Thoughts on Amos in general and specifically on Amos chapter 9

An Introduction

- More people in human history have been and are currently being exploited and abused in the cause of religion than in any other cause. Sex, money and power have been and are still powerful, but they have to take a back seat as a **source of evil**.
- Religion is the most dangerous "energy source" known to man. The moment a person or tribe or government or organisation or religion is convinced that God is ordering (or at least sanctioning) a cause to enhance the religion's power, then anything goes.
- In the history of religion-fuelled hate, the killing and oppression over known history is staggering!
- Amos the prophet continues to be an effective, powerful voice to believers in the Lord Jesus. He is honest about the abuse of religion, but humble and compassionate at the same time.
- We need to be able to detect injustice **and especially injustice that is dressed up as religion**. We need to detect **hypocrisy** masked by religion. We should never be impressed by position and power. We must never be fooled by numbers, size or the appearance of success.
- The key to developing a sense of justice is to **listen to God** and rigorously test human actions and language by God's standards.
- Amos was a defender of the poor and an accuser of the powerful rich who used God's name to legitimize their sin.
- In our day it is easy to absorb the evangelical atmosphere in our churches of a certain degree of self-satisfaction that we at least are doing okay. But we must spend time keeping company with these Biblical prophets. So often what we do as believers has something of being self-serving in our attitudes and behaviour.
- A spiritual life that doesn't give a large place to the issue of justice will make us worse and separate us from God's way.

Some Historical Background

About 180 years before the time of Amos ~930 BC, King Jeroboam 1 led off the ten northern tribes of Israel to form the Kingdom of Israel. But in the Northern Kingdom, those in power always had a sense of insecurity. Why? Everyone had to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem – the capital of "the enemy" – at least once a year. To avoid this, the Old Testament writers said that Jeroboam committed "the sin of Jeroboam" which was to use religion in the interest of politics.

So in the Northern Kingdom, at Bethel, they built a duplicate temple that was a replica of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. A new "feast" was initiated on the 15th day of the eighth month and Jeroboam offered up sacrifices as a priest/king (See 1 Kings 12:32-33 and 31:1).

Abraham, Moses, David and Amos were all shepherds in sparse grassland areas. It was a life where God taught them the scale of true values – true religion. God demands justice and He demands justice from all people everywhere, but very especially from those who worship Him.

Sadly, God's people in history have often been self-centred, self-willed and obstinately blind to their own faults. An example would be the Pharisees in the time of the Lord Jesus. At least in the Northern Kingdom, the leaders were oppressing the poor in order to live in luxury (Amos 4:1, 5:11, 6:3-7) and they did this by dishonest trade (Amos 8:5-6). Then there were sins of immorality (Amos 2:7) and injustice in the law courts (Amos 5:7, 12)

Amos was well informed about history and about current affairs especially those of the surrounding nations – over the other side of the Jordan and in the whole Near East region. His hearers in Bethel

must have loved it when he was preaching and he was critical of those surrounding nations and pronounced God's judgement on them, but they probably got very uncomfortable when he also spoke of God's judgement on them!

Perhaps what we have is a distillation of what he said. His main message (1:3-3:2) can be delivered in less than 5 minutes. It covers the ground very rapidly. Perhaps it is just a record of Amos' notes.

Just understanding what Amos says isn't enough. Like food in a deep freeze, it needs to be taken out, thawed, tasted, swallowed and digested to make it valuable to us.

- Amos rebukes our formalism and traditions.
- He exposes our sins of religious self-pleasing.
- He says we must be committed to obedience.
- He says we must have a ceaseless concern for the needy.

Amos wasn't a popular prophet. For most people he was a "disaster howler". He likened God to a roaring lion. He had four main points:

- He emphasised the people's sin.
- He warned of coming judgement.
- He spoke of the righteousness and holiness of God.
- He also spoke of the mercy of God and the deliverance God was offering.

To me a key verse is Amos 5:4, ***"Seek me and live"***. Don't try and be "religious".

