, he entered into that holy city, of which no stranger shall enter, for the gate is through the blood of Jesus alone, through his death, through his sacrifice, and it is only those for whom he died, whose sins are covered by that blood, may enter.

With the exception of Obadiah so far, each of these prophecies emphasize repentance and redemption. If you remember Obadiah was a prophecy to Edom, foretelling of their destruction, without hope of redemption, without a chance of repentance it was plain and simple, you rose up against my people and now I shall rise up against you, I shall drag you out of your mountains, and utterly destroy you. We know that this prophecy has come true for the people of Edom disappeared, their nation no longer exists, God made good on his judgment. So, if we look at the pattern here of what we have seen so far, the ultimate conclusion is that God is a God who is sovereign over all, a God who chooses some, and destroys others, but notice...that there are none righteous. Even Israel, even the people whom he chose to reveal himself to, rebel against him and he pours his wrath out upon them to drive them back from their unfaithfulness. There is none worthy, all are worthy of destruction, all are worthy of death, yet God in his mercy chooses to save some.

Those who oppose this view, say that it paints God as to wrathful, and that he is a God of love and peace. It is true that he is the God of Love and peace, because if he wasn't, then all would be destroyed, none would be redeemed. All would be like Edom, all would be like Gomorrah, the judgment and of sin is death, a holy God can not abide sin, he can not merely just look the other way while it continues on...I think the best example of this, would be that if you get a bill in the mail for a large sum of money you owe, and you just throw it away without looking at it, you know what it is, you understand how much it is going to be, but you ignore it, you throw it away....does that debt go away? No, you will be given another bill, another chance, and if you keep ignoring it, you will be brought before a judge, and forced to pay. There is no getting out of it, unless the one of whom you owe, forgives you. That is God, and Jesus paid it for us, God chose to show mercy to his people by sending his Son to pay their debt, to pay their bill, to die in their place so that his righteousness could be accounted to us. Not that we are righteous ourselves, but we are righteous because of his righteousness, we are holy because of his holiness, we are pure because of his purity which was laid to our account.

So we see throughout these minor prophets that God is a God of great wrath, but also a God of great mercy. He did not send a messenger to Edom, he did not give them a chance for repentance, but rather the prophet was to Israel, foretelling of the destruction of their enemies, this wrath, this destruction was a blessing to Israel, God's wrath upon the sinful is a blessing to his people. Think of the temptations you have now, think of the influences, and the struggles of constantly being surrounded by sinfulness, by rebellion, one day, God will take that all away and we will be left, with him, in that New Jerusalem of which the outsider, the stranger, the sinful will not enter. Israel awaited the day that God would destroy her enemies, and we await the day when God will once and for all deal with the sin and rebellion of this world. In these Minor prophets we get basically 3 groups, we see God's people whom fall away, in which he uses hardships and calamity to drive them back to himself, we see Edom, whom God destroys in judgment, and we see Nineveh, a people who are not his people, given a message to repent and believe and become his people. This gives us a picture of God's wrath, and a picture of God's mercy, and each of these groups represent the various peoples of today.

Those of us who believe, who struggle with sin, who struggle with the weakness of the flesh and the remaining depravity within us, but God uses exactly what we need to draw us to himself over and over again, to reveal to us our own sin and our own rebellion so that we may repent and turn from it. And his gospel message goes out, everyday through the teaching and preaching of his word, through the ministry of our conduct and our lives, to those who do not yet know him, a message to the lost and dying world to repent, believe, and follow him. And those who are to hardened, who have turned themselves against God will one day suffer his wrath, as that bill comes due, and they are dragged into that valley of decision mentioned in Joel, and required to pay with their own lives. The God that we serve, is a mighty, and glorious God full of mercy, and full of grace, yet he is also a God to be feared, who judges the world, and brings down the mighty, and destroys the wicked. This is what these books are about, throughout the generations of these prophets we see God's dealing with the people of this world, as he forgives, as he relents, as he sends messages through the prophets to warn, and to call for his people to repent of this rebellion and return to him.

