

- Amos series #3

Introduction

- We've got the **map** again tonight! Reminder of context:
 - northern & southern kingdoms, Israel and Judah;
 - **Amos**, from Tekoa in south, **sent by God to speak out words of judgement in the north**, and in particular to the ruling elite in Samaria, the capital city.
- Amos is hammering away at these Israelites - and in this chapter and a half we come to the **crux of the problem**, and the **crux of the solution**:
 - **the heart of the problem: the people's neglect of any living relationship with God;**
 - **and the heart of the solution: a repentant return to that relationship with God.**
- Amos addresses this at a number of different levels, but one of the key ways in which he tries to grab his audience's attention is by his references to three of the main pilgrimage destinations in Israelite worship:
 - **Bethel, Beersheba and Gilgal**
- These were shrines, with **associations** from incidents in the early history of God's people (**patriarchs, initial conquest of the land**) that made them **"special"** places of worship.
 - (remember Amos is speaking to people of the Northern Kingdom, and despite location of one of these places in the South, **none of them were Jerusalem** or acknowledged Jerusalem's claim to be the true place of worship...)
- Amos basically takes each of these revered shrines, and **holds the lives of the "worshippers" who go there up against the lives of the shrine's first visitors... Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua...**
 - "Look - it shouldn't be this way! You need to get your act sorted out!"
- So, **look at each shrine in turn** & draw together main thrust of Amos' message.

Bethel: place of God's proclamation

- Backdrop in **Genesis**:
 - **Gen 28**: Jacob dreamt at Bethel - ladder from heaven to earth - means of God's descent to man - so **"Home of (Beth) God (El)"** - God is here.
 - **Gen 35**: Jacob also received his new name, **Israel**, at a second visit to Bethel.
- God came to Jacob, proclaiming himself, revealing himself - and that changed Jacob, and the direction of his life.
- **God was there - and Jacob was changed**:
 - from a man with a **shady past**, at the first encounter, to a man with a **future and a purpose in God**;
 - from **Jacob to Israel**, at the second encounter - the name change in part granting a new **assurance** of his status before God.
- Years later pilgrims trekked to Bethel, **ostensibly to meet with God**.
 - **but their lives were not changed by him!**
- Look at **5:6-13** - the lives lived by these "worshippers":
 - the twisting of justice
 - the hatred of anyone who stood up for what is right and true
 - the oppression of the poor, the persecution, the bribery...
- However much they might have **sung the hymns** associated with Bethel (**and perhaps vs.8/9 is a verse out of one of them!**), made appropriate **animal sacrifices**, unless their **relationship with God** was sorted, they were doomed.
- They **said they went to meet with God** - but lived lives that excluded that possibility.

Beer-sheba: place of God's presence

- Second shrine was at **Beer-sheba**, way down in the south of Judah - c.40 miles over the border, certainly a couple of days journey south on foot, maybe more.
- **Abraham/Isaac/Jacob**: "God is with you in all that you do...."
- Pilgrims thought that **God would be with them** if/when went to Beer-sheba.

- But God's presence is linked with living God's way....
 - coming into his presence is down to his grace;
 - but **living in his presence should burn away evil.**
- These people longed for "**the day of the Lord**" - sounded full of promise - not realising **what it would be like to dwell in God's holy presence.**
 - like a man who runs from a **lion**, only to meet a **bear!**
 - like a man who puts his hand on the wall, only to be bitten by a snake!

Gilgal: place of God's promise

- Third shrine was at **Gilgal**, place of **first camp** when Joshua and people came over the Jordan, before taking Jericho - **base camp for expedition to conquer the land.**
- As such **linked** in people's thinking with God's promise of a **good inheritance**, a land flowing with milk and honey.
- **Worship there proclaimed being God's people in God's land.**
- But, again, **God's promise is linked to living God's way:**
 - coming into our true inheritance, citizenship of heaven, is down to his grace;
 - but **living as if we are citizens of heaven should be the result**, not self-satisfied, feel-good festivals.
- God wants people who are living for him, not putting on an act or a show.
 - with **justice** and **righteousness** welling up inside his people, **flowing from a vibrant, living relationship with himself! (5:24)**
- Incidentally, chorus of "**O Lord, the clouds are gathering**" (sang first week we studied Amos) comes from here in Amos:
 - Have mercy Lord.... Forgive us Lord....**
 - Restore us Lord, revive Your Church again.**
 - Let justice flow.... Like rivers....**
 - And righteousness like a never failing stream.**

Relationship, not Religiosity, through Repentance

- **Three shrines** - three places where God was encountered....
- And yet a people who "**worshipped**" at these 3 shrines and **failed to encounter God.**

What was going wrong?

- They were building their relationship with God on the **wrong footing.**
- They were building on **religiosity**, on outward things.
- What Amos was calling them back to, even as he proclaimed these fierce judgements, was **repentance.**
 - ...Read 5:4, 5:14-15, 5:24**
- Repentance involves a turning away from evil, consciously, continually, consistently; an on-going fight to have nothing to do with that which is wrong; a deep confession, not a shallow, generalised admission of guilt.
- **Needs always to be the basis on which we come to God:**
 - but we have a tendency to drift away...
 - ...for such honesty and humility hurts our pride.
- In many ways **repentance is an attitude, rather than an act.**
- An attitude the church in every generation needs to re-learn:
 - not just for **others** but for each of us here, an attitude of repentance is the seed of a strong, growing, healthy relationship with God.
 - **pray God it would be so!**