

# THE LION ROARS

The Book of Amos



St Matt's Bible Study Series

# An Introduction to the Book of Amos

(Resourced from J A Motyer, The Message of Amos – BST Series  
and The Message of the Prophets, J. Daniel Hays)

## The Setting

Amos 1:1 provides a very specific historical setting for his prophetic words: *'...the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel'*. Amos himself was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah but sent to the northern Kingdom of Israel to deliver the LORD's severe message. The reference to an earthquake, no doubt well known to his first readers, tightly locks his prophetic ministry to a relatively short span of time in the middle of the eighth century B.C.

Jeroboam II's reign in the northern kingdom Israel was marked by prosperity, especially among the upper classes. It's also extremely important to remember that since the division of the kingdoms the northern Israel had immediately fallen into idol worship, creating new worship centres with calf idols at Bethel and Dan (see 1 Kings 12). As the text will reveal, prosperity hadn't stopped religious practices. Indeed, religious observance (ritual) thrived, but it was of a kind that was an abomination to the LORD.

## The Message

Amos delivers the same basic message as the rest of the standard pre-exilic prophets:

1. Israel/Judah the elect people of God have broken the covenant (sinned against God & others). Therefore you had better repent!
2. No Repentance? Then judgement! Judgement will actually come to all the nations.
3. Yet there is hope beyond judgement for a glorious future restoration, both for Israel/Judah and for the nations.

The message of judgement dominates in Amos and we have to wait till the end of the book before the word of hope bursts forth from the page. His message revealed a rich understanding of world history and current affairs,

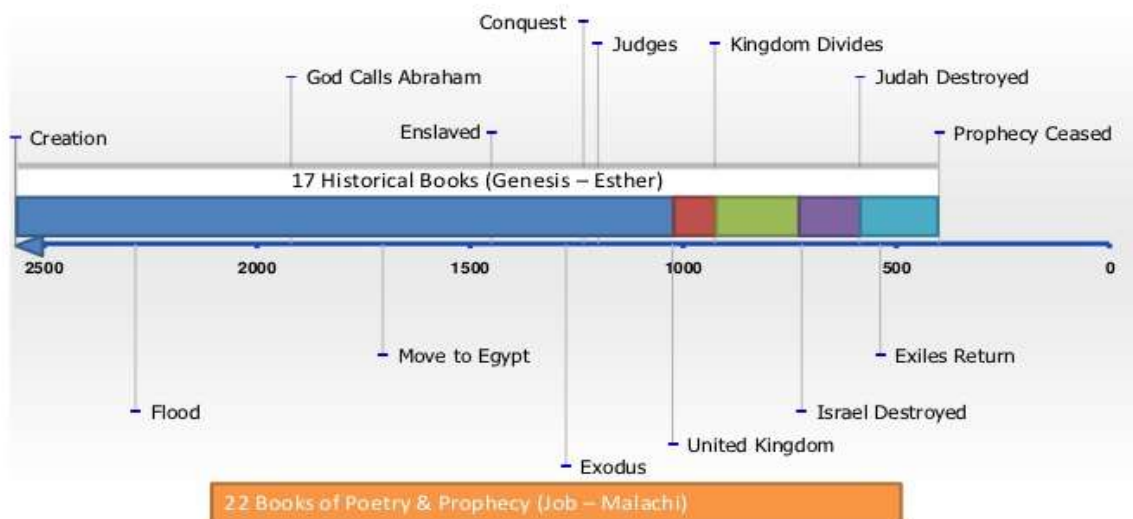
not to mention the serious heart condition of God's people.

Amos' concentrated indictment of Israel focuses on three main sins: idolatry, social injustice and religious ritualism. The selfish and self-sufficient wealthy class come under an especially scathing critique. This ought to catch our attention given Australian wealth and the poverty and struggle to survive for many in our world.

## The Book's Place in the Old Testament

On the Old Testament Outline, Amos fits towards the end of the green section, just before Israel is destroyed:

# Old Testament Timeline



## The Man Amos

He is called a shepherd (1:1, 7:14), although the term probably refers more accurately to a 'breeder of sheep'. He also refers to himself as one who takes care of sycamore-fig trees (7:14). Amos is a shepherd/farmer by occupation. He is from Tekoa, deep in the Kingdom of Judah about 10 miles south of Jerusalem and yet the LORD (Yahweh) calls him to preach a stinging rebuke against the wealthy ruling families of the northern kingdom Israel. Not surprisingly, the rustic prophet's critical message was not well received by the sophisticated upper classes that controlled Israel.

