

# <AMOS: BACK TO 'THE START'>

As we look at the book of Amos over the next 4 weeks, we're going back to basics. If God is sovereign, then God can set the rules in his world, God can judge the world and can choose to show unmerited favour.

**GETTING STARTED:** Albert Einstein is quoted as saying:

"A man's ethical behaviour should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death."<sup>1</sup>

- ? Given the state of the world and the atrocities that people have rendered on others, especially in the last 120 years, are "sympathy, education, social ties and needs" enough, to motivate people to both formulate an ethical framework and live that out?
- ? Think of a person that you know that is not a person of faith. What would be their ultimate rule or guiding principle for life? (eg do no harm, love others, family comes first, etc)

**READ: AMOS 1:1-2:16**

Amos 1:3-2:3 is essentially a catalogue of judgements against the nations surrounding Israel and Judah. The poetic form is consistent and repetitive, even monotonous.

- ? What 'sins' are listed? Which sins surprise or shock you?  
What judgements are meted out? Do the judgements 'fit the crimes' or are they too hard/ soft?
- ? The sins of the other nations essentially related to "international treaty-breaking (and) outrageously inhumane conduct."<sup>2</sup> What is different about the sins of Israel and Judah? (Amos 2:4, 6-12)

Last week, we looked at the historical background and an overview of the book of Amos. This week, we come back to some basic Biblical truths, that we also find in Genesis 1-3: God is our creator. God made us for relationship with Him. God sets the rules of engagement. We have broken those rules (ie we have sinned) and, as a result, we are subject to his judgement. In this book, Amos introduces:

"... God as the One who formed the mountains and created the winds (Amos 4:13). These, however, are not so much theological doctrines about creation as practical statements of God's power. Amos warns that **the sinful people of Israel will face the mighty power of the Creator when this judgment comes on them**. Thus, his theology is a description of God's relationships with people in all aspects of their world."<sup>3</sup>

- ? What picture and words come into your head when you think of the word 'judge'? If you have ever been to court (for whatever reason), do you think that experience shaped your understanding of the idea of God's judgement? Is there a difference between the nature and types of judgement that comes out of our legal system vs the judgement that God metes out?

In Amos 2:4, the first reason given for judgement against Judah is that "They have rejected the instruction of the LORD, refusing to obey his decrees." For us, this may sound petty or trite. But, back in Exodus 19:7-8, the people had entered into a covenant with God. Obedience was like a contractual obligation.

<sup>7</sup> So Moses returned from the mountain and called together the elders of the people and told them everything the LORD had commanded him.<sup>8</sup> And all the people responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has commanded." So Moses brought the people's answer back to the LORD.

- ? What are the first two (of the ten) commandments? (Ex 20:1-6)
- ? In the standard marriage service, there is a phrase "forsaking all others".<sup>4</sup> When two people get married, they are expected to commit to be faithful to each other. How do people respond, when their partner is unfaithful? How do you think God felt, when his people started worshipping idols?
- ? What are the other 8 commandments that are listed in Ex 20? (Can you name them without looking them up?)
- ? What are the ethical principles underlie each of these commandments? eg: What principle is behind keeping the sabbath?

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/ethics?page=2>

<sup>2</sup> Hubbard, D. A. (1989). *Joel and Amos: an Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 25). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p144.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, G. V. (2001). *Hosea, Amos, Micah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. p214.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/what-forsaking-all-others-at-the-marriage-altar-really-means/95814.htm>

Re-read Amos 2:6-8 (below)

*“The people of Israel have sinned again and again, and I will not let them go unpunished! They sell honourable people for silver and poor people for a pair of sandals. They trample helpless people in the dust and shove the oppressed out of the way. Both father and son sleep with the same woman, corrupting my holy name. At their religious festivals, they lounge in clothing their debtors put up as security. In the house of their gods [or their God] they drink wine bought with unjust fines. [NLT]*

- ? In the last question, we listed some underlying ethical principles found in the Ten Commandments. Amos here describes behaviour of people in Israel. What ethical principles were they violating?

