

## Message #1

## Amos 1:1

There is no doubt as we look at our country that we are, or at least we certainly have been, a very prosperous nation. We drive nice cars and we live in nice homes and we eat good food. It is actually possible today to be on welfare and make more money than many of our fathers made when they went to work full time. We are a very prosperous nation.

But when you listen to politicians talk about this prosperity, there is almost an arrogant attitude that claims we have done it ourselves and we have achieved it because we are Americans. In fact, we name this philosophy the “American Dream.” We dream it and then accomplish it. When you listen to people talk about national prosperity, you rarely hear a mention of God. Frankly, God is pretty much left out of all of this. Politicians and elite businessmen want the credit. Now there is one thing that would be very wise for all people to remember: **rarely do material prosperity and spiritual prosperity go together.**

That is certainly true when you look objectively at the United States. We are not certainly prospering when it comes to God. Our spirituality and our morality are rapidly declining. We are increasing in depravity. There are leading politicians who support immoral behavior that is an abomination to God. We are seeing a rapid level of growth and indifference when it comes to God and His Word. We are seeing religion that is flourishing because it offers entertainment for an audience, but certainly not because it is focused on an accurate understanding of God and His Word. The truth is, spiritually and morally speaking, our nation is in total shambles and poverty. **From a financial standpoint our country may be rich, but from a spiritual standpoint our country is bankrupt.**

If you are a believer who stands for the truth of God and you attempt to accurately communicate the Word of God to most people in this big world, you will soon discover that what you believe and what you say almost seems irrelevant. It isn't the majority who are interested in anything you have to say. Most aren't really interested in hearing the truth, knowing the truth and they are certainly not interested in responding to the truth. When we, as a non-denominational Bible Church, take on the world and proclaim that this country and even churches are moving the wrong way, hardly any want to listen to us.

This national spiritual crisis is not new to the United States; this was exactly the same problem that existed back in **760 B.C. in Israel and Judah**. That period of history was very rare for Israel because it was a time of **national prosperity both in Israel in the north under Jeroboam II and a time of prosperity in Judah in the south under Uzziah**. The people were proud of all they had and all they accomplished. In fact, the prevailing attitude was we have done this “by our own strength” (**Amos 6:13**).

During this time in Israel's history, commerce was thriving; religion was flourishing but real spirituality and real morality were plummeting. **What God decided to do in that very historical context was raise up a prophet who would stand up and speak out and warn people to get right with Him. He would confront the corruption and compromise.**

**God decided He had a prophetic message he wanted communicated to that culture and He had selected a man to communicate His truth in a book of the Bible and that man's name and the book's name is Amos .** In the next weeks we would like to take you on a journey through the book that bears his name.

**QUESTION #1** – Why study the book?

Let me give five simple reasons why we need to study this book of Amos:

**Reason #1** - It is one of only 66 inspired books God has given to man.

Amos is one of God's inspired books and God does not give a great number of books to man. William Rainey Harper, who wrote a good commentary on the Hebrew text of Amos back in 1904, said, "The text of Amos is as well preserved as perhaps any text in the Hebrew Bible..." (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos*, p. clxxiii).

In the famous Dead Sea Scroll discovery, which started back in 1947 in Cave 4 of the eleven caves, a copy of Amos was discovered. After the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1952, Bedouins in the area wanted to look into all the caves and in caves southeast of Bethlehem, some scrolls were found that contained the book of Amos. This scroll was dated from the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century B.C..

The discovery of these scrolls proved that the Hebrew Masoretic text (Vowel-pointed Hebrew text) that was completed about A.D. 900, from which our English Bibles are translated, was identical to the original Hebrew manuscript. Furthermore, when the Masoretic Hebrew text was compared to the Greek Septuagint which was written from 250-150 B.C., it proved to be identical, indicating that Amos was, in fact, one of the rare inspired and well-preserved books of God's precious written Word. God preserved Amos for Israel and for us as well. So because this is one of those rare books of God, we will study it.

**Reason #2** - Because the book of Amos is one of the most neglected books in all of the Bible.

James Montgomery Boice said that Amos is a book in the church in which "little or no attention has been paid to it." The reason he said for this neglect is because Amos is a book that speaks powerfully against moral evils, social injustices and religious formalism and if people in the church read and studied it, they would be convicted of sin and condemned by the book (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 133). Frank Gaebelien said from 1920 until 1979 he had never heard in either a conference or a church a "responsible treatment of Amos" (*Challenging Christians to the Simple Life*, p. 23).

How many careful expositions have you been through concerning the book of Amos? Amos is a book that will force each one of us to look honestly at God and ourselves to determine whether we are spiritually affluent. It is no wonder most churches neglect this book.

**Reason #3** - It is a book that warns of serious judgments that the Sovereign God will send against nations and His own elect because of their moral corruption.

