

Amos:

Roll Justice Roll



Our Scripture will be Amos 5:18-24. We will not be exegeting these particular verses, but I picked them because they capture the essence of the book. We are at exit number 30 in our Route 66 series. Let's look at how Amos fits into the big storyline of the Bible, which ultimately reveals the Savior we have in Jesus Christ.

Scripture

"Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord!

Why would you have the day of the Lord?

It is darkness, and not light, as if a man fled from a lion,

and a bear met him,

or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall,

and a serpent bit him.

Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light,

and gloom with no brightness in it?

"I hate, I despise your feasts,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,

***I will not accept them;
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
I will not look upon them.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”***

Yahweh’s Burden

As we travel down Route 66 and get to exit number 30, we are exiting into the prophetic book of Amos. Amos is the eighth prophet in the prophetic section of the Old Testament. He is the third prophet in what we call the Minor Prophets. I would hate for someone to stand toe to toe with Amos and tell him he was a minor prophet. There is nothing minor about this man’s message. When we speak about him as a minor prophet, we are not referring to the content of his message, but the length of his message.

As we exit into the book of Amos, we expect to turn immediately north because you realize this prophecy concerns the Northern Kingdom of Israel, not the Southern Kingdom. First, let’s look south and then north, because the storyline of Amos actually starts in the South with a man named Amos. His name means ‘to lift, to carry.’ Therefore, it basically means ‘to be burdened.’ More specifically, the name Amos means ‘Yahweh is burdened.’ Because Yahweh was burdened, we are going to discover that His prophet Amos also carried a heavy load, a burden, to deliver a message to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

So we are in the Southern Kingdom where Uzziah is the king. In the north, Jeroboam the 2nd is king. If we put the dates of their kingships together, we know that this period is during the earthquake. Archeologists tell us this earthquake took place around 762 BC. We are in the first half of the eighth

century. Even though Amos is the eighth prophet, he is also the third minor prophet. He is actually what we call the first writing prophet. Elijah and Elisha were great prophets of God, but they don't have books named after them. The reason is because they never wrote down anything they said. They just preached. Later on, the prophets would not only speak their message, but would write it down. Scholars believe that Amos was the first written prophet we have.

The Call

As we turn and look out the window of divine revelation and look toward the South, we will be going about ten miles south of Jerusalem to a countryside called Tekoa. This is in the grazing region of the Southern Kingdom. We will see a man who has cattle and sheep on the high elevation of the Judean Desert. As we start down toward the Dead Sea and get down below 1000 feet above sea level, we see that he has a grove of fruit trees called sycamores. On this particular day, he is tending his sheep. Now, we get all this information from Amos chapter 7 when he has an encounter with Amaziah. Amos is following his sheep, in other words, he is a farmer who has fruit trees and livestock. He is minding his own business, doing his own thing, when, all of a sudden, God steps into his life and calls him to preach a message to the Northern Kingdom. Amos is going to say he is not a prophet; neither is he a son of a prophet. In other words, as Amos stands before Amaziah, he is saying I never went to school; I never had a formal education; I was not part of the prophetic guild or union, so to speak, that was common in his day. I was minding my own business, doing my own thing, and tending to my sheep when, all of a sudden, God took me while I was following the flock.

Now this word "took" is the Hebrew word, *laqach*, which literally means 'with the power of death.' It was a word the professional mourners, who were paid to mourn the death of someone, used. They would stand in the streets as they mourned and would roll this Hebrew word, *laqach*, off their tongue, and when they did, it would be spine-chilling. This word came to

be known as the Death Grip. In other words, Amos was saying I was minding my own business, doing my own thing, when, all of a sudden, God put His Death Grip on me, and said go preach to the Northern Kingdom. Wow! If God says that to you, what are you going to do if He has a death grip on you? You are going to do what he says! This farmer, with no formal training, has been called by God to go up to the Northern Kingdom. So as we watch him cross over into the Northern Kingdom, he will come to the city of Bethel. Now, that is where the king set up a church, so to speak.