## Suggested Resources for Small Group Leaders

I highly recommend the following books:

J. A. Motyer, The Message of Amos: Bible Speaks Today Series,  
Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1974

T. D. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner Ed. New Dictionary of Biblical  
Theology, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England, 2000 p.242-245

J. Daniel Hays, The Message of the Prophets, Zondervan, Michigan  
USA, 2010 p.285-296

### Content of Preaching Series and Bible Studies

|              |                                  |
|--------------|----------------------------------|
| Amos 1-3:8   | 'The Lion Roars'                 |
| Amos 4:1-13  | 'Come to Church and Sin!'        |
| Amos 5:14-20 | 'How to Avoid Spiritual Loss'    |
| Amos 6:1-14  | 'False Security'                 |
| Amos 7:1-9   | '3-2-1 Lift Off!'                |
| Amos 8:1-10  | 'Will Your Rut Become a Grave?'  |
| Amos 9:11-15 | 'Light at the End of the Tunnel' |

## Study 1 – Amos 1-3:8 ‘The Lion Roars’

### Structure:

- 1:1-2 The Lion Roars
- 1:3-2:3 The LORD’s Judgement on the Nations
- 2:4-5 The LORD’s Judgement on Southern Judah
- 2:6-3:8 The LORD’s Judgement on Northern Israel

### Getting Inside the Text:

Read Amos 1:1-3:8 aloud and get a feel for the power of the message, remembering it was addressed to the Northern Kingdom Israel. On the map below locate the Nations and cities mentioned in the text.



### **Introductory Comment:**

Like many of the other prophets Amos' message incorporates a world view which understands the LORD (Yahweh) is the Lord of all the nations. Yes, the LORD has chosen Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and Israel (the Northern Kingdom) but He is invested in all of creation and will hold all people to account for the choices they make. Amos' opening message is very clever. One can imagine Israel listening and cheering with increasing delight as they heard of God's judgement on Israel's enemies, the surrounding nations (1:3-2:3). Maybe there was even a standing ovation as Israel's southern brother Judah came under Yahweh's condemnation (2:4-5). There was no love lost between these two constantly battling kingdoms, despite their original family connections.

### **Discussion Starter:**

How do we tend to react when someone challenges our behavior or beliefs?

1. What can we learn about the LORD from Amos' opening words in 1:2 and 3:8?

2. The recurring statement '*For three sins...even for four*' may emphasise God's patience before pronouncing judgement. It's interesting that idolatry isn't listed in the charges against the pagan nations, but crimes against humanity are. What specific sins are noted? Amos 1:3-2:3

### What about us?

- If Amos was addressing our society what sins might he highlight?
  
- Given the church is to be the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World (Matthew 5:13-16) what can we do about these sins?

3. What elements of the LORD's (Yahweh's) character emerge from the words of judgement in Amos 1:3-2:3?

What about us?

- Given the character of the LORD and the precarious situation of society before the judgement of God, what response should Christians embrace? See Mark 13:5-11; 1 Peter 2:9-12; 2 Peter 3:8-13

- From these words of judgement to the nations, what encouragement is provided for Christians today who endure persecution from atheistic and pagan nations?

4. How are Judah's sins different to those of the pagan nations in Amos 2:4-5?

5. In Amos 2:6 the prophet finally addresses Israel. What sins does the LORD hold against them? Amos 2:6-8, 12

6. How would you categorise Israel's sins?

What about us?

- If Amos was addressing the people of God today, what sins might he highlight?

7. Why does Yahweh (the LORD) expect more of Israel?  
Amos 2:9-11, 3:1-2

What about us?

- What advice does the Holy Spirit give to the church regarding falling into sin? 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; 2 Peter 1:3-11

**Close in Prayer:** [Give thanks that Jesus Christ bore our judgement on the cross. Pray that we might be courageous like Amos in letting God's word shape our ministry to the world (see 3:8).]





## Study 2 – Amos 4:1-13 ‘Come to Church and Sin’

### Structure:

- 4:1-3 Sins in the Wealthy Samaritan Home
- 4:4-5 Sins in the Well-attended Shrines
- 4:6-11 The Purposes of Yahweh (the LORD)
- 4:12-13 The Great Appeal of God

### Discussion Starter:

Ask one or two willing members of your small group to share a time when they wandered from God or grew cold in faith? What brought them back?