God is a Sovereign God. God is a sin-counting God. He is a Sovereign God of election (**Amos 3:2**) and He is a Sovereign God of judgments. In fact, **Amos 3:6** says God will judgmentally target cities and send judgmental calamities for moral corruption. Do you think that a hurricane that almost destroys New Orleans is a coincidence? Do you think an earthquake that rattles San Francisco happens by chance? God says I send calamity to cities that are morally corrupt.

God's sovereignty controls political powers and individuals. He raises people up to power and then if they do not obey Him, He takes them out. He chose Israel as His nation and He chose Amos as His prophet. He determines who He will use to warn and when He will send His judgment.

God wants His own elect to realize that he monitors them and if they lapse into some persistent arrogant way of thinking that does not focus on Him or His Word, or if they pursue some immoral behavior contrary to what is right, He can and will send His sovereign judgments.

Amos was written at a time when the standards of morality had reached an all-time low. Fathers and sons were pursuing immorality with the same woman (**Amos 2:7**). Fathers were not teaching their children to love God and His Word; they were going out with them and enjoying a night of sin. These were God's own people who were going to worship services, but were deep in sin.

It is impossible to go to church and worship God in a way that pleases Him if one is involved in immoral things. In fact, one scholar said this whole book of Amos is a call to "Moral Obedience" (C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, p. 55). This book of Amos will challenge God's people to stay morally pure.

**Reason #4** - It is a book that warns of serious judgments that God will send to His prosperous nation and people who forget about Him.

It is a very fatal mistake to assume that because a nation, a city, a church or a person has a lot of money that it will always be that way. God gave it and He can take it away in a moment. At the time the book of Amos was written, it was the best of times for Israel. Money was flowing in Israel. Big beautiful, luxurious homes were being built. The economy was thriving.

There were wealthy people of God who had summer homes and winter homes (**Amos 3:15**). They had plenty of good food (**Amos 6:4**) and plenty of good wine (**Amos 6:6**). It was the good life and the people living it were living in a false sense and delusional sense of security that they were right with God. God was not first in these people's lives and God was about to bring all their prosperity crashing down.

There is nothing wrong with having nice things and good things in life, but when God is not the primary focal point of the nice things, there is something drastically wrong, dangerously wrong.

We are living in a very affluent time. Many people have their summer and winter homes and they have gourmet foods to eat and gourmet coffee and imported wines to drink. But God is being pushed farther and farther into the background and He is not first in their lives and Amos is a book that says **it will all come crashing down**. We need a good dose of the book of Amos because it challenges us to keep our focus on God and His precious Word.

**Reason #5** - It is a book that warns of serious judgments that God will send to those who are involved in religion, not interested in carefully understanding and applying His Word.

When the book of Amos was written, religion was flourishing and fashionable. But all of the religious stuff did not mean anything to God. In fact, it was all detestable. The big problem in the days of Amos is that the people were not going to worship to learn the Word of God so they could make adjustments in their lives (**Amos 2:4**). They had worship services, but their worship services were not devoted to accurately understanding and applying God's Word.

In fact, in **Amos 5:21-22**, God said, "I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them."

The ramifications of that statement are serious. Affluent people can go to church, give money, sing hymns, bow their heads and pray, repeat words and actually have God hate what they are doing. **If we are not interested in pursuing a true righteousness based on the Word of God, God hates that church and He hates its services.**

The time is ripe for a good dose of Amos and these are reasons we are going to study it.

**QUESTION #2** – Who wrote Amos?

**Amos was written by Amos**. This fact is obvious from the first verse **Amos 1:1**. Plus it is obvious by use of pronouns and other descriptive things he says in the book.

Amos was a "shepherd" (**1:1**) from Tekoa. Tekoa was a city that was located about 10-11 miles south of Jerusalem in Judah and about 6 miles south of Bethlehem. According to Thomas McComiskey, the town was located on a hilly ridge that commanded a magnificent view of the wilderness below and of the Mount of Olives (*Amos*, p. 275). It was not a big city, but more a village that was in rough country. The thing that puts Tekoa on the map is that one of the great prophets of God originated from that city.

We know Amos was a shepherd and it may be that Amos himself was a sheep owner. We do know that he had a business of growing sycamore figs (**Amos 7:14**).

Sycamore fig trees grew in the Jordan River valley to a height of 25-50 feet and bore fruit four times a year. It is also clear that he spent a great deal of time in the outdoors. He loved the outdoors. In fact, many of the statements he makes are taken from the outdoors (**1:2; 2:9; 3:4-5; 5:19-20, 24; 6:12; 7:1-6; 8:1; 9:3-15**). This was a man who enjoyed being outside in God's creation.

**However, what makes Amos such an important man was he was a prophet who accurately communicated God's Word.** He was a bold, fearless prophet. He was not a prophet because he went to some prophet's school. He was not a prophet because he was born into a prophet's home. He had no formal or professional religious training. He was a prophet because God selected and elected him and said, "go prophesy to my people Israel" (**Amos 7:14-15**).