Now remember from our study in the historical books, when they had the civil war in Israel with the ten tribes in the North and the two tribes in the South, Jeroboam the 1st quickly realized something needed to be done. If the ten tribes in the North kept going back to Jerusalem to worship, they would never be a strong nation. So he set up a church in Bethel, a church in Gilgal, and a church in Beersheba. He told the people they didn't have to go to Jerusalem to worship anymore; you can worship God right here. So Amos is in Bethel, and some scholars believe that this entire book was preached in less than thirty minutes. Other scholars pick the book apart and say this part was preached 'here,' and this part was preached 'there,' and this was preached over 'there;' so, the book may have lasted three months. Some believe it may have lasted a couple of years; we don't know.

God Gives Amos the Message

When we study Amos in written form, I want you to see that it naturally divides into two parts, chapters 3-6, and chapters 7-9. Chapters 3-6 deal with what Amos heard, and chapters 7-9 deal with what Amos saw. If you will notice, "*Thus saith the Lord; Declares the Lord*" is repeated over and over again in chapters 3-6. It is what God says to Israel. Amos is delivering the Word that he heard from God, so he is basically delivering the Word of God. God not only spoke to Amos, God actually showed Amos things in visions. So when you get to chapters 7-9, you will notice that Amos quit saying, "*Thus saith the Lord,*" and started saying, "*This is what the Lord God showed me; The thing that God showed me.*" In chapter 9 he said, "*I*

saw the Lord standing by the altar." The prophetic writing of Amos is dealing with what he heard and what he saw. So Amos, by divine compulsion, is going to deliver both what he heard and what he saw from God. Now, some of you may be wondering why we started the first part of Amos in chapter 3; what about chapters 1 and 2? In my opinion, and when I tell you this is my opinion, I could be wrong, (I am probably not, but could be, just so you know!) but I believe that chapters 1 and 2 are the introduction to the message. The message of the book is primarily in chapters 3-9.

- **The Sins of the Nations**

Have you ever spoken publicly or been called on to give a speech? If you have ever delivered a speech, you know that the first thirty to sixty seconds is the most important part of your talk. During that first minute, the audience decides whether or not they are going to listen to what you are going to say. If you don't catch the audience's attention right up front, they won't listen. The introduction is so important. So get this picture... Here is a man going to deliver a message to the Northern Kingdom and he is going to go into a city called Bethel. Now how is he supposed to get their attention? How does he get them to listen? I think God gave him the introduction to the message while he was going from Tekoa to Bethel. If I can say this, it is one of the most masterful introductions I have ever heard. Amos knew that it's human nature to like to talk about sin.

But we don't like to talk about our sin, but other people's sin, amen? We have prayer meetings to talk about peoples' sins! "We need to pray about Brother so and so; did you know he...," and we just gossip right there before the whole world! How many times have we picked up our cell phones and dialed quickly to tell someone what someone else just did? You say you didn't mean to gossip, but you knew exactly what you were doing! You were blabbing about somebody else blowing it; fess up.

That is what Amos did. He knew people liked to talk about other people's sins, so he starts talking about all the nations around Northern Israel. You

have to realize the Israelites were big on numerology. Seven is the number of perfection. Seven is the number of completion. So when Amos starts preaching about all these nations around Israel and all of their sins, he comes to Judah, their sister in the South, and he starts talking about them. I can just see the crowd saying amen, because they realize Judah is the seventh nation. In chapter 1, there are six pagan nations around Israel that Amos indicts. Israel knew there was going to be a seventh, but it wasn't Israel, it was Judah. He hammers Judah and the crowd is saying amen! Then he does something that would be unthinkable. He didn't stop at seven; he listed an eighth. The eighth was Israel. Isn't it amazing how a preacher can go from preaching to meddling? If someone else is committing the sin, it's preaching. But if you are committing it, he is now meddling.

In his introduction, he speaks of "for three transgressions" and "for four." In Israelite terminology, this was the famous straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak. For three transgressions, it was ok; God took it. He was patient, He was kind, and He was long suffering. But for the fourth transgression, judgment is now on its way.

