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AMOS 1:1-2:16

Today, we begin a study of the **Book of Amos**. To find the **Book of Amos**, find the **Book of Daniel** and go right about three books...after **Daniel** comes **Hosea** and then **Joel** and then **Amos**.

But, before we get into our Scripture today, let's just set a little background.

We've just finished the **Book of 1 Samuel**, and in that great old book we learned that Saul had been anointed the first king of Israel. Had we gone on into **2 Samuel**, we would have seen David assume the throne after Saul's death. And then, in **1 Kings**, David died and his son, Solomon took the throne.

Saul, David and Solomon ruled over a united kingdom. Israel was one nation. But after Solomon died, God fulfilled a promise He had made to Solomon.

God had blessed Solomon with **great wisdom** and **great wealth**. Solomon began his reign with **great promise...** **walking** with God and **relying** on God and the great wisdom with which God had blessed Solomon.

But, as we talked last week about how Saul began well and finished badly, the same is true of Solomon.

God's Word tells us that ***"it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been."***

God's Word goes on to tell us that what Solomon did was evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord was angry with Solomon and God told Solomon that He would tear the kingdom from him and He would give it to Solomon's servant.

God in His grace then promised Solomon, ***"I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son."***

And that's exactly what God did. After Solomon died, the united kingdom of Israel became the divided kingdoms of **Israel to the north** and **Judah to the south**. The capitol of Judah was **Jerusalem** and the capitol of Israel was **Samaria**. All this took place about 931 B.C.

Well, the **Book of Amos** takes place around 750-755 B.C. – or some 180 years later. Amos was a contemporary of Jonah (793-753) and Hosea (753-715).

See, God didn't want His children to be divided. God had called these people out to be His own possession. He desired that they walk with Him and do His will and obey all His commandments. He desired that they be a light to the other nations. He desired for His children to love Him and love each other.

He desired to be their King, but He allowed them to have earthly kings. Remember when we were in the **Book of 1 Samuel** we said that there are three aspects of God's will, His direct will, His determined will and His disciplinary will. It was in God's disciplinary will that God divided the kingdom.

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That's what we saw when God allowed them to have a king. God is sovereign...don't ever forget that...and in His sovereignty He allowed the people to have a king. And because of rank disobedience, in His sovereignty, He divided the kingdom.

Norman Geisler, author of an Old Testament survey wrote **“the moral decadence that began with Solomon led to *division* which led to *deterioration* and eventually led to *deportation*.”**

In fact, the effects and results of this division are what we see in **1 Kings on** in the **Old Testament**. What we see in the **Old Testament** from **1 Kings on** is that the nations of Israel and Judah went steadily downward. They sunk deeper and deeper into idolatry and they drifted farther and farther away from Jehovah.

Another important thing to remember is that sometimes Israel and Judah were **at peace** with each other and sometimes they were **at war** with each other.

The kingdom of Judah to the south had a **few** good kings...not many, but a few. The kingdom of Israel had **no** good kings. **Not one king in the northern kingdom of Israel's 200 years of having kings rule over them was a good king.**

I said all that to simply say this...not only were the **kings** corrupt and evil, but so were the **priests**. The very men God had called to mediate between God and man were corrupt! **So, God raised up prophets!**

And some of the men who prophesied in God's name are the same men who wrote the books of the Old Testament. We commonly know these books as the **“major and minor prophets.”**

The “major prophets” are major simply because they are longer. The “minor prophets” are minor simply because they are shorter. **Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and Jeremiah** are no more important than **Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah** and the rest!

I know all this is basic, but if we fail to get this clear in our minds, we're not going to truly understand it when we have a lesson or hear a sermon on the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. **I mean, when we look at any of the prophets, we need to understand where they were in Jewish history.** We need to also understand that they lived and preached and wrote during the times of **1 and 2 Kings**. That's what is so beautiful about God's Word!

All of it is connected! All of it intertwines! All of it is interrelated! All of it is built on and around all the other parts! Isn't God good to give us such a book?

Isn't it true for all of us that we pay more attention to someone if we know them? **The better we get to know Amos, the more we'll feel the impact of his words and his ministry.** Don't look at this as a dry, old dusty book that doesn't speak to us today! **IT DOES!**

Our pastor's sermons are to teach people they are lost and need to come to Jesus. Sunday School lessons are to go deeper into the Word so we understand and know the holy God we serve.

So, with all that as background and introduction, let's look at this book written by an old prophet of God named Amos...

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Amos 1:1...

Now, this one little verse speaks volumes of information to us about who this man was...

- It tells us 1) the words of the **Book of Amos** were indeed written
by a man named Amos
- 2) this man was a shepherd
 - 3) this man was from Tekoa
 - 4) this man saw visions concerning **Israel**
 - 5) this man saw these visions during the time **Uzziah**
was king of Judah and **Jeroboam** was king
of Israel

Now, let's get a couple of things straight before we go on...

Amos was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Tekoa was in the Southern Kingdom, not far from Bethlehem.