We have looked at four visions of Amos:

- **Fire** – but the judgement was withheld. (7:4-6)
- **Locusts** – the spring crop would be destroyed leading to famine. Amos intercedes and judgement is averted.
- **A plumb line** – God's judgement was justified. (7:9)
- **Summer fruit** – God's judgement was imminent. (8:14)

Now we have a fifth vision (Amos 9:1-10)

The Lord God is beside the altar and judgement comes. This is the last vision in Amos. Did Amos' vision of God raise his hopes that God would relent and bless His people? God's words soon convinced Amos that this would not be so. God was going to destroy the chief sanctuary/temple at Bethel in such a way that it would bury those "priests" within. Archaeologists say that it was probably destroyed by an earthquake. There was no escape from God's judgement on the Northern Kingdom. They had fallen into the ***"Hands of the Living God"***. (Heb. 10:31)

Chapter 9: The War on Pretence – the Final Judgement

Amos 9:1-8

v. 1. God will shatter the columns of Jeroboam's Temple and bring down the roof and destroy the priests and idolatrous worshippers. Remember that with God's help Samson did the same to the Philistines.

The Amplified Old Testament: ***"I saw the Lord standing on the altar and He said, 'Smite the tops of the pillars until the thresholds tremble and shatter them on the heads of the people and the remainder of them I will slay with the sword. He who flees shall not get away. He who escapes shall not be delivered."***

There is no escape from God's judgement and there are no mistakes in those to whom God gives salvation. ***"My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father who has given them to Me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."*** (Jn. 10:27-29)

The Sovereign Lord is Lord of **all.**

- ✓ the physical earth
- ✓ all human beings everywhere
- ✓ the condition of every person everywhere at any time
- ✓ the heavens and earth are open to His use

So the answer to man's **pretence** is judgement. The essence of pretence is throwing a cloak of religion over it. But in reality that life is motivated by self. That was the sin of Jeroboam – religion as a tool whereby self could be secured and life be made safe and comfortable for self.

v. 5. This implies that the Northern Kingdom will be overwhelmed by the disastrous and inescapable judgement of God the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and this came about eventually after a long period of mercy and the ministry of prophets such as Elijah and Elisha.

v. 7. The Lord God is the Ruler of history and of time. He is behind all movements and migrations in history – Israel from Egypt, the Philistines from the collapse of the Minon civilisation (a volcanic island blew up causing huge waves) etc.

"For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1 Cor. 4:7)

v. 8-9. God will destroy the Northern Kingdom eventually despite His mercy in sending Elijah and Elisha to them and all their mighty works. But the Southern Kingdom would be preserved for a while longer. It was destroyed by the Babylonians.

The Lord views with hostility those living in a **spiritual dream world** with no holiness, no sense that the reward for sin is destruction and no sense that God will one day hold them to account. They see religion merely as a useful prop for the 'establishment'.

v. 7. Divine government operates everywhere not just for believers. God is working in the history of every nation/tribe and in every racial migration. It is no more a privilege to be a Jew than an Englishman, an Indian, a Chinese or a Patagonian living near Cape Horn. The Lord rules all and appoints a place for all – a place they can settle.

We often sing a Christmas Carol with the line: "And men shall live for evermore because of Christmas day." But this is not true! The Lord Jesus was born possibly in 6 or 5 BC. For we know that Herod died in 4 BC. Just because the Messiah has been born, it doesn't guarantee spiritual life for evermore to anybody.

There is One Lord who rules all peoples. All are subject to His sovereign will. It is a historic fact that God can, by His will, become a means of blessing to anyone or any people. But at the same time, He also judges all people. So we can learn from what has happened in the historic past, but what really matters is our moral present.

Every nation and people comes under God's moral scrutiny – the holy, all-seeing God. He will judge all people with equity. Our American friends sing a song, 'God bless America'. We are as bad if we sing in an exclusive way, 'God save our gracious Queen'. Our prayer is, 'God bless all people everywhere by bringing them under Your rule'. The problem with these nationalistic/religious songs is that they lead to complacency!

Amos 9: 8-10 – The Concept of a People within a People

" 'I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob' declares the Lord."

This is a repeat of Amos 7:1-6. But these verses show that even in the Northern Kingdom there were some people living lives of holiness and accordingly they were true in their worship of a Holy God. So God will judge, but He can also sovereignly save. How? By the process of sifting with a sieve.