Also in the introduction, Amos pictures God as a roaring lion. Now if someone turned a lion loose in your neighborhood, would you call anyone to warn them? If law enforcement said someone had escaped prison and were in the area Dad and I were working, or a criminal was loose on the eastside of our county, my mom would call and say, "Don't go outside; keep your doors locked!" My granny was really bad about this! She was always concerned there was something out there that could hurt us. Now imagine you are Amos and God reveals to you that He is upset and He is a roaring lion and He is going to roar in judgment. Could you keep your mouth shut? No...and neither could Amos. So by the time he gets to Bethel, hooks his audience, lets them know this message is not about Damascus, the Edomites, the Ammonites, and the Moabites, it is about them; he has gotten their attention. So he begins to tell them what he has

heard God say to him. In chapters 3-6, he just basically tells them what God told him to say to them.

- **Israel, the Chosen**

Now, I don't want you to miss this; in my mind, the key to the book of Amos is chapter 3 verse 2. The first thing God said to Israel through Amos is you only, of all the families of the earth, have I known. Wow! The word, "know," can be talking about what you know in your mind, the facts about something. It can also be used in the Bible to speak of intimacy, to know someone in an intimate way, to know someone in a loving way. I think it is really easy to see that the Bible is talking about intimacy, love, covenant relationship in this verse. The reason is because it doesn't fit for God to say you are the only family on the earth that I 'have knowledge about, information about, that I have the facts about.' God knows the history of every nation on the planet. As a matter of fact, He just revealed in the introduction that he knows everything the nations around Israel are doing wrong because Amos used that in his introduction. So there is no way that God is he saying you are the only nation I have the story, or the facts about. It can't be that.

Now listen, if Amos has to speak the Word of the Lord, I have to speak the Word of the Lord. I can promise you, I am not doing this because I have been to school. I am not doing this because I want to do this. This is the last thing I ever wanted to do. I wanted to be a deacon, a Sunday school teacher, and yes, I wanted to be a music leader. I wanted to be anything but a preacher, but I lost the argument. God would not change his mind. I only do what I do because of a call from God. Honestly, I felt like I had a death grip on my shoulder too. Now I am so glad God called me to do what I am now doing and I wouldn't want to do anything but this, but thirty-three years ago, this is not what I wanted to do. Now this is going to hurt some people's feelings, but it is the Bible. Before Christ, the only people, or nation, God had a covenant relationship with was Israel. Out of all the nations on the earth, only Israel did God love, in a way where He

elected them to be His people and carry out His sovereign purposes through them! Does that mean He didn't love other people? No...as a matter of fact, it was His love for other people that caused Him to love Israel. What I mean by that is He loved the world, and His plan was to send a Messiah one day who would die for the sins of the world. But before the Messiah would come, we had to know who He would be, so God called Israel for the purpose of bringing forth the birth of the Messiah. Wow! God did not have a covenant relationship with the Egyptians. He did not have the covenant relationship with the Moabites, or the Ammonites. It was only with the Israelites. You have to understand that.

- **Responsibility and Accountability**

Now, if you are one of those people who immediately, when you hear of divine election, start getting arrogant and start thinking privileged, you have missed the Bible. In the Bible, election never brings privilege. In the Bible, election always brings responsibility and accountability. God did not elect you or me for you or me. He elected you and me for Him, and that is why He elected Israel. With election comes great responsibility because here is what happens; I want you to get this picture. Israel had more light of God than any other nation on the planet at that time. No one knew God like Israel did.

Now, when you have more light, there is more expectation. Amen? I mean, if someone can't see, you don't expect very much out of them. My eyesight is slowly failing. I backed into a semi this week. I had already backed into a tree before I backed into the semi, but not on the same day! I would get so aggravated at my Papaw. I would think; how could you hit your mirror at the granary Papaw? I never said that to him, but when he came back with the mirror broken and I had to fix it, I wanted to say, why don't you just look where you are going? Now, I am Papaw. The first thing I am going to do when I get to do in Heaven is apologize to Papaw! I have to carry reading glasses with me now everywhere I go. I can't read my Bible inside because it is too dark. But it is amazing that I can be out in the field

without my reading glasses, and if it is a sunny day, I can put my Bible in the sun and I can read the small print! Now I am sure my optometrist can tell me why that's true. I do not know why that is true; I just know it is true. The more light I have, the more I can read. Without light, I cannot read.