Tekoa wasn't a very big town, not a well-known place at all. In fact, the land in and around Tekoa was desert land. It's down close to the Dead Sea and if you've ever been there or seen pictures of that area, you know it's not very pretty. It's certainly not lush and green. It was good apparently for sheep and for growing sycamore figs, because later on, Amos will say he is a grower of sycamore figs.

By the way, if you don't know what sycamore figs, you probably don't know what mayhaws are either...or mulberries...

Now, don't miss the significance of this. Where is Amos from? He's from the Southern Kingdom...Judah. About whom has he been given visions so that he can prophesy? The Northern Kingdom...Israel.

So, let me ask you...how well received do you believe Amos is going to be in Israel? Think about it...Amos isn't a priest... Amos is a shepherd and a fig picker. And he travels from Tekoa in Judah to Bethel in Israel. In fact, he was received about like the Lord Jesus was.

Bethel was the place where a golden calf had been erected.

Bethel was a cultural center of Israel and it was also a center for cults. Bethel was the intellectual center.

They had a seminary...a school of prophets there...a school where liberalism was taught.

Folks in Bethel thought they had it all together.

Folks in Bethel didn't care much about the commandments of Almighty God. They thought, "**Hey that was okay for our forefathers,**

they didn't know any better. But, we know so much more! We're so much more cultured and sophisticated and educated."

We also need to know that this was a period of great wealth, luxury and arrogance. It was a period when the rich were really rich and the poor were really poor. It was a period of worldly security for the rich and oppression of the poor.

It was also a period of very, very low spirituality. It's always a time of low spirituality when we worship idols...golden calves don't demand holiness from us...they don't demand any spiritual depth, do they?

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And here comes this shepherd and fig picker. What do you believe the folks in Bethel thought about Amos? Well, let's jump over to **chapter 7** and get just a quick idea of how Amos was received.

I told you earlier that the priests had become corrupt...

Verses 10-13...

Do you see what Amaziah did? First of all, he sent word to the king saying Amos was conspiring against him, and secondly he told Amos to get out of town. He implied that Amos was a prophet for hire...

"Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah, and **there** eat bread and **there** do your prophesying."

Well, what was Amos' response?

Verses 14-17...

Amos wasn't arrogant! Amos stated very plainly however that his message came from the Lord. This was not something he had thought up on his own...this was straight from God and his authority was God!

So with that in mind, let's go back to

Amos 1:2...

Amos sets forth that what he is about to say is from the Lord! Then, Amos begins to pronounce judgment on the heathen nations around about Israel and Judah.

Verses 3-5...

Over and over we're going to see this expression:

"...for three transgressions and for four..."

This doesn't stand for a specific number. This expression means the measure of the iniquity is full and wrath must fall upon the wicked. This expression means God had patiently waited until their iniquity had reached its completion. Remember what your parents said, "just keep on" and you did and finally they reached their end in patience and punished you?

God is a God of patience. He waits and waits for folks to come to Him, but God is also a God of holiness and of justice. There comes a day when God will not wait any longer. He **must and will** judge the sins of men.

So, first Amos begins at **Damascus** and he says God will judge them because they threshed Gilead with tools of sharp iron. Who were the people of Gilead? They were God's people!

Where is Damascus? It's in Syria. Syria is just north of Israel, isn't it? Syria was captured by the Assyrians thus fulfilling this prophecy.

By the way, these people are **still** staunch enemies of Israel. God judged them way back then and God will judge them again for the way they've treated His children.

Verses 6-8 tell us judgment was pronounced upon **Gaza**. Gaza was a Philistine city. Have you heard of the Gaza Strip? Well, it's currently in Israeli territory, but some of the recent peace accords were written up to give this parcel of land back to the Arabs. But, back then the judgment of God came upon Gaza when King Hezekiah destroyed it around 700 B.C.

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You know, it wouldn't be a bad idea if the folks who are so quick to draw up peace accords would read the Bible, would it?

Verses 9 and 10 tell us of God's judgment against **Tyre**. There had been a treaty between Phoenicia (Tyre) and Judah and Israel, but Phoenicia broke the treaty... "the covenant of brotherhood" spoken of in **verse 9**. Alexander the Great destroyed Tyre around 330 B.C.

Verses 11-12 tell us of God's judgment against **Edom**. Who were the Edomites? They were the descendants of Esau. That's why **verse 11** tells us they pursued their "brother" with the sword. Esau and Jacob were twin brothers. **From Jacob came the Jews. From Esau came the Edomites.**

The city of Petra is in what was once Edom. And Petra is a great tourist attraction, but you won't find any Edomites there today. The Assyrians came against Edom in the eighth century B.C. and Edom was turned into a desolate wasteland by the fifth century B.C., and overtaken by an Arabian tribe (the Nabateans) around 400-300 B.C.

Verses 13-15 tell us of God's judgment against **Ammon**. The Ammonites were a violent people and they murdered and pillaged and ravished the Jewish people and God says, "I will judge you for this." This is what is now the city of Amman, Jordan. Modern Jordan has been built upon the ruins of the nation of the Ammonites.

