

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

The Prophecies of Amos

Readings: *Amos 5:1-7:9; 8:1-9:15*

Reflections:

- The themes of Amos' prophecies echo everything we have encountered already in the narrative:
 - "Seek me and live" – God's cry for Israel to humble themselves and seek true relationship with God;
 - "You who turn justice into bitterness, and cast righteousness to the ground..." "...you who hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth." "You trample on the poor..." Israel has rejected both justice and mercy as they have victimized the weak and vulnerable.
- Conclusion? "For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times for the times are evil. Seek good, not evil that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph."
- We see here four basic insights in Amos' summary statement:
 - God sees everything
 - He is looking for a righteous people who display his heart of mercy and justice for the poor and weak
 - When evil dominates, good people go quiet
 - Repentance means practically seeking good, loving good and rejecting all forms of evil – it isn't just feeling sorry but actually pursuing God wholeheartedly "Seek me and live" and pursuing mercy and justice wholeheartedly "seek good, not evil."
- God's judgment is horrifying. "Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a

bear..." Israel has a history of rejecting God and then believing that God should just destroy their enemies. In fact, they are under judgment and so when they cry out to God for him to come in power, they do not realize that they are the ones who are under his judgment. This will be replayed again in the days of Jesus as the religious leaders believed that the Messiah would lead them in war against the Romans when in fact Jesus' own mission was to bring salvation to both Israel and the nations of the world. The only judgment that was to fall was against Jerusalem (Mark 13) and the Temple. Jesus' own words declared that he would come as a conquering king ("you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds") to bring judgment and destruction. This was fulfilled in 70 AD as the Romans invaded and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

- God's hatred of religion comes out full force. "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I can not stand your assemblies. Even though you bring burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them...Away with the noise of your songs! ...But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream."
- When our lives and heart are proud, selfish and opposed to the heart of God, then every outward form of devotion to God becomes empty religion. He hates the hypocrisy with a vengeance. We see this echoed again in Jesus' harsh words against the Pharisees in Matthew 23. God hates religion but he loves true relationship that is grounded in humility, love, mercy and justice.
- The image of a river or never failing stream is one rich in meaning. In a dry and arid land, a never failing stream or river is a source of life and vitality. This image of the river of life was found in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:10ff) and will be used again by Ezekiel (Ezra 47) and the apostle John (Revelation 22). Jeremiah will declare, "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13). Jesus will declare himself, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7:37-39). We see the image of a river or of living waters being used to capture this notion of God's grace and life being poured out. God desires his presence or Spirit (living waters) to so flow through his people that we bring his life and grace into a dying world.
- Again through Amos he names the core issue: "I abhor the pride of Jacob." All of these sins and acts of selfishness come down to the heart issue of pride. And the horrible judgment that is falling will not come like a river of life but a fire of destruction. (Amos 7:4-6). Amos uses the image of a plumb line to help the people visualize how far off base they are. God is measuring them and they are completely out of line with the heart of God. And what will happen in this season of judgment?

Israel will be exiled in a foreign nation (Amos 5:27); God will turn their religious feasts into mourning and singing into weeping (8:10); God will send a famine (8:11); Israel will be bit by the serpent in the great sea (Satan – see Revelation 12:9). Here we see that God’s judgment is against everything that Israel was promised: 1) Promised Land – now in exile; 2) The Law and the Temple – now a place of mourning and weeping; 3) Physical blessing and prosperity – now in famine; 4) They would be under the one God – bitten by the serpent, Satan. Everything that was meant to be the hope of Israel is now being wiped out. Again we see that this is the unfolding story of “what doesn’t work.”

- Does Amos say that this is the bitter end? No, he concludes his prophecies pointing to the day a new story will begin: the story of what does work. God declares, “I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins...new wine...gardens...plant Israel in their own land.” In a very real way Israel will return from Exile one day but this prophecy points to a time even further in the future when God will pour out healing and new wine (Mark 2:22 and John 2:3ff) through his Messiah. In this time it will not be Israel planted in their land but all nations being welcomed into a new secure kingdom that will transcend all borders and boundaries.