### Getting Inside the Text:

Read the whole chapter, noting in particular the contrasts between Israel and the LORD God.

1. How would you describe the tone of the text?

2. Note: Bashan was noted for its fat, sleek cattle. What does this say about the lifestyle of the wealthy Israelites? Amos 4:1

### What about us?

- What are the dangers of affluence and self-centredness today? Compare Revelation 3:14-22

3. Note: Swearing by his holy character the LORD adds weight, urgency and certainty to the coming judgement. How does the wealthy Israelite's current lifestyle contrast with the judgement God guarantees to bring? Amos 4:2-3

4. Bethel and Gilgal were unauthorized centres of worship for the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12:26-33; Hosea 4:15). What was sinful about Israel's prolific worship at these places? Amos 4:4-5

What about us?

- What could happen in the church and in the heart of Christians that the LORD could say to us, *'Come to church and sin?'*

5. What are the judgements the LORD brought on Israel and what was the purpose of these judgements? Amos 4:6-11

6. What can we learn about the character of God from this sequence of judgements upon Israel?  
[Hint: See Numbers 14:18; 2 Peter 3:8-9]

What about us?

- Do you think we sometimes need to be disciplined repeatedly before we will return to God? If so why?

Note: While there is debate on the intent of the phrase '*prepare to meet your God*' in 4:12, I'm persuaded by Motyer's arguments in his Bible Speaks Today Commentary. There he explains this verse as a final appeal for repentance, even as God's judgement, '*I will do this to you*', is almost knocking on the door.

7. Israel needs to be prepared to meet God. How does Amos 4:13 describe Him?

- Compare John's vision of Jesus in Revelation 1:12-18

What about us?

- How can these descriptions of God and the Risen Christ Jesus assist us in preparing to meet the LORD?

**Close in Prayer:** [Take some time to praise the Lord God for who he is as revealed in Amos 4:13 and Revelation 1:12-18. Also pray for people who are caught up in sin and need to repent: saints and sinners.]

## Study 3 – Amos 5:14-20 ‘How to Avoid Spiritual Loss’

### Structure:

|         |                          |
|---------|--------------------------|
| 5:14-15 | The Call to Repentance   |
| 5:16-17 | The Despair of Judgement |
| 5:18-20 | The Day of the LORD      |

### Discussion Starter:

What is it about evil things that can keep us from doing good?

### Getting Inside the Text:

This study follows the structure of Motyer’s commentary and highlights how the headings in Bible translations aren’t always the best guides for breaking up a passage. Read the text aloud noting the flow of the argument.

1. What does the LORD God Almighty desire from his people?  
Amos 5:14-15

2. What flows from pursuing God’s ways? Amos 5:14-15

### What about us?

- What might ‘seeking and loving good’ look like for St Matthew’s?

3. In Amos 5:16-17 what will be the result of God's '*passing through Israel's midst*'?

*What about us?*

- God's judgement is devastating and comprehensive. It touches both city and rural communities. Therefore, how should we respond?

4. It would appear that Israel is blind to their sin and therefore confidently they say, *the LORD is with us*' (5:14) and they naively '*long for the Day of the LORD*' (5:18). But what will the Day of the LORD actually bring to Israel? Amos 5:18-20

*What about us?*

- Psalm 139:23-24 reads '*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*' Take the time right now to stop and pray this prayer for your own life, your group's life and the life of St Matthew's. Write down those things the LORD brings to mind, items in our lives and our community, which we may have been blind to.

- Christians, and even Churches, can proclaim to be disciples of Jesus but live in ways which contradict this claim. What can cause such spiritual blindness? [Recall the couple in 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 and the church in Laodicea mentioned in Revelation 3:17.]

5. Knowing the Day of the LORD is coming should make a difference to our walk of faith. How?

- Matthew 28:18-20

- 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

- 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

- 2 Peter 3:11-14



**Close in Prayer:** [Don't forget to pray for your family and friends, who are outside the grace of God and largely oblivious to, or rejecting of, the coming Day of the LORD.]

## Study 4 – Amos 6:1-14 ‘False Security’

### Structure:

|             |                      |
|-------------|----------------------|
| Amos 6:1-7  | The Folly of Pride   |
| Amos 6:8-14 | The Tragedy of Pride |

### Discussion Starter:

What are the dangers of pride? Make a list.