So our national history and personal history matters tremendously. If we live in the intellectual knowledge of all the benefits of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but in practice we never submit to His control of our lives, all our believing is phony. We are deceived and we are still in our sins.

The Jewish people were brought by God into Palestine, but so also were the Philistines. Anthropologists say the Ethiopians (some of them) never left their indigenous homeland. God is in control of all people movements.

Clearly in the time of Amos there was some good soil that went through the sieve. The pebbles were removed. Who are the pebbles? Probably those who say, ***"The evil shall not overtake us"***. (v. 10) These folk are not alarmed at what is happening to their nation. As they look into the future, they see no problems they can't cope with. It is to these people that disaster comes and nothing can avert this.

The problem we have as sinners is that we are not aware that our sin is the greatest threat to our existence now and throughout eternity. We dismiss the Law of God before which we stand condemned for, ***"All have sinned and fallen short"***. (Rom. 3:23) Because of our ignorance of our sin we dismiss the grace of God's provision for our salvation. For it is God's grace that provides for us the only way we can be redeemed. But normally we are complacent, careless sinners living in a world of pretence and make-believe.

Clearly there is some "good soil". How do you tell "good soil" from "pebbles" in God's sieve?

- We are sinners who are deeply concerned about our moral and spiritual state.
- We know about God's sieve and don't want to be a pebble – not even a small one. We want to be good fine soil.
- We long to fight a better war against sin in our own lives.
- We long for holiness.
- We love the teaching of the Lord Jesus on how to live to please Him.
- We rage against any form of pretence in ourselves.
- We aim above all else to please the Lord Jesus whom we love.

Amos 9:11-15 – The Promise of Restoration

At the great Council in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, James quotes from Amos, ***"That the residue of men may seek after the Lord and all the Gentiles who bear my name."*** (Acts 15:16-18). The Council met to decide what should be done with the non-messianic believers – i.e. Gentile believers like us. James argued from Amos 9:11-12 that this messianic prophecy was now being fulfilled before their very eyes!

There had always been a remnant of believing Jewish people (good soil). One example would be Simeon and Anna in Luke 2:25-28. They were looking forward to God's promise in 2 Sam. 7:8-17 where God says He will, ***"Establish the throne of (David's) kingdom for ever."*** They clearly believed that this was the Messianic Kingdom of the Lord Jesus. Israel had been scattered among the nations. But God is at work in our day. We should really study Romans 11 at this point, where it speaks of the ***"remnant of believing Jews"*** and the Gentiles being grafted into the people of God and then the final completion of the salvation of the Jewish people.

In effect, James said that:

1. The royal house of David would be brought into an extremely low position before the fulfilment of this prophecy. [The Lord Jesus was known as a poor labourer – a carpenter in a despised town.]
2. The royal house of David would be restored by great David's greater son – the Lord Jesus – the seed of David (Lk. 1:31-33).
3. Some people from all tribes, nations and languages would become believing followers of the Lord Jesus. (Mt. 24:14) This would even include the Edomites – nearly always enemies of Israel in the Old Testament. [Herod's ancestors were Edomites.] They would begin to seek the Lord. More of the Edomites later.
4. How could this be? ***"The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it."*** Romans 11 speaks about the ingathering of the Gentiles by the work of the Messiah alone ….. and ***"of His Kingdom there will be no end"***. (Lk. 1:32-33)

What follows? (v. 13-15) **A Time of Huge Blessing!**

<u>Why? The "curse" has been removed</u>!

Because the harvest is so prolific, there is hardly time to harvest before the next ploughing should be done. At that time, in Israel, you ploughed in October and sowed the seed. Harvest time came in April/May.

Here God is promising a period of very great blessing – a time of restoration – a time of peace – a time of plenty and great satisfaction. (See Is. 35:1-2). [Note that the land is a gift.] There is no sign of poverty or need. Wine seemed to flow like rivers.