Which brings us to Amos this morning, and what we will find in this book is no different than the few that we have already looked at. A warning of judgment, a call to repentance, and ultimately God's deliverance for his people. This book was written around the time of 760-753BC, so roughly 100 years after Joel, and it is a time of great prosperity for Israel. God had indeed relented from their destruction as they turned and repented, as we saw in Joel, he restores the land, and blesses his people. So here in Amos, we see Israel prospering, under the reigns of Jeroboam the second for the northern kingdom, and King Uzziah of Judah, the southern kingdom.

Amos himself was a shepherd, and fig tree farmer from a small town in the southern kingdom of Tekoa. Israel was experiencing a sort of golden age, of wealth, military success and secure borders that of which rivaled the glory days of Solomon. Yet, there was of course problems, we see yet again God's people when things are good, slowly drifting away from what matters most, this great wealth created a disparity among the people, as many owed money to the rich and became bond servants as the rich used dishonest practices, corrupt legal courts, and oppressed the poor. Though they were in a time of great blessing, the people have turned away from God, as tends to be the cycle. This message of the prophet Amos is about this turning away, and a warning from God that if they do not return he would bring an outside army to conquer them and send them into exile. How quickly Israel forgets, how quickly they fall into their old patterns, It had been only roughly 100 years, people who went through the calamity of the destruction brought on by the locusts were still alive, yet what describes Israel at this time of great blessing following the reconstruction from that previous damage, is hypocrisy, selfishness, and greed.

But as we see will see this morning when we read chapter 1, this judgment isn't just upon the people of Israel, and Judah, but upon their neighbors as well. Again God will bring down judgment and punishment for the rebellion of the nations. So let us go ahead and read this morning, the first chapter which is split up into different small sections as Amos prophesies the word of the Lord against each and every nation, calling out their sins and transgressions and warning of their pending destruction. Starting in verse 1 (Read chapter 1) Verse 1 here mentions an earthquake, it says, "two years before the earthquake." Around 760BC was a massive earthquake in Israel, which became a historical marker for generations. It would be sort of like the world wars, or 9/11, or even Covid..a massive event remembered and talked about for generations. This is why the dating of this book can be considered to be pretty accurate, because we know it was 2 years before that earthquake, which is something that is very well documented.

I started going down the rabbit hole a bit this past week over this earthquake because I thought it was interesting, and what I found was that it was indeed a massive earthquake that redefined the region, reshaping the landscape, and architecture. It is estimated to have measured somewhere around 8.2 and judging by the evidences that it left is believed to have been the energy equivalent of a dozen atomic bombs, the geologic and structural scars to the land are still being studied today. The shaking was so intense it caused "soil liquefaction" In other words, solid ground behaved like liquid swallowing up what ever was upon it. The evidences of this can be found in the sediment beneath the dead sea, and Geologists have extracted core samples dating back to the 8th century. Archaeologists have found stone pillars all tilted in the same direction, warped flooring, split foundation stones, walls laying where they fell. This earthquake was so destructive that several cities never recovered, never rebuilt. The city Tel Agol in the Jezreel Valley, was a heavily fortified city designed to withstand an invasion of foreign armies, it was utterly destroyed, the city was completely leveled.

So, these words of Amos are 2 years before that earthquake, a warning of destruction, of a raiding army, and judgment of God upon the nations. This morning we will look at a few of these warnings of these judgments but we won't get through them all. First one we see in verse 3 is the warning to Damascus. Amos begins by saying "for three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke its punishment." This is a Hebrew poetic idiom, Amos is not describing specifically 3, or 4 sins, but is basically saying the cup of sin is overflowing. God is saying he has been very patient with them, but they have crossed the line, and a time of punishment is now upon them. It would seem, that though it isn't just one sin, God mentions one saying "Because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron." It's implied here, a crushing, grinding, violent oppression like that of a threshing floor with wheat.

Therefore he says, “I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad. I will also break the gate bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the Valley of Aven, and the one who holds the scepter from Beth Eden. The people of Syria shall go captive to Kir, says the Lord.” God describes complete destruction of Damascus, the capital city of Syria. Hazael, and Ben-Hadad were prominent kings of Damascus, their palaces, their strongholds, and their dynasty shall be consumed by fire, the people shall be taken captive and sent into exile. A once mighty nation, who using their military strength oppressed others, shall be destroyed and brought into slavery. In verse 5 is mentioned the Valley of Aven, which translates to the Valley of Wickedness, or Idols, and Beth Edon translates to the house of pleasure. These were areas associated with Syrian royalty, and pagan worship. God will destroy their kings, their places of worship, their mighty cities, and scatter the people.