### Getting Inside the Text:

Read the passage aloud remembering that Amos would have been preaching this to the religious, wealthy, leadership population of Israel.

1. Who is Amos addressing and how does he describe them? Amos 6:1-2

[Note: 6:2 is a reference to three substantial cities of other nations but none surpassed the Kingdoms of Israel or Judah.]

2. How does Amos colourfully describe the ‘*notable men’s*’ complacency in 6:3-6?

3. What will be the consequences for these leaders? Amos 6:7

What about us?

- How can prosperity and apparent security lead to complacency for believers and for the church in their devotion to God?

- What should grieve us today about our personal lives, our church and our nation?

4. What is the Sovereign LORD's attitude towards Israel's pride and self-confidence? Amos 6:8, 13

5. Why is their pride and security ill founded? Amos 6:12

[Note: The point of the two images in the first half of the verse is that Israel has done the impossible.]

6. What are the consequences of their pride and 'impossible' sins?

- Amos 6:9-11

- Amos 6:14

### What about us?

- We live in an incredibly wealthy and relatively safe community. We belong to a reasonably healthy church with a biblical vision and values statement and many quite effective ministries.

What can we do and/or continue to do to avoid becoming filled with pride or spiritual complacency?

### **Personal Task:**

Write down at least one thing you will change about the way you live as a result of this study.

If comfortable, share it with your group or another member for the purposes of accountability.

**Close in Prayer:** [Pray that God will remove from our lives and the church any elements of 'foolish pride' or complacency in our discipleship.]

## Study 5 – Amos 7:1-9    ‘3-2-1 Lift Off’

### Structure:

Amos 7:1-6      Envisions a Praying Prophet and the Repentant LORD  
Amos 7:7-9      The Vision of Judgement that Remains

### Discussion Starter:

What do your personal and group prayers suggest about the nature and character of the God you are talking with?

### Getting Inside the Text:

Read the passage aloud, pausing after each vision (7:1, 4 and 8) in order to picture the vision in your mind.

1. In contrast to what Israelites think of themselves, how does Amos consider the nation when it's confronted by the potential judgements of the LORD Amos 7:1 & 4?

### What about us?

- How ought we to think of ourselves when we consider the nature of our Sovereign LORD? See Mark 9:33-37

- What might being a 'little one' before God look like in our daily lives?

2. Why does the LORD relent regarding the first two visions?  
Amos 7:2-3, 5-6

3. What type of judgements are the first two visions? Amos 7:1, 4.  
[Hint: Note the source of the fire in Amos 1:4, 7, 10, etc.]

4. What changes in the language can you find in the LORD's responses to Amos' two cries for mercy? Amos 7:2-3, 5-6

[Note: Motyer suggests that the additions are an emphatic solemn divine affirmation, which rules out any idea of the total destruction of God's people.]

*What about us?*

- How do we know that in Christ Jesus we will never be destroyed by either natural or supernatural threat? How many scriptures can you locate that give expression to the believer's eternal security?

- From Amos, what can we learn for today about intercession?

5. What is the third vision? Amos 7:7-8

6. Since Israel (the wall) had been built with God's true plumb line, this vision was a test to see if Israel was still aligned with God's original construction. How do we know they weren't? Amos 7:8c

7. What does Amos 7:9 specifically mention as being out of plumb within Israel? For the historical background refer 1 Kings 12:25-30; 15:25-26, 33-34.

*What about us?*

- What value has the plumb line for us today?  
Romans 3:19-26; 7:7-13; 8:1-4 and Galatians 3:21-29

- What disciplines can we incorporate into our life that can keep us aligned with God's person and purposes?

**Close in Prayer:** [Pray that St Matt's will be a church where Christ's generosity shapes all we do and say, corporately and individually.]

## **Study 6 – Amos 8:1-10 'Will Your Rut Become a Grave'**

### **Structure:**

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Amos 8:1-3  | A Basket of Ripe Fruit Ready for Judgement |
| Amos 8:4-6  | Why the Fruit of Israel is Ripe            |
| Amos 8:7-10 | The LORD's Judgement Described             |

### **Discussion Starter:**

Sometimes our walk with Christ can feel like we are in a rut, that is, we have very little life and growth. What can make us feel like this? How could a spiritual rut become a spiritual grave?