Amos was a man with a backbone and God called this country boy to go to the big city and confront people with the truth of God. J. Vernon McGee said that Amos to him was "the country preacher who came to town" (*Amos*, p. 680). In other words, God chose this shepherd to become a great communicator of His Word to not only big cities, but to the world.

Much of the data in the book of Amos is negative, but there is always a seasoning of grace. If one is to accurately communicate the Word of God, one must present the positive and the negative.

This book is fitting for us at this church because here we are a non-denominational Bible Church and we are firing the Word of God at the whole world, including Washington D.C.. We are not big or impressive anymore than Amos was, but there is power in the Word and it will not return void. Our mission is much like that of Amos.

**QUESTION #3** – When was Amos written?

**Amos ministered during the reigns of King Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 B.C.) and King Uzziah (Azariah) of Judah (792-740 B.C.).** These dates make Amos a contemporary of Jonah and Hosea, who were prophets to the northern Israel, and also Isaiah and Micah, who were prophets to the southern Kingdom of Judah. What this teaches us is that God had plenty of key men alive who were communicating His Word and His truth.

**Verse 1** says that Amos specifically wrote **two years before the earthquake (Amos 1:1)**. Zechariah referred to a major earthquake that occurred during the days of Uzziah (Zech. 14:5). Josephus claims that an earthquake occurred when Uzziah entered the temple and was struck with leprosy (II Chron. 26:16-20).

It is interesting that archeological excavations of Hazor uncovered data that suggests that a violent earthquake hit in 760 B.C..

It is also interesting that in **Amos 8:8** he seems to predict a coming earthquake and in **Amos 8:9** he seems to predict a coming solar eclipse. So if these two events were to occur at about the same time, we could assume that it happened two years before 760 B.C.. **Amos wrote in 763 B.C.-762 B.C..**

**QUESTION #4** – What is the purpose of the book of Amos?

**According to verse 1, Amos prophesied against the northern kingdom of Israel.** God raised him up as a prophet to announce coming judgment on Israel because of her unfaithfulness and rebellion. People were affluent and many of these people gained their affluence by doing unjust things to those who were poor (**Amos 5:24**). The desire of God was that the nation would get right with him, so He raised up Amos to tell them that. But it didn't work.

Amos was a very strong communicator of God's Word and many people did not like him. In fact, he rubbed both priests and kings the wrong way. **Amos was a real thorn in the flesh against the religious and political leaders because he preached straight truth.**

For example, in **Amos 7:10-17**, when Amos' message got to Bethel, leaders did not like him or his message. Bethel was the capital city of Israel in the north and Amaziah was the priest and he hated what Amos had to say, so he sent word to the king and they warned him to stop preaching. So here was this simple man, Amos, walking into a big city and preaching to the sophisticated and educated religious leaders and politicians and they wanted him gone.

But God wanted to give His people an opportunity to repent. There is no question that his message not only included serious warning, but it also offered grace. God always offers grace before judgment (**Amos 5:14-15**). If God's people would obey Him, judgment could be stayed.

Now some people responded and turned to God and His Word. But the majority did not. The organized religious leaders and politicians hated Amos. They criticized him and tried to undermine him and in the end, the judgment did come.

**QUESTION #5** – What is the theme of Amos?

As we said, when Amos lived, life was good for Israel and Judah. There was political stability, there was economic prosperity and there was land expansion. But what was also flourishing was rebellion and sin. God's Word was not taken as authoritative and it would bring Israel down.

According to Donald Sunukjian, "Commerce thrived (8:5), an upper class emerged (4:1-3), and expensive homes were built (3:15; 5:11; 6:4, 11). The rich enjoyed an indolent, indulgent lifestyle (6:1-6), while the poor became targets for legal and economic exploitation (2:6-7; 5:7, 10-13; 6:12; 8:4-6). Slavery for debt was easily accepted (2:6; 8:6). Standards of morality had sunk to a low ebb (2:7)" (*Amos*, p. 1425). Religion was big time and big show and it all presented the façade that these people were right with God.

In that setting, God raised up a country boy named Amos to go to the big city and nation and say—"you are not right with God and you better realize that His eyes are on you (**Amos 9:8**) and you are about to be destroyed."

We cannot be far from the theme when we suggest that **the book of Amos is designed to teach that when God's people are in good times and prosperous times, they must always maintain a true Biblical righteousness based on God's Word and not pursue what is sinful and evil; because God is watching His people and He will eventually punish those who refuse to respond to Him and His Word.**

We must never make a fatal mistake of assuming that our material prosperity is a reward from God because we are so good. The fact is many who have much are living corrupt and depraved lives behind the scenes and they need to know "the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful...".