

Sermon Notes: Book of Amos, Part II by Rev Dr Lorna Khoo

Recap of Amos Part I

- *God is concerned about how people treat His people*
- *God is concerned about how people treat other people*
- *If you are related by blood or by covenants, honor that relationship*

1. The Situation

- Kings: Amos spoke to the Northern Kingdom (Israel), which was led by kings whose rule was more unstable and varied than the South, ranging from 3 years to 33 years.
- Capitals: Unlike the South, the North did not have a designated religious centre. While certain places such as Bethel were appointed as religious centres at times, the religious practice was syncretistic.
- Economy and Culture:
 - Amos spoke to Israel at a time when they experienced a time of peace, material prosperity and a flowering of culture.
 - 3:15 - I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished,” declares the LORD
 - 6: 4-5 - You lie on beds adorned with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. ⁵You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments
 - Religion was flourishing but it was mixed with idolatry, immorality and hypocrisy. Worship at Bethel, Gilgal and Samaria was mixed with fertility cults - syncretistic (false) worship and it was done in a boastful way.
 - 5:25-27: “Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god— which you made for yourselves. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,” says the Lord, whose name is God Almighty.
 - 4:4-5: “Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings— boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,” declares the Sovereign Lord.

Israel’s Sins

- a. **Oppression of the poor** – rich-poor divide and heavy taxation on the poor
 - 5:11 - You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain.
- b. **Injustice** – unjust laws/legal system used to oppress the poor, property takeovers, bribery
 - 2:6 - This is what the Lord says: “For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals.
 - 5:7 - There are those who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground.
 - 5:10 - There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth.
 - 5:12 - For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.
- c. **Dishonest scales/cheating**
 - 8:4-6 - Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, “When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?”— skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales,

- ⁶buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.
- 3:10 - “They do not know how to do right,” declares the Lord, “who store up in their fortresses what they have plundered and looted.”
- d. What it is: Worship of Mammon – Priority of material things, covetous materialism, consumerism, self-indulgence
- 4:1 - Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, “Bring us some drinks!”
- e. **False worship** - Worship at Bethel, Gilgal and Samaria was syncretistic (mixed with fertility cults) and it was done so that people could boast.
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- f. **Complacency and insensitivity to sin in their midst.** There was a sense of false security that did not feel the pain of God over the nation.
- 6:6 - You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.
 - 5:21-24 - “I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. **But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!** [*key verse in Amos*] God is interested in justice, how we treat one another.

This list of sins show decisions were made with an economic, not moral compass.

Exercise: What is applicable to us in Singapore today? In what ways are our present practices similar to those days?

2. The Discipline of the Lord

a. Warnings ignored

- Famine (not dependent on the fertility gods)
 - 4:6 – “I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me”, declares the Lord.
- Drought
 - 4:7-8 - “I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. ⁸People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD.
- Disease
 - 4:9 - “Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, destroying them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD.
- Plagues

- 4:10 - "I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt.
- Raids
 - 4:10 - I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.
- Volcano Eruption (as interpreted by scholars)
 - "I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.
- Earthquake
 - An earthquake is referenced at the start of Amos 1:1 - The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash^a was king of Israel.
- Exile
 - 10 tribes taken by Assyrians and disappeared from the face of the Earth

Nowadays when disasters strike, we assume that it is an attack from the Enemy and pray against it. But what if God allowed it because of things that are not right? We need to discern if disasters are from the Lord. If it isn't, we can pray against it. If it is, it is a call to repentance. "The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." (Hebrews 12:6) Do not pray against the discipline of God. Submit and repent instead.

Exercise: Look at the not so happy things that have happened to us lately. Is it the work of the enemy or is it God trying to tell us something, ie. His discipline?

b. Mercy taken for granted

- God is merciful. He relented when Amos interceded for the people. 7:1-6 - This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: He was preparing swarms of locusts after the king's share had been harvested and just as the late crops were coming up. ²When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!" ³So the LORD relented. "This will not happen," the LORD said. ⁴This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: The Sovereign LORD was calling for judgment by fire; it dried up the great deep and devoured the land. ⁵Then I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!" ⁶So the LORD relented. "This will not happen either," the Sovereign LORD said.
- But do we take His mercy for granted? Romans 6:1-2 - What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Hebrews 10:26 - If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left.

c. Appeal fell on deaf ears

- 5:4-6 - This is what the Lord says to Israel: Seek me and live; do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing." Seek the Lord and live, or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire; it will devour them, and Bethel will have no one to quench it.
- 5: 8-9 - He who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns midnight into dawn and darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land— the Lord is his name. With a blinding flash he destroys the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin.