### **Getting Inside the Text:**

Read the passage aloud, keeping in mind that the prophet's message may well have been delivered as Israel brought in their harvest hampers. These were token offerings of thankfulness for all the prosperity the LORD had given.

[Note: Motyer comments helpfully on a pun contained in the original Hebrew of Amos 8:2. *'Israel came into the presence of God not just with ripe fruit but as ripe fruit, ripened over all the months and years of moral and spiritual...(disappointment).'*]

1. The people of Israel continue to carry out rites of religion but are oblivious to the fact they are a disappointment to the very LORD they come to worship. What is so sad about this fact? Amos 8:1-2

2. How will things change for Israel when the day of judgement arrives?  
Amos 8:3



3. How does Amos describe the lifestyle of those who are ripe for judgement? Amos 8:4-6

*What about us?*

- The August 2015 Southern Cross diocesan magazine contained an article on abuse with a story of an Anglican minister who had abused his wife. Yet this man had continued to serve his local church. Discuss how such obvious hypocrisy could occur. Consider other areas where we ourselves claim to be following Jesus, but in fact fall way short of biblical morality.

[Hint: Think about the practices of Israel mentioned in Amos 8:4-6 and the principles which underpin these sinful actions.]

- What advantage do Christians have over ancient Israel when it comes to overcoming our natural propensity to be selfish and damage our relationships? Galatians 5:13-26; 1 John 1:8-2:2

4. How does Amos describe the 'harvest' Israel will experience in 8:7-10?

*What about us?*

- Here the LORD promises there will come a day when Israel will be forced into mourning because their sin has been brought on their heads. By contrast, what does Jesus teach are the spiritual qualities of authentic disciples, in Matthew 5:3-10?

- Discuss how we might develop the discipleship qualities mentioned in Matthew 5:3-10?

### **Close in Prayer:**

[Pray for forgiveness for areas of our lives where we have caused offence and then pray for our contacts, who need Jesus, that we will be more faithful in our witness to them from this time on.]

## **Study 7 – Amos 9:11-15 ‘Light at the End of the Tunnel’**

### **Structure:**

Amos 9:11-12            The LORD’S Vision for Israel and the World

Amos 9:13-15           The Glorious Hope of Israel’s Restoration

### **Discussion Starter:**

*‘Hope gives meaning and purpose to people’s lives.’* Do you agree with this statement? Discuss your responses.

### **Getting Inside the Text:**

Read the passage aloud, mindful that the content stands in stark contrast to all that has been preached until this point. Here we genuinely have hope’s light at the end of what has been a long, dark tunnel of judgement.

1. What is the first positive element of restoration that will take place *‘in that day’*? Amos 9:11

2. What is the purpose of this restoration? Amos 9:12

3. Who will oversee this restoration of Jerusalem, David’s city?  
Amos 9:11-12

4. How does Acts 15:13-19 make use of this text and how does this help us understand its meaning?

What about us?

- The LORD is concerned to welcome all nations into his Kingdom. How ought this shape our personal and corporate lives as citizens of the Kingdom while we await the Day?

[Check out: Matthew 5:13-16; 28:18-20; Philippians 2:12-16; Colossians 4:2-6; 1 Peter 2:9-12; 3:13-17; 2 Peter 2:8-12

- Endeavour to come up with one practical way your group and/or family could effectively reach out with the hope of the gospel to people who are not yet Christians.

[Note: Motyer comments on this passage: *'If the coming Messiah is the second David (9:11), He is also the second Adam reigning in a restored Eden (9:13-15).'*]

5. How is life described in the newly restored land?

- 9:13

- 9:14 (compare Amos 5:11)

6. What does the LORD promise to Israel in Amos 9:15?

7. If the land is now Israel's forever, what does that imply about the situation being described in Amos 9:11-15? Compare Revelation 21:1-8

[Hint: The Old Testament consistently teaches that the inheritance, the land, is lost by sin. See Deuteronomy 28:58-68]

8. How do the final words of Amos provide a sort of guarantee of the hope just described? Amos 9:15c; compare Revelation 21:5

*What about us?*

- Make a list of the things that can destroy or distract us from the hope we have in the gospel of God.

- Read some of the hope-full promises of God and consider how they address the list above: Amos 9:11-15; Isaiah 61:1-3; Romans 8:18-39; Ephesians 1:3-14

**Close in Prayer:** [Pray for the lost who have no hope without Christ and for those believers who are overwhelmed by their current difficulties and struggle to hold onto hope.]



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