We can see that this prophesy is fulfilled in 2nd Kings 16:9. which says, “So the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and took it, carried its people captive to Kir and killed Rezin.” This occurred in 732BC when the Assyrian empire led by King Tiglath-Pileser the third, captured Damascus, executed its kings, and exiled the people into slavery. Roughly 20 years after Amos’ prophesy. Damascus was given 20 years to turn around, but they didn’t...God knew they wouldn’t, again we see no sign, or call for repentance here, this is God simply declaring what he shall do, and there is no relenting, no turning back from it. Then in verse 6 we see a similar judgment against Gaza, he says, “because they took captive the whole captivity to deliver them up to Edom.” Again we see this, Hebrew Idiom denoting a history of sin and rebellion against God, but their evil ways have festered for so long so God is bringing judgment upon them.

The sin that is listed here, is that unlike what was standard practice of the day, that an invading army would take its captures to be laborers, and slaves within their own nation, they showed no mercy and made no discernment in their captivity, taking women, children, the young and the old and selling them off to Edom. They deliberately targeted civilian populations and where in a sense human traffickers and slave traders, selling their captives to the Edomite who were known for being cruel masters. It is noted that many believe that these raids, where into Jewish communities, where they would sell the captures off to Edom, and if you remember when we went through Obadiah, we found out that the Edomites were kin, they were the offspring of Esau and that conflict that started between the 2 brothers carried on for generations between their offspring with Edom oppressing the people of Judah. Because of this merciless human trafficking and cruelty, God pronounced a judgment against them, a judgment of total destruction upon the Philistine cities in Gaza.

Again we see the same trend, fire destroying the palaces and fortress, the death of her kings and leaders, and an exile of the inhabitants in verse 8 he says, “a remnant of the Philistines shall perish.” There will not be any left, no remnant shall remain. This judgment was fulfilled over several centuries, as there were constant military invasions primarily by the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires. The first part of this prophesy came quickly, by the raiding Assyrian army, the same of which destroyed Damascus, came and took over Philistia because of its strategic coastal locations. Over the centuries we can see accounts of military excursions against them, and their losses, one after another. In roughly 715–686 BC King Hezekiah of Judah fought against the Philistine aggression and defeated them pushing them all the way back to their fortifications...we can see this in 2nd Kings 18:8 which says of King Hezekiah “He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. For he held fast to the Lord and he did not depart from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord had commanded Moses. The Lord was with him, he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the King of Assyria and did not serve him. He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory from watchtower to fortified city.”

In these 2 judgments we see a disparity of time, for Damascus it is fairly quickly, but the judgment to Gaza takes place over the course of a few hundred years as each city is destroyed through various conflicts. A few lessons we can take away from this, is one, God's moral standards is placed upon all nations, upon all people, whether they believe in him or not. A pagan nation, which does not acknowledge God is still judged by him, and held accountable for their actions. This isn't a breaking of some ritual, or religious rite, but is a judgment of conduct, and cruelty against their fellow man. Damascus brutal treatment of their enemies, and Gaza's raids and human trafficking practices are an affront to God, and in justice he will no longer stand by and allow so, he utterly destroys them. And though, it may not be swift, and though it may have taken a few 100 years, what God has set forth will happen. In each of these judgments, it is the Rulers who are singled out, the "scepter holders" These are the ones calling the shots, making the policies, and creating the culture around their cruelty, leaders who have lead their entire society into ruin.

Not only are we as individuals held accountable to God, so are the nations, and God is not idle. He uses other nations to bring judgment upon nations, we could look at the history of these conflicts mentioned here and see the human side, but Amos is giving us a view into the spiritual, into God's hand in the destruction of these nations. This is something to think about with our own nation, with the conflicts we see around the world, we don't have the luxury of an Amos giving us insight, but we can still see all things through the lens of God enacting his will one way or another. So, I think the take away this morning, is we should be praying for our leaders, praying for our nation, for as we will see further down in this chapter, Israel does not escape judgment, God's judges his people, but relents in her utter destruction, because of his mercy, and grace as his judgment isn't a judgment of destruction but serves the purpose of calling them back to himself.

So next week we will pick up at verse 9, where these Judgments continue.