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What's the Point....of Amos?

Mark Garner

As Amos laments over human ways, he also reassures us that God is a never-failing stream of righteousness and justice and mercy. Amos prophesied in the first half of the 700s BC, when most of the Israelites were unfaithful. This world's circumstances and appearances change constantly, yet God and the purposes of his heart will not change.

A Never-Failing Stream (Overview Of Amos)

The prophet addresses the Israelites as well as the surrounding nations. Each time he says, "for three sins, even for four" God is distressed; that is, as soon as he enumerates their sins, he sees yet another (Amos 1-3). After addressing Aram (Syria), the Philistines, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, he also describes the idolatry, faithlessness, and pride both in Judah and in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Though the prophet's words are stern, and they warn of discipline, he is giving them yet another chance to soften their calloused hearts and to worship him in truth, instead of relying on outward appearances and human strength.

The prophet calls them to "seek the Lord, and live" (Amos 4-6); for although they worshiped God outwardly, instead of drawing them closer, this hardened their hearts and gave them a sense of false security. So God tells them to "prepare to meet your God", to pause and contemplate who he really is. God tells them not to seek him in a special place, instead to seek God for his own sake, for he is not far whenever we turn to him.

Our Heavenly Father's vastness is beyond us to understand fully, and he is a holy God whose ways and thoughts are far higher than ours. The Lord tells the Israelites that they cannot make themselves righteous through human efforts and human reasoning, so instead they should let God's righteousness flow. Our Heavenly Father asks us to worship him in truth and in the Spirit, so that his own righteousness and his grace and his truth may flow like a never-failing stream.

God tells Israel, Judah, and the other nations that he will shake them, an image of shaking off the dust and chaff; and he tells them he will use a sieve to prevent the pebbles from falling to the ground, an image of his promise to save anyone who seeks him in truth (Amos 7-9). The Lord also uses the image of him using a plumb line; that is, he will show them that their foundation is faulty and needs to be rebuilt.

As our Heavenly Father does this with them, he also refines and purifies us spiritually, and he reminds us all of our need for his mercy and his understanding. Amos concludes with the comforting image of God rebuilding the ruins. In our walk with God, he renews us inwardly day-by-day, and sometimes he may need to repair our broken walls. God can always give us spiritual nourishment, and he promises us that when we seek him with a humble heart, he will be there.

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What's the Point....of Amos? Caleb Dillinger

Amos was a shepherd when the word of the Lord came to him concerning Israel's neighboring nations, as well as Judah, and Israel (reminder: Israel and Judah split to form two separate kingdoms). The bulk of the message could be boiled down to: you will face judgment for your sins. But no matter the anger of the Lord, the same message can be found at the end of Amos as all the other messages of judgment: there will be restoration.

One of the most significant reasons to read Amos today is to be reminded that WHO you are pales in comparison to HOW you live. Non-Israelites committed sinful actions and were judged accordingly. And God's own people, split between two kingdoms, also were committing sinful actions and God judges them accordingly! Claiming to be one of God's people is not the same as acting in the way God wants his people to act. There are plenty of teachings from God on how to behave. The challenge is living according to those teachings! If you persist in your failings, you are liable to punishment. But it's not a punishment to soothe God's wrath. It's a punishment meant to bring you back to His ways.

This is where the middle of Amos picks up. God punished Israel, expecting them to turn to him. Except, for various reasons, they didn't! So he punished them a different way, and still they persisted in sin, refusing to turn to God. Amos brings out God's desired response when you are being punished for your sins: "Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing" (Amos 5:4-5). Amos is highlighting how turning to other places and gods won't save you. The only proper response to God's punishment is turning back to God!

After hearing these accusations, Israel's leaders still refuse to repent. Instead, they seek to banish Amos because of his teachings! This brings out another reason to read Amos today: just because you speak the truth does not mean people will believe you or respect you. When living in sin, sinners don't want to be told how wrong they are, or how guilty they are. Instead, they will paint you in a bad light! But we are not to turn away from God simply because things are hard. And the lost, those living in sin, they will not be lost forever if they should ever choose to cling to the one who will save them: Jesus Christ.

Amos ends his message with that call: God will bring restoration. That's the point of reading Amos in the 21st century. Be reminded of your accountability, and look to God for hope.