Amos 2:1-3 tell us that God pronounced judgment upon **Moab**. This was the land from whence Ruth came. **Deuteronomy 23** tells us that no Moabite was allowed into the Temple down to the tenth generation. The Babylonians came in and totally destroyed Moab and they don't even exist anymore.

Do you see what Amos is doing? He has gone to Israel and he is pronouncing God's judgment on all the heathen nations all around Israel. But in **verse 4**, we see him getting a little closer to home. In **verse 4**, he zeroes in on Judah, doesn't he?

Verses 4-5...

See, the heathen nations had transgressed the universal covenant God had made with all mankind when He made the covenant with Noah. By their acts of **barbarism** and their **wholesale slave trade** and their **vicious hatred** and **atrocities**, they had broken the covenant that forbade such inhuman acts. You have to go all the way back to **Genesis 9** to see this.

Also, they had harmed God's people. In fact, Amos speaks with divine eloquence of the dangers involved in harming the Jews...the **"apple of God's eye."**

But, the people of **Judah** had broken another covenant. God had made a covenant with just the Jews. It was given to Moses. It was called the Mosaic Covenant. It was called "the Law."

And God said, **"You rejected My law and you did not keep My statutes and your lies have led My people astray."**

God had called His people to a much higher standard than He had called the heathens. He didn't want His people living like heathens! He mentions specifically "lying" here.

I was interested to see an interview of Dan Rather on "The O'Reilly Factor" a couple of weeks ago.

Dan Rather has written a book. Tom Brokaw wrote one and

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it became a best seller so Dan Rather thought he better write one, too. Anyway, as Bill O'Reilly interviewed Dan Rather, he asked him if he thought Bill Clinton was an honest man. And Dan Rather said, "Yes."

Bill O'Reilly reminded Dan Rather that Bill Clinton had lied to Congress and lied to the American people.

And to this Dan Rather said, "Well, I believe a man can lie and still be honest."

Really? That's not what God says!! In fact, God says He will judge those who lie! God said He would burn Judah with fire that would consume Jerusalem and He did...Nebuchadnezzar burned Jerusalem to the ground and then the Romans came along later and did the same thing!

Well, when Israel heard Amos pronounce judgment on the heathen nations and then heard Amos pronounce judgment on Judah, they **might** have gotten a little uncomfortable. However, as we've already mentioned, the ten Northern tribes and the two Southern tribes were at war with each other a great deal of the time...**so no doubt they nodded their heads in agreement with Amos' assessment of Judah...**

But look at

Verses 6-8...

Now Amos is pronouncing judgment on Israel! Why? What had Israel done?

Well, they had sold their own people into slavery!

They had oppressed their own poor!

They had become immoral!

They had profaned God's house!

Verses 11-12...

They had made the Nazirite drink wine...

See, they weren't content to just break God's laws **themselves**...they were making other folks break **their** vows to God as well. If Nazirites were corrupted, there would be little good among the Israelites... Look at Jesus' church in America...

The bottom line is this...they had transgressed the revealed will of God! They had what the heathen nations never had...they had the Law of the Lord!

And God makes what they've done come into clearer focus by reminding them of just some of the things He had done for them...

Verses 9-10...

God is saying, **"I did things for you I never ever did for any other nation."**

And to us, God is saying, **"For centuries I reserved the land that is now known as America. I then had it discovered. I wanted it to be used for good. I wanted to channel My blessings to other parts of the world from this nation...and that's what happened at first. But, now, America, you have left Me...and you have become as corrupt as My beloved Israel."**

Verse 13...

God is saying, **"You've put Me in a difficult situation. You're My people. I put you in the land, and I put**

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**the Amorites out. Now, here you are...
committing the same sins they commit!**

**Do you expect Me to shut My eyes to your
sin because you're My people? I'm pressed
down 'as a wagon is weighted down when
filled with sheaves.'"**

Verses 14-16...

What does this say to you and me?

Well, it's a picture of a strong and mighty army that will go down in defeat. It's a picture of a smug and self-confident people who are trusting in themselves and they're falling under the justice of God's wrath.

DOES THIS REMIND YOU OF ANYONE YOU KNOW?

Look down at **3:10...**

"...they do not know how to do what is right..."

The people of Israel were drowning in sin. The people of America are, too.

The people of Israel could no longer tell right from wrong. The people of America can't either.

There was no longer any national conscience in Israel and America has lost her conscience as well.

**A nation is on the verge of collapse when good and evil look
the same. A nation is in serious trouble if questions of right
and wrong no longer even enter the people's minds. A nation
is in trouble when folks who lie are called "honest."**

A nation is made up of individuals, isn't it?

God had called His people to be the light to the other nations around them. He has called you and me to be salt and light to those around us.

May God help us to do that. May our lives and our witness and our walk and our prayers make a difference in our country. May God stay His hand of judgment upon America because we repent and turn back to Him.

If we continue the way we're going, I'm afraid we're going to suffer the same sort of judgment Israel and Judah faced. And like Israel and Judah of long ago, we don't want to hear that, do we? May God use you and me to make an impact in our little circle... After all, that's all He holds us accountable for, isn't it?