

Prayer

Visit us today, Lord God with Your awesome power.
Judge our sins, and lead us on a pathway of repentance,
Break through our presumptions and show us Your will,
And open up the way for us to follow in Your service.
Visit us today, Lord God, and do such a work amongst us
That we will give You glory for the rest of our lives! AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Each time you eat or drink, say a prayer of thanks to God for His provision

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who suffer disasters.** *Pray for areas of the world where people suffers storm and hurricane damage*
- *Give thanks for faithful friends*
- *Pray for those in Northern Ireland and the UK, as they come to terms with the 'Bloody Sunday' report. Pray that the fallout from this will be handled well*

Meditation

Show us Your glorious power O Lord!
Come to the help of those in real need.

Come to the aid of the poor and disadvantaged,
Raise them up and show them Your love!

Come to the aid of Your downtrodden people,
Renew Your church and rekindle its zeal!

Come to the aid of the sick and distressed,
Restore them; touch, heal and deliver!

Come to the aid of those who do not know You,
Rescue them, love them, and lead them to faith!

Come to the aid of Your people who wait for You,
Revive their hope and prepare them for glory!

When You act in Your glorious power, O Lord
All things become possible, here and in heaven.

Bible passage – Amos 1:9-15

⁹ This is what the LORD says: 'For three crimes of Tyre and for four, I will not withdraw the punishment, because they handed over whole groups of captives to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of kinship. ¹⁰ So I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, and it will consume her citadels.'

¹¹ This is what the LORD says: 'For three crimes of Edom and for four, I will not withdraw the punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword and threw away all pity, his anger raged continually, and he held on to his wrath forever. ¹² So I will send a fire upon Teman, and it will consume the strongholds of Bozrah.'

¹³ This is what the LORD says: 'For three crimes of the Ammonites and for four, I will not withdraw the punishment, because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, simply

to enlarge their border. ¹⁴ So I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it will consume her strongholds amidst the clamour of battle and with raging anger on the day of judgement. ¹⁵ Their king shall go into exile, he and his princes together,' says the LORD.

Bible Study

Review

Amos condemns the crimes of Tyre, Edom and the Ammonites. None of the nations surrounding Israel could stand before the judgement of God

This passage of scripture is certainly not easy reading, because these words were meant to shock. In three terse prophecies, Amos condemned three nations on the borders of Israel for a variety of sins, including slave trading (1:9), sustained rage (1:11) and war atrocities (1:13). The Lord's punishment in each case would be to bring 'fire' to each nation and undermine its authority and military power (1:10,12,14,15).

Now, if we were to open our Bibles and read these verses without looking at the rest of Amos' prophecies then we would indeed be bemused. These three short prophecies pronounce God's just judgment on some terrible sins, but it is hard to imagine why Amos went to northern Israel to give them. Israelites would have been glad to hear such denunciations of their neighbouring nations, with whom they often had difficult relationships. But surely, if God had given Amos special messages about other nations, then they should have been taken to those people. So why did Amos deliver them to Israel?

We will find out the full answer to this question tomorrow, but we must keep the question in mind as we study the text. Amos had come from his homelands of Tekoa (1:1) to preach at one of the sanctuaries of Israel, probably Bethel (7:10,13 etc), and those who heard him would probably have approved of his denunciation of the nations. So as Amos began to speak, the first impressions he made were favourable!

Having begun with prophecies against Damascus and Gaza (1:3-8), the prophecies in today's reading continue to address states which directly bordered on Judah and Israel. Here, Amos riles against the three states of Tyre (1:9,10), Edom (1:11,12) and Ammon (1:13-15). You will see in the map of the region provided below the general position of each of the nations or 'city-states' surrounding Israel and Judah.



Looking at the map makes everything clearer, and it is not such a wild thought for us to guess at what Amos is doing; he seems to be giving a series of prophecies whilst leading up to a greater message. But although we know there is more to come, we must still look carefully at what Amos prophesies for each of the nations in today's reading.

It is impossible for us to know exactly what happened between Israel and the surrounding states in the middle of the eighth century BC, and what lies behind these prophecies. Their details hold clues to incidents, skirmishes and atrocities not recorded in scripture or elsewhere. In general, it seems that the rich merchants of Tyre had broken their agreements with nations and begun to trade people into slavery (1:9,10), and such injustice threatened the stability of the region. The nation of Edom was descended from Jacob's brother Esau, but long term relationships between Israel and Edom were poor; it seems that Edom was still jealous of Israel and had conducted aggressive military raids into Israel and Judah (1:11,12). Lastly, the Ammonites had committed acts of unspeakable humanitarian outrage (1:13-15) in the midst of war. Amos' prophetic condemnation of such things is plain; God brings judgement on all nations who act with deception, injustice and lack of regard for human life. The penalty for such things is the same as found previously for Gaza and Damascus; God will bring down the authority of these nations, as it says here, 'by fire'.

As we read these prophecies, we can imagine a crowd of Israelites listening to Amos at the sanctuary at Bethel (see yesterday's study). The preacher prophet was a stranger from the south until he began to raise people's interest in this way. The tension mounts, and nods of agreement accompany Amos' words as he castigates the nations for the terrible things they have done against Israel. His message is appreciated, and the crowd grows. As he speaks out God's judgement on each nation, we can almost hear shouts of approval!

But Amos was drawing near to the climax of his presentation, and he had succeeded in his primary aim, which was to raise a crowd. The northern Israelites were listening to him, and he was biding his time. He was about to unleash on them his real message, as we will soon discover in chapter 2!