- 5: 14-15 - Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.
- 7:10-15 - Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: “Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. ¹¹ For this is what Amos is saying: ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.’” Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. ¹³ Don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.” Amos answered Amaziah, “I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. ¹⁵ But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”
- 3:3-8 - Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? Does a lion roar in the thicket when it has no prey? Does it growl in its den when it has caught nothing? Does a bird swoop down to a trap on the ground when no bait is there? Does a trap spring up from the ground if it has not caught anything? When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared— who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken— who can but prophesy? The lion has roared— who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken— who can but prophesy?

Amos was the least likely instrument to bring God’s word to Israel.

- He was a foreigner (Southerner preaching to Northerners)
- Not a professional prophet with proper training
- A low class businessman (his business involved sycamore trees)

Jesus’ disciples were not the most qualified, nor did they seem like the most ideal disciples. Yet Jesus chose them. Our way of doing and thinking might not be God’s way. God can speak to us through unlikely or broken vessels.

Exercise: How do we choose leaders? Are we humble enough to hear? Are we looking for those we are comfortable with (eg. Same social class, who speaks the same language) so that we won’t be disturbed? Are we listening? (ref. song “softly and tenderly Jesus is calling”)

- d. Prepare to meet your God.
 - It’s time
 - 8:1-3 - This is what the Sovereign Lord showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. “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. “In that day,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies—flung everywhere! Silence!”
 - 7:7-9 - This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord asked me, “What do you see, Amos?” “A plumb line,” I replied. Then the Lord said, “Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer. “The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.”
 - Encounter with God
 - 4:12 -13 - “Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, Israel, prepare to meet your God.” He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind, and who reveals

his thoughts to mankind, who turns dawn to darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth- the Lord God Almighty is his name.

- 5:16-17 - Therefore this is what the Lord, the Lord God Almighty, says: “There will be wailing in all the streets and cries of anguish in every public square. The farmers will be summoned to weep and the mourners to wail. There will be wailing in all the vineyards, for I will pass through your midst,” says the Lord.
- The Day of the Lord
- 5:18-19 - Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light— pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?
- 8: 7-9 - The Lord has sworn by himself, the Pride of Jacob: “I will never forget anything they have done. “Will not the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn? The whole land will rise like the Nile; it will be stirred up and then sink like the river of Egypt. “In that day,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.
- Defeat – 5:1-3 - Hear this word, Israel, this lament I take up concerning you: “Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up.” This is what the Sovereign Lord says to Israel: “Your city that marches out a thousand strong will have only a hundred left; your town that marches out a hundred strong will have only ten left.”; 3:11 - Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “An enemy will overrun your land, pull down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses.” ; 9:1-4 I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said: “Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake. Bring them down on the heads of all the people; those who are left I will kill with the sword. Not one will get away, none will escape. Though they dig down to the depths below, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens above, from there I will bring them down. Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, there I will hunt them down and seize them. Though they hide from my eyes at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them. Though they are driven into exile by their enemies, there I will command the sword to slay them. “I will keep my eye on them, for harm and not for good.”
- Loss of Property – 5:10-12 - There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins ; 3:15 I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished, declares the Lord.
- Destruction of places of worship – 3:14 “On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground ; 8:10 - I will turn your religious festivals into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.
- The Silence of the Lord – 8: 11-13 “The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it. “In that day the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst”
- Exile: 6:7 - Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end ; 6:2-3 The Sovereign Lord has sworn by his holiness: “The time will surely come when you will

be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks. You will each go straight out through breaches in the wall, and you will be cast out toward Harmon,¹” declares the Lord.

Before all this happens, Repent! Change. And there will be...

- Mercy
- 9:8-15 “Surely the eyes of the Sovereign Lord are on the sinful kingdom. I will destroy it from the face of the earth. Yet I will not totally destroy the descendants of Jacob,” declares the Lord. “For I will give the command, and I will shake the people of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble will reach the ground. All the sinners among my people will die by the sword, all those who say ‘Disaster will not overtake or meet us.’ “In that day “I will restore David’s fallen shelter— I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins— and will rebuild it as it used to be so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name” declares the Lord, who will do these things. “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills, and I will bring my people Israel back from exile. “They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,” says the Lord your God.
- A remnant will be saved. 3:12 -13 - This is what the Lord says: “As a shepherd rescues from the lion’s mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites living in Samaria be rescued, with only the head of a bed and a piece of fabric from a couch.”

Exercise: Do a check on the way we are living. Are we testing God’s patience? Repent and change TODAY.