

- Amos Series, #1
- Actually read Amos 1:1-12, 2:4-3:2

Introduction

- Why some obscure little book in the middle of the Old Testament that most of us can't find?!
- Answerable at a number of different levels:
 - it "happened" to be about the right length to fit into June/early July!
 - I felt it said some things that we (as a congregation here, and as God's people in this day and age more generally) needed to hear;
 - because of a conviction that ALL of Scripture is from God, reveals him, and needs to be read and studied to shape our lives as Christians;
- Let me try and illustrate that last point a little:
 - its rather like Scripture is a car, designed to reveal God's way of bringing humanity to himself;
 - the driving force of that, the engine if you like, is Christ's death and resurrection;
 - but while an engine on its own may be powerful, it doesn't get anyone anywhere!
 - only when part of the car - part of God's whole revelation bl - does it hang together...
 - only understand need for reconciliation with God (which is what Christ accomplished on the Cross) if we understand the holiness of God, how much he hates sin;
 - only understand that it has to be Christ who achieves this for us if we see how impossible it is for man, even with the best start (God's own Law), to get anywhere near God by his own efforts...
- So it is essential that we consciously and carefully study the whole of Scripture, not just the bits we like or find easier to understand.
 - that's not to say its all alike!!
 - we deal differently with Amos and Acts, Leviticus and Luke, Psalms and Philippians.
- So.... that's why we are looking at Amos - pray God would speak to us as we do so!

Background

- To begin to understand what God might be saying through Amos, it really helps to understand something of the background to what he is saying, the world in which he was operating:
 - When: around 760 BC - ie 2760 years ago;
 - Who: Uzziah of Judah, and Jeroboam of Israel - both long reigning kings, suggesting a degree of stability for the region;
 - Who to: Israel, northern half of split kingdom of God's people;
 - International: a bit of a power vacuum between the larger neighbouring powers, leaving Israel free to expand (greater size implied greater control over trade routes which implied greater prosperity for the country as a whole);
- So we have a well-off elite in the Israelite capital Samaria, with no immediate threats on the horizon. What small hiccups do arise seem easily able to be dealt with using worldly political wisdom.
- Complacency, indolence, carelessness with God's standards.
- Amos himself was a shepherd from Tekoa, south of the border.
 - an outsider, an enemy, yet sharing much - akin to Northern Ireland and Eire!
 - and not a job commanding much respect - not a priest or a prince!
- God used a nobody, an outsider, one with no official status as his mouthpiece, to speak his words!

The Nations

- The whole of the first chunk of Amos is taken up with a series of prophecies or judgements against the nations of the area, including Judah and Israel.
- Bracketed between 1:2 "The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem" and 3:8 "The lion has roared - who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken - who can but prophesy?"
 - pronouncement of God's judgement on the nations!
- It would probably help to get a visual picture of who and where these nations were that come under God's judgement here:
 - surrounding Israel on all sides;
- Order is interesting:
 - in many ways, the judgements are getting closer to home as they go on;
 - the Philistines and Syrians were furthest away and had least in common with the Israelites nationally; those from Tyre and Edom were still quite distant, but a little closer; Ammon and Moab were closer still; and finally Judah is just next door, and essentially the same people.

The Judgements

- Remember that the first nations mentioned were heathen, godless, idol worshipping, lower than the low - in the eyes of the Israelites.
- And the crimes they committed in war were atrocities:
 - not just "par for the course" (though these were brutal times!);
 - (1:3) iron sledges, vicious way of slaughtering prisoners!
 - (1:6) whole communities - ethnic cleansing - rather than merely leaders, or fighters, or whatever....
 - (1:9) broke treaty, betrayal;
 - (1:13) ripping open pregnant women - even in ancient world was "not on";
 - (2:1) desecrating bones of the dead;
- Most akin to the kind of reaction you get these days to child sexual abuse.
- God will bring judgement on these - fine - they deserve it!!
 - but message is that God DOES bring judgement, not just sits back and lets things happen...

Judah (2:4-5):

- Distinctly less heinous crime in the eyes of the society of that day!
 - (2:4) "...they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed..."
- Turning back on God... (note how Amos is critical of his own people)
- Has two effects:
 - first, brings home seriousness of that as a crime when put beside these other judgements on the heathen nations.
(remember, this is the first & second commandments...)
 - second, also begins to open up realisation that God judges his own people as well as the heathen.

Israel

- Finally, last chunk of chapter 2, judgement on Israel.
 - OUCH!
 - bit too close to home; imagine the reaction: "we don't deserve... we haven't done anything like that.... splutter, splutter...!"
- They are being judged - not for ignoring religious observances, which they attended to.
 - but for their lifestyle, their standards!
- The way they used their money, the way they treated other people:
 - selfishness, greed, injustice, gluttony!
- These are not on for God's people

- and God will bring devastating judgement against even his own people.
- Picture of judgement (v.13) is graphic - **crushing by a fully-laden cart**, like a car crash or an industrial accident today.
 - **inescapable, devastating**, not a little slap on the wrists - playing for real!
- God **is** holy, pure, utterly righteous, and uncompromising in his hatred of all sin.
 - we talked of the incarnation this morning, and noted that the Jewish image of God was of a remote, unapproachable God - **and that such an image was one sided, unbalanced**
 - sometimes we go too far the other way and fail to hold God's holiness up beside his wonderful love; **our image can also be one sided, but the other side!**

Conclusion

- **Why?**
- That would have been the kind of bewildered question on the lips of the Israelites:
 - **"we thought we were God's people!"**
- Yes, you are indeed... (see 3:1,2!!)
 - ... **and that's exactly why such a high standard is expected of you!**

So of us too!

- **not so much externals**, whether we smoke or drink...
- **how we really are in our attitude to other people** - loving, self-giving, forgiving?
- **how we really are in our use of our money** - generous or selfish?
- **how we really are in our sexual standards** - our thought lives as well as our actions...
- God calls for the best from us:
 - **he gives us the best help, through his Spirit...**
 - **and our acceptance by him is on the basis of Jesus' perfection, not our own...**
- But in response to his Son's love, God looks for the highest standards from his people.
 - **let's pray for God's help to live his way!**