Do you get it? If I can see, I should do. The more I see, the more I should do. Therefore, God had a higher expectation of Israel than He did any other nation on the planet. When God judges a people, He judges them based on the light of revelation He has given them. When are we going to realize this is as a church and quit thinking about how the world lives? What we should be worried about is why we don't live differently than the world does! How much light have we been given? We have the full revelation of God in Christ, and with that comes great responsibility and great accountability to God.

Then in chapter 4, Amos basically asks the women if they realize what a role they play in society. As a matter of fact, he calls them a cow of Bashan. That is not a compliment because cows of Bashan were fat and ferocious. They were fat because they had an appetite that could not be quenched. They were so ferocious and they would run other off the other cows. Because the women could not be satisfied, the husbands were slaves to the economy of his day. He just couldn't work enough, because she didn't just want to drink her wine out of a cup; she wanted to drink her wine out of a bowl. She wasn't satisfied with just one house; she required a summer house and a winter house. She wasn't satisfied with just pine, like everyone else; she had to have ivory and marble. Yes ladies, a cow of Bashan!

Then, He said you men can't wait to go to work, and you prey off the needy. You can't wait to make a business deal and don't care who it hurts just as long as it is contributing to your net worth. Then, God said I sent cleanness of teeth. This did not refer to a dental hygiene; it meant He sent a famine. God said you had nothing to eat and none of you thought of

returning to Me. He said, I withheld the rain and didn't allow it to rain for months, and not one of you realized why it wasn't raining! I sent blight and mildew on your crops, I sent pestilence, and I sent war. I even caused an earthquake like in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah and you did not return to Me, therefore, prepare to meet your God! Oh, please do not see this as a divine invitation. In the days of Amos, the words, prepare to meet your God, were not an invitation to get right. It was to say, because you are not right, you are going to meet God and it's going to be bad. Then He said, how dare you come to church! You come to church to sin! You can't wait to bring your tithes. You can't wait to bring your offerings. You love to get up and tell everyone how you have been blessed by God and what you have been doing for Him. But, God said, you are not into Me, you are into you.

- **The Day of the Lord**

Then in chapter 5, Amos said, "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord." You must realize that Amos is the first prophet to bring the concept of the day of the Lord into writing. All the other prophets will pick up on this and we will start to see a theology in the Old Testament of the day of the Lord. The Israelites believed that because they were God's chosen people, His elect, there would be a day when God would step into human history and right all wrongs. They thought He would judge the unrighteous and bring salvation to the righteous. Because they were the elect, they thought they were the righteous, so they longed for the day of the Lord. They thought when the Lord did break into human history that He was going to judge all the pagans and all the Israelites would be saved.

But verse 18 says it is not going to be a good day when the Lord comes. As a matter of fact, it will be a day of darkness, not a day of light. It will be a day of gloom, not brightness. Whoa, do you catch what's going on here? Not everyone who thought they were in, were really in. Therefore, the day of the Lord may not be a day of salvation, but a day of judgment. It scares me to death that there are people in the Church today who flippantly say I wish Christ would come back, not realizing that when He comes back, it

won't be a good thing for them. It will be a bad thing, because Amos teaches a life of faith is evidenced by a changed life. We often sing these words, "Since Jesus came into my heart." What has been the change in your life since Jesus came into your heart? If there has not been a life change, He didn't come into your heart. Amos was saying that when the day of the Lord comes, you can't stop it; you can't escape from it.

In Amos' day, the day of the Lord was not going to be the return of Jesus Christ to the earth for the saints. In Amos' day, the day of the Lord was when the Assyrian army would come out of the North, under the direction of God, and take the Northern Kingdom into exile. When that starts, they can't stop it; they can't escape it. He is saying get ready to be judged by God! Prepare to meet God in judgment! He said it is like a guy is being chased by a lion and when he looks back the lion is gone and now there is a bear. Now, he is running from the bear and he runs into his house and shuts the door. Whew, the bear is on the outside! He leans against the wall and a poisonous snake bites him; he can't get away from it!

