

# **AMOS: HELLO AND WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT**

*(Amos 1.1-3 & 9.11-15 and Mark 12.28-44)*

Well hello – and its hello from me and hello from Amos!

Over the next 4 weeks we're having a look at the book of the prophet Amos. And the reason for that is that Amos might seem to be just another obscure Old Testament prophet, but in fact his message is very relevant to our modern society.

A few years ago now, we had a harvest festival service in the school about Fair Trade. Remember? And where did we go for a Bible reading? Amos of course. People sold for a pair of sandals. So today we're having an overview of Amos, and we'll be having more detail in the next 3 weeks

So who was this Amos? We know he was one of a group of shepherds and he also tended sycamore fig trees, and he lived about 750 BC. At that time, the kingdom of David and of Solomon had split into two. The southern part, Judah, had Jerusalem and one set of kings. The northern kingdom, Israel, had another set of kings and its capital was Samaria.

Strangely, Amos came from the south (a village called Tekoa), but his message was mainly directed at the north. And the important thing to note is that this was a period of relatively great prosperity, particularly in the north.

So what did Amos have to say?

Well, first of all he had things to say about God. The God revealed to Amos was a great and Holy God. The lion who roars in our reading. A God whose word is powerful, whose roar withers the grass and reaches from Jerusalem to the top of Mount Carmel. A God who has high expectations of people and holds them to account. Not the white haired old man of some peoples imagination. A God to be taken seriously.

Then Amos had things to say from God about the brutal behaviour of the nations surrounding the northern and southern kingdoms. Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon. We heard the start of first of those in our reading. *'For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not relent.'* Even though these countries have not heard the word of God directly, they are still under judgement because they haven't listened to their God-given consciences.

I'm sure when the people of the Northern kingdom heard all this from Amos, they would have said 'Amen' to that. But then there's a bit of a shock. Using the same form of words, 'For three sins, even for four' Amos has a word of condemnation for their brothers in the south.

And finally the biggest shock of all, *'For three sins of **Israel**, even for four, I will not relent'*. Israel, the northern kingdom is getting the same judgement as all those terrible foreigners. You can imagine the shock that caused!

Amos then goes on in massive detail to enlarge on God's judgement on Israel, the northern kingdom. We'll be covering this in more detail in the next three weeks, looking at problems of abuse of wealth, of injustice and of comfortable living.

But Amos' broader message is that the people have not been paying attention to God. Not paying attention to God's laws. Not listening to prophetic words. (Amos himself was told to shut up and go home by Amaziah the priest of Bethel). They've not been looking for signs of God's activity in natural events. The people needed to turn back to God and repent of their ways.

But sadly, Amos sees that no repentance will come. And the consequences will be terrible. Amos sees the significance of a basket of ripe figs. When the time is ripe, God will spare them no longer. Israel will come under devastating attack and destruction.

The enemy is not specified by Amos, but we know it will be the Assyrians, who will sweep down from the upper Euphrates, devastate the land, carry off many into exile and settle other people in Israel, creating the latter day

Samaria of the New Testament. (This happened in 721 BC, and we can learn about it in 2 Kings 17 and in Assyrian clay and stone artefacts.)

But after this terrible message, Amos ends with words of hope. The Assyrian attack will have a purifying effect, like grain being purified by a sieve. There will be restoration, as we heard in the second part of our reading, from the end of the book of Amos.

*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.*

Thus Amos ends on a note of hope. The lion who roars is also a God of mercy.

So, looking at the big picture, what can we take from this? Amos would say:

- Listen to our God given consciences
- Pay attention to God's word
- Look out for the prophetic in what God's people are saying
- Pay attention to events, see God working in the signs of the times

And if there is one verse that sums it up it is in chapter 5 verse 6. *Seek the Lord and live!* And that's not about living a life of wealth, injustice and comfortable living, but living the life in all its fullness which Jesus promises.

So let's seek the Lord and live that life. And let's pay careful attention to the message of Amos over the next three weeks.