The New Testament speaks of:

- ***"Pressed down and running over"*** (Lk. 6:38)
- ***"My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches."*** (Phil. 4:19)

It is a picture of blessing and restoration. It reminds me of the Parable of the Prodigal Son coming home – an amazing revelation of the love and mercy of God. God's glorious hand is in control. God's purposes and His Divine Sovereignty interplay with our repentant human hearts: ***"I will … they shall".*** (Amos 9:11, 14) This is an echo of, ***"The love of Christ constrains us"***. (2 Cor. 5:14)

The fact is that sin must be dealt with. God's judgement must come – not for revenge, but to preserve God's holy standards. Through the Lord Jesus, He has provided a way for us to repent. (Rom. 8:2) The blessings of His salvation are ours **now** and throughout eternity.

"God is working his purpose out
As year succeeds to year.
God is working his purpose out
And the time is drawing near.
Nearer and nearer draws the time,
The time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea"

Five Features of the Coming Day of the Lord

1. **The King** (v. 11-12)

These Old Testament prophets saw the Messianic King in the light of who **they** were:

- ✓ Ezekiel (a priest) saw the King/Priest bringing in a perfect priestly system (Ez. 40-48)
- ✓ Hosea, who loved his wife Gomer who deserted him and who he had to buy back, saw the Messianic King having a perfect marriage with His People. (Hosea 2:14 ff)
- ✓ Isaiah and Jeremiah saw the Messianic King as divine – Great David's Greater Son.

Amos, coming from Tekoa in Judah, certainly knew of booths (v. 11). Booths were flimsy, temporary structures that offered some shade but no protection. But the Messianic King will build "a booth" that will be glorious and strong! We are part of that "booth"!

In 1 Kings 12:32 King Jeroboam 1 stood at the altar in Bethel on the feast of booths acting as a false priest/king (a mockery of the order of the Messianic Priest/King of the order of Melchizedek) but God's Messiah would be a royal priest who would act as a mediator between the people and God and would be fully acceptable to God.

The Messiah is the second David and also the second Adam. He reigns in a restored Eden with all the natural bounty of the Messianic Kingdom (an echo of which is seen in Genesis 2 and 3 and in Deut. 28 and 29). For the great rebellion of man is over!!

2. **The End of the Separation of the Nations**

All nations are involved in the reign of the Messianic King. Why was Edom singled out? What does it mean to be ***"called by my name"***? What does ***"possess"*** mean?

- Edom was a symbol of all that is hostile to the Kingdom of God. Edom was the name given to Esau in memory of the red soup he exchanged for his birthright. (See Gen. 25:30; 36:1, 8, 19) The name was given to the descendants of Esau. They captured the land north of the Gulf of Aqaba both sides of the Arabah which is a continuation of the rift valley starting near Mt. Hermon and running down to the Gulf and the Red Sea and into Africa. They had kings long before Saul. (Gen. 36:31-39)
- The Israelites were forbidden to hate the Edomites (Deut. 23:7-8), but they usually did. Some Edomites served in King Saul's army. (1 Sam. 27:7)
- David conquered Edom and put garrisons throughout the land. (2 Sam. 8:13-14) Many Edomites died. 1 Kings speaks of Joab staying in Edom, ***"Until he had killed every male in Edom".*** Evidently some escaped to Egypt.
- The conquest of Edom allowed King Solomon to build the port that we call Aqaba today.
- From time to time Edom became independent – sometimes making an alliance with the Jews and sometimes with Moab against them. Amaziah, King of Judah, invaded Edom killing 10,000 Edomites in a battle in the Valley of Salt. He then captured their capital, Sela, just north-west of Petra. Another 10,000 were driven over a cliff to their death. (2 Kings 14:1-20; 2 Chron. 25) Edom became a vassal state of Assyria in 763 BC some time after King Amaziah was assassinated. When Judah fell to the Babylonian conquest the Edomites were delighted. (Ps. 137:7)
- In the third century BC, Edom was overrun by an Arab tribe – the Nabateans – descendants of Ishmael's eldest son Nabaoth. The Edomites fled into Judaea and there Judas Maccabeaus subdued them and John Hyracanus forced them to become Jews. The Herods were from these former Edomites.
- So the overthrow of Edom is a symbol of a **real** and **complete** end **<u>to all opposition</u>**. So when "Edom" falls, all worldly opposition is clearly and finally ended and the reign of the Messiah has arrived. But note that this doesn't mean a 'military conquest', but rather a process of incorporation.