Smith comments that:

“God is at the centre of Amos’s theology. Theology is about what God does to, for, against, or with his created world. He may interact with individuals, nations, animals, places, or parts of nature. **All of his relationships are affected by the fundamental belief that he is the sovereign Lord, who controls all nations on the earth; thus, Israel and all her neighbours are under his rule.** Because he is in charge of everyone, he can move nations from one geographic area to another and raise up one nation to destroy another - yes, even to destroy the people of Israel, the nation he promised to bless many years earlier (Amos 3:11; 4:2–3; 5:27; 6:14; 7:17).”<sup>5</sup>

Smith highlights a dilemma: God chose Israel to be the object of his blessing. But, in light of their disobedience, God wrought judgement on them. The covenant relationship had always been conditional, predicated on “if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me.” (Ex 19:5)

- ? What does it mean, for you, when you say the “Jesus is Lord” or refer to the “sovereignty of God”? Does that mean that God is ‘above’ the stuff going on in the world? Or, does it have implications for you, personally, and the way you live? Should God’s rules also apply to your neighbours?

The relationship between the LORD and Israel, was defined, firstly, by the covenant and secondly, their history. Amos reminded the people of God’s mighty acts to save and rescue them. This history was passed down from generation to generation, as their history was recited, rehearsed and celebrated each year at Passover. The Nazarites and their austere lifestyle reminded the people that they were especially devoted to God, as a holy people. The prophets continually reminded the people of what God required of them.

*It was I who rescued you from Egypt and led you through the desert for forty years, so you could possess the land of the Amorites. I chose some of your sons to be prophets and others to be Nazirites. Can you deny this, my people of Israel?” asks the LORD. “But you caused the Nazirites to sin by making them drink wine, and you commanded the prophets, ‘Shut up!’ (Amos 2:10-12)*

Harvard philosopher George Santayana is quoted as saying “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” (1905) Winston Churchill paraphrased this, in a 1948 speech to the House of Commons, as “Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>6</sup> In Amos 2:13-16, Amos depicts – and prophesies - of a powerless and defeated army, running for their lives. God is not in this picture, as their defender and protector. As they had been in many situations through their history, their disobedience and refusal to rely on God, means they are alone, scared, confused and vulnerable.

- ? There is a temptation for us to stop listening to and reading God’s word each day. Life can become so busy that we stop praying and being utterly reliant on God, including asking him to fight our battles and intervene in our life situations. We can forget the lessons that God has taught us in the past. What was one situation where God used you powerfully, when you waited on him? And one situation, where you failed miserably, when you tried to resolve things in your own strength?

While justice is a key theme in Amos, we also see mention of God’s grace being extended to the nations. “But God does not do this without a reason, for a basic determiner of God’s relationship to a nation is that nation’s sinfulness (9:8). God sees all violent behaviour, and those responsible are held accountable for their sinful deeds (1:3–2:16). Although all people are dear to God (even the distant Ethiopians), some (like the Philistines, Syrians, and Israelites) are given special treatment by God (9:7). These factors suggest that **Amos sees God as acting with justice on some occasions and in loving creative freedom at other times. Although God’s justice is understandable because it is related to obedience or disobedience, there does not seem to be a human way to explain his gracious deeds that are undeserved.**”<sup>7</sup>

**REFLECT, SHARE & PRAY / REPENT:** In what ways has God been gracious to you, even when you have not deserved his love and kindness? In what ways have you not honoured and obeyed God’s commands? When have you told God to ‘shut up’ and that you don’t want to hear his voice or his word?

<sup>5</sup> Smith, G. V. (2001). *Hosea, Amos, Micah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. p214.

<sup>6</sup> <https://bigthink.com/the-proverbial-skeptic/those-who-do-not-learn-history-doomed-to-repeat-it-really>

<sup>7</sup> Smith, G. V. (2001). *Hosea, Amos, Micah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. p214.