

Route 66

Amos: Hooked on Luxury

Part 30 – February 28, 2010

Amos quite possibly has the most distinctive personality in the Old Testament. Commentaries refer to him as a “fiery speaker,” with a “refreshingly rugged frankness.” You just can’t not *love* the unique speaking style of Amos!

Nowhere else in Scripture does God *encourage* sin; *but Amos does!*



Modern Beitin; ancient Bethel

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 ... – *Amos 4:4-5a NIV*

This is dripping with irony and sarcasm. But, Amos is speaking to an audience that has grown deaf to calls for repentance.

“Bethel” and “Gilgal” were places of religious pilgrimage. When Jeroboam (and ten tribes) split from Judah and created the kingdom of Israel, Bethel is where they built a rival temple, complete with a golden calf at the entrance!¹

The Israelites were offering sacrifices for their sin (enough to brag about), but they had no intention of *turning* from their sin *or* their idols. And this made their sacrifices to God *immoral!* If worship is *merely* external it’s *morally* sinful.

Then, in chapter five, Amos cuts the irony and the Lord says:

I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. ... Away with the noise of your songs! ... But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! – *Amos 5:21-24 NIV*

If our outward acts of worship are just a token to God (and a mask that we wear while our heart is *actually* attached to the world), then He *loathes* our offerings and our singing!

At this time in history, Israel is by far the most powerful nation in the north, and enjoying *great* peace and prosperity. And the people greedily view this as God’s *endorsement*.

¹ 1 Kings 12:28

You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. ... You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end. - *Amos 6:4-7 NIV*

This is just 50 years before their destruction (722^{BC}). In 5:2 he says, "Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again ..." And unlike Judah, Israel is scattered and assimilated and never regroups.



These are the 19 kings of Judah (the blue kings "did right in the eyes of God"). Amos ministered during the reign of Uzziah [uh-ZIGH-uh] [a.k.a. Azariah]. This is the same time that Hosea (who married Gomer) began *his* ministry. So, there's a possibility they traveled as coworkers.

The grey dots represent Isaiah's ministry. He began toward the end of Uzziah/Azariah's reign. So, as a boy, Isaiah may have even heard Amos preach on one of his tours.

Archaeologists have recently found evidence of a massive earthquake that took place in the mid-700s B.C., when Uzziah reigned in Judah and Jeroboam II reigned in Israel. And this is interesting because Amos 1:1 says:



Modern day Tekoa, Israel

The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa [tih-KOH-uh] – what he saw concerning Israel **two years before the earthquake**, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel. - *Amos 1:1 NIV*

Notice that it says that he was "one of the shepherds of Tekoa"

This is Tekoa. It's 10 miles south of Jerusalem in *Judah*, yet God calls Amos to minister in *Israel*. So he walks 22 miles north to Bethel (which may have been on his wool-trading route). We don't know where all Amos traveled and spoke in the north. He may have walked as far as 50 miles, to the capitol, Samaria (because many of his words are directed at the people there).

It's usually just the *men* who are chastised by the prophets; but, Amos had a special message for the ladies of Samaria:



Indifferent, fat cow

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!" The Sovereign Lord has sworn by his holiness: The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks ... - *Amos 4:1-2a NIV*

In their defense, he's referring to the *top breed* of pampered cattle - these are the very *finest* fat cows!

But these prosperous women are “hooked” on luxury in the same way a cow is hooked through the nose and led to the slaughter. Instead of caring for the poor as God has commanded, they lumber along, grazing to gratify their own appetites, indifferent and uninterested toward those in need. And apparently the husbands were happily supplying their habit:

They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name.
– Amos 2:6-7 NIV

Thankfully we live in a nation that has a social conscience and provisions to protect the poor against this kind of oppression. We also have charities and churches to help fill in the gaps. But, how do *you* personally feel about the poor? Do you “feel” about the poor?! There’s a common tendency to grow more self-centered and self-indulgent as we have the means to do so. And with societal safeguards and prosperity like ours, it’s way too easy to disconnect from a personal sense of responsibility and to become *enslaved* to comfort and *addicted* to luxury.

There are really only three attitudes toward the needy: You can be: Callous *to* the poor; indifferent, apathetic, unconcerned, just chewing your own cud. You can be: Contemtuous *of* the poor; scornful, condescending, viewing prosperity as a morality gauge. Or, you can be: Compassionate *toward* the poor; caring, concerned ... Christlike.

We all have moments of all three. But which is winning over more and more of your heart?

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? – 1 John 3:17 NIV

This was Amos’ message: The people of Israel were demonstrating their lack of love for God by their lack of concern for others! Sincere love for God produces true concern for others. If you don’t have the first, you won’t have the second. And if you don’t have the second, you better question just how much you *really* have of the first!

It’s not that God wants you to empty your wallet or purse every time you see a cardboard sign (we’re called to use discernment and to be good stewards). But are your eyes open to opportunities to help the legitimate needs the Lord brings across your path? We can’t do everything for everyone; but we can all do something for someone.

Your council has made sure that our offerings as a church go to help the poor in many ways: Love Inc. (*helping the community with goods and financial training*), local food banks, Friendship house (*which gives people a place to stay*), the Gideons (*making sure the Word of God is available to all*), and Pregnancy choices (*helping with the expenses of pregnancy*). And above and beyond that, your openhanded, bighearted responses to OCC and missions and things like the Haiti relief remind me what a privilege it is to serve such a generous congregation! Amos would really like you guys!

Let's just make sure we're growing in our ability to see the needs of the less fortunate and to routinely put them above our own.

Over and over in Moses' writings God reminds the Israelites how they were oppressed in Egypt and calls them to be a nation that watches over for the unfortunate as He watched over them.² This is why, in chapter three, Amos rhetorically calls on Egypt to bear witness to the oppression within Israel (3:1;9).

You know, this all didn't go over so well for Amos. He begins with a lot of support, by condemning Israel's surrounding enemy nations for their sins against God's people:

- Damascus: they dragged logs with spikes over the people. (1:3)
- Gaza: they sold whole communities of Jews into slavery. (1:6)
- Tyre: They enslaved Jews and broke a peace treaty. (1:9)
- Edom: They showed no mercy though they're related. (1:11)
- Ammon: They committed genocide against the innocent. (1:13)
- Moab: They desecrated a descendant king of Jacob. (2:1)

And then he even condemns his own home-nation of Judah, for rejecting God's law and following after false gods. (2:4)

And this is where he starts to lose 'em. He explains how God has tried to get their attention with minor plagues (4:6-11), and how He's held off two major plagues (7:1-6), not to show favor but forbearance (in hope of repentance). And by the time he finishes reeling off their sins, and explaining how God used a plumb line to show him how crooked the entire nation is, they've pretty much had enough of Amos.

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. 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. 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 a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" - *Amos 7:10-15 NIV*

And the Lord shows Amos a basket of ripe fruit and says, "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer." (8:1-2) And Amos goes home; and he writes down all that took place. And the last thing God reveals to Amos is that He will not abandon his chosen people or his chosen plan of redemption. Because God's heart goes out to the unfortunate - and that includes *us*.

² Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; 15:12-15; 16:9-12; 24:17-22