- Edom and all nations, tribes and people ***"who are called by my name"*** are incorporated into the People of God. We Gentiles are fellow heirs of these great promises. We are members of the same family and partakers of all the promises of God – the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. (Eph. 3:6)
- In the Bible, the phrase, ***"called by my name"*** has the sense of possession. Joab called to David to come to the fall of Rabbah (now called Amman – the capital of Jordan). It was an urgent call. Why was this? In 2 Sam 12:28 Joab tells David, ***"Lest I take the city and it be called by my name"***. To have the name signifies conquest! We are often called "Christians". The implication is that Christ possesses us! But the Lord Jesus said, ***"If My Kingship were of this world, My servants would fight."*** (Jn. 18:36) We should never fight anybody as "Christians". We are to love all peoples everywhere.

  At the great Council of Jerusalem, James quotes this passage to demonstrate that all believers in the Lord Jesus have equal membership in the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

  - ✓ **Forgiveness** replaces guilt.
  - ✓ **Peace with God** replaces the fear of God and the dread of the tomb.
  - ✓ **The power of the Holy Spirit** replaces our helplessness.

  And you come into all these blessings by submitting yourself to the truth of the Lord Jesus found in the Bible and declared and explained to you by some other believer.

Amos had a worldwide vision!

3. **The End of the Curse on the Earth** (v. 13)

The Messiah is also the second Adam reigning in a restored Eden. The emphasis here is on the bounty of the Messianic Kingdom – a lavish and spontaneous abundance. There was almost no time to gather in the crops or the grapes. It was so lavish that the hills were oozing with sweet wine.

The context of this is Genesis 2 and 3 and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden – also Deut. 28:2-14 and chapter 29 – the blessings at Gerizim.

The natural physical world and the whole universe preserve something of the holy characteristics of the God who made them. But to some extent the earth goes into revolt and reverse when mankind perverts our relationship with its Creator.

If and when the basic spiritualities and moral realities have been put right and all is well between God and mankind – the rebellion is over and reconciliation has taken place – **<u>then</u>** all nature is liberated. The "curse" is gone and Eden is restored. (Gen. 3:17-18)

Note the lovely pictures in Isaiah 11:6 and 9, ***"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid and the calf and the young lion … together and a little child shall lead them." "They shall not hurt nor destroy …. For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea".***

4. **The End of Disappointment and Frustration** (v. 14)

Verse 14 is about the enjoyment experienced by God's People! In chapter 5:11 we read, ***"You build houses … but you will not live in them. You plant pleasant vineyards, but you will not drink their wine."***

What characterised these people was disappointment and frustration. But now we read, ***"Waste cities will be rebuilt … vineyards will be planted and the wine produced will be enjoyed …. Gardens with fruit trees will be planted and their fruit eaten by the planters."***

It is a picture of peace, plenty, satisfaction and beauty. (See also Is. 35:1-2) Sin brings disappointment and frustration. But one day the power of sin will be destroyed. **Then** there will be no more disappointments, no blight on what we do, no frustration at all!

5. **The End of Insecurity** (v. 15)

We should be, perhaps slowly, being delivered from the power of sin. Often we feel it is happening very slowly! But we are promised that we will be delivered one day from the **presence of sin**! We will be delivered from the **power of sin** and it is sin that brings frustration to our hopes. We are also set free from the **penalty of sin** by the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross.

So we will never be robbed of our inheritance – eternal life! In the Old Covenant, the People of God lost the land because of sin! (See Deut. 28:58-68) But the penalty of our sin has been borne by the Lord Jesus so we will never lose our inheritance and never ever be up-rooted again.

So this is a promise of eternal security!

Amos ends his book with a declaration: ***"Thus says the Lord"*** or ***"The Lord declares"***. God has committed Himself to make all this real in your life.

"God is not a man that He should lie nor a Son of Man that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfil?" (Numbers 23:19)