In the last three chapters, Amos sees a vision of summer fruit. He sees a vision of a plumb line, visions of locusts, and visions of this fire that is coming. He sees the Lord standing by the altar, ready to strike the assembly of the Northern Kingdom. What are those visions saying? God has measured you, you have fallen short, and judgment cannot be stopped; it is already on its way! And in 721 BC, less than 40 years later, the Northern Kingdom would cease to be a nation. Wow!! How would you like to carry all that around; to believe that God would step into the lives of people who claim to be kin to you, spiritually, judge them, and they lose everything they have?

Prepare for Christ' Return

How does Amos fit into the big story of the Bible? Amos introduces to us the thought of the day of the Lord, and by the time Jesus comes and Peter and Paul write, they take the phrase, "day of the Lord," and associate it with the end of the world as we know it, not just the Northern Kingdom of

Israel, but the end of the world because of an event called the return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

Israel wasn't ready for the day of the Lord. They thought they were, but they weren't. The book of Amos should cause each one of us to ask ourselves if we are ready for the real day of the Lord. Are you ready for the event that will bring everything, as you and I know it, to a complete end and it will all be no more? In 1st Thessalonians 4, Paul actually says that when Christ returns, everyone who has died in the Lord is coming with Him. There will be a resurrection in the cemeteries where all those bodies will come up out of the earth and their spirit-souls will be united with a glorified body, and those of us who are alive will rise and meet them in the air. This means (1st Corinthians 15) we all will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and receive a body just like that of Jesus, if we are believers. And then he says quit worrying about the season and the times, because you know perfectly that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. And then he says a thief breaks in in darkness, but you are not children of darkness, you are children of light. So this thought of the day of the Lord should not overwhelm you because you are ready.

- **Sober and Watchful**

According to Paul in 1st Thessalonians 5, you show your readiness by living soberly and watchfully. You make decisions that are different from the decision other people on the planet are making, because you are children of light, not of darkness! You must understand this; the world doesn't see what they are doing against God. They don't!! If you asked them if they are blind, of course, they would say no! If you were to ask them if they knew what they were doing, of course, they would say they know what they are doing – they are standing up for human rights! Really? What is your standard for human rights? They don't see what we see. That's why what is going on out in the world should not be happening in the Church! We know better!! The light shines into your actions, your mind, your spirit, and reveals to us when we are sinning against God. The more light that

shines, the more responsibility we have to quit excusing what we do, and own up to it and live as a child of light, a child who really sees.

- **Be Ready**

In 2nd Peter 3, Peter says the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Basically, he is saying that you should be ready. We ought to be actually hastening, wanting the day of the Lord to come. The reason is because when the Lord comes, when Jesus steps out on that cloud in what we call His return to the earth, the Bible teaches that human history, as we know it, is coming to a conclusion, quickly. This is not me saying this; this is the Bible! The earth we are living on will dissolve. It will be burned. The heavens, that you can look up to with a telescope, are going to dissolve; they are going to melt with great fire. Peter says we are to look for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteous dwells. If we really believe this, what manner of life should we be living? Peter issues two words – holy and godly. Wow!!

Are you holy? Are you godly? If you're not, you do not believe in the return of Jesus Christ. I mean, you do, but you don't. You are not living in light of it. You are not ready. Yes, if you are a believer, you are going to Heaven, but Scripture teaches that even a believer will give accounts of the life he has lived for God. If you believe in the day of the Lord, is there anything you are doing that you would not want to be doing when He comes? That is what Amos should cause us to be thinking about. Is there anything you would not have wanted to be doing if He were to come at the very moment you were doing it? Is it possible you will do that same thing, knowing if He comes you wouldn't want to be doing it? Then, why are you doing it? I believe you are doing it because you don't believe He is coming. Oh, you believe His coming, but you don't believe He is coming today, so you don't live in light of the day of the Lord.

We need to make a commitment to live a life believing He could come at any moment for the rest of our lives. We need to live in light of the hope of the day of the Lord. If you are a saint of God and you have been given the

light of God's revelation, you are going to be judged by that light. Everything in our life points to eternity, not just right now. Right now does count and it counts forever.