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- The condemnation of Tyre, Edom and Ammon
- The punishments of Tyre, Edom and Ammon

Notes on the text and translation

V9 'covenant of kinship'

In various places within the Old Testament, we read about God's covenant with His people. The term 'covenant', however, is a general word for an agreement, and this is what it means here. Clearly, our passage refers to an agreement between Israel and the city / nation of Tyre which is described as a 'covenant of kinship'. Such an agreement may have been in operation for a number of reasons, but from the days of Solomon onwards, Israel (and also Judah) tended to trade with Tyre and there was little war between them because of mutual commercial commitment.

V10 'citadels'

The word used here is usually translated 'strongholds'. However, Tyre was an important trade centre but was not strongly fortified and had little military backing, keeping its peace by negotiation rather than warfare. It seems more appropriate to refer to 'citadels', that is, fortresses for show rather than effective military strongholds.

V11 'throw away all pity'

Other translations:

'stifling all compassion' (NIV)

'cast off all pity' (NRSV)

The word translated 'pity' or 'compassion' is the Hebrew 'racham', meaning 'belly'. In ancient thought, the root of all feeling was believed to lie in the belly, or, as we might say, 'in the guts'. Amos mentions feelings here because the dispute between Edom and Israel is a dispute between brothers (see study). A familial bond has been broken.

Going Deeper

The condemnation of Tyre, Edom and Ammon

1. **Tyre** The port of Tyre stands on the Mediterranean shores, and it has been a trading centre for the whole region for longer than is known. In the eighth century BC, Tyre was like a small state, run from the city itself, and was not occupied or dominated by a larger power. The entire region depended upon trade that came through the port from the rest of the Mediterranean, and the city used its position to advantage, and many of its occupants became very wealthy. It was therefore able to dominate trade agreements, and the other nations including Israel and Judah, had to accept its terms. For example, if kings wanted quality wood from Lebanon, or spices from other regions of the Mediterranean, then it came through Tyre, and with little competition, they could exact whatever rate could be paid. There is ample archaeological evidence of such trade in the region for thousands of years.

Amos denounces Tyre because *'they handed over whole groups of captives to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of kinship'* (1:9). This sentence is a little difficult to unpick, but it could refer to two separate sins, one of 'handing over groups of captives', which sounds like one aspect of the slave trade, certainly, some form of human trafficking. The second part of the sentence then refers to a 'covenant of kinship', which might have been some kind of commercial agreement, or a special arrangement between Tyre and Israel acknowledging their historic relationship (see Solomon's use of Tyre in building the Temple – 1 Kings 5:1f.).

Some who have studied this passage suggest that both halves of this sentence go together, and Tyre is condemned for breaking an agreement with Israel to provide them with slave labour, and sending slaves to Edom rather than to Israel! This may seem to be a reasonable explanation of what is said, but it hardly sounds right for God to condemn Tyre for failing to supply Israel with slaves! It is perhaps best to think of these as two separate issues deserving condemnation.

2. **Edom** The people of Israel are the descendants of Jacob and the Edomites are the direct descendants of Esau, Jacob's older twin brother. Enmity existed from the beginning between Esau and Jacob, because Isaac's inheritance, including God's covenant, should normally have been given to the older twin brother. However, Jacob tricked Esau out of his inheritance at his mother's behest and against the will of his father Isaac (Genesis 27,28). Later in life, Jacob made peace with his brother Esau (Genesis 33), but in the following centuries, there was little peace between Israel and Edom (e.g. Numbers 20).

The specific crime of Edom stated here by Amos is that of pursuing his brother (that is, Israel) with the sword. Undoubtedly, this means that there were incursions or other military actions on the borders between Israel and Edom, and Amos accuses Edom of being the aggressor. Amos also states the historic reason for this instability on the border, which is jealousy. He says, Edom *'threw away all pity, his anger raged continually, and he held his wrath forever'* (1:11). The threat of Edom is not so much violent as persistent, but this is just as much an offence.

3. **Ammon** The people of Ammon lived on the eastern side of the Jordan. Now when Israel came to the Promised Land and entered Canaan by crossing the Jordan, several tribes decided to take their chances settling on the east of the Jordan, and part of this is a region called 'Gilead'. In the light of all this, the accusation against the Ammonites here in Amos becomes clearer. It seems that atrocities had taken place on the east of the Jordan, as the Ammonites attempted to take back from Israel some of the tribal lands they believed to be theirs.

Throughout history, atrocities have taken place in times of war, and to this day, militias in some parts of Africa commit appalling atrocities on isolated village communities in order to intimidate people and gain ground. In recent decades, similar things have happened in Europe, in Bosnia and Macedonia, and they continue the world over. From ancient times to this, men have committed outrages on women and children, and this is the clear root of the evil highlighted here, *'they ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, simply to enlarge their border'* (1:13). It should be no surprise to us to read in Scripture that God abhors such things. Indeed, if Scripture did not say this, it would surely be lacking. Such heinous crimes are indeed 'crimes against humanity', and as Amos says, the ultimate judgement against them is God's judgement.

The punishments of Tyre, Edom and Ammon

The punishments meted out by God to Tyre and Edom are remarkably similar. God says that He will *'send a fire'* on the *'wall of Tyre'* (1:10) and *'upon Teman'* (1:12). On first reading, this sounds like a retaliatory act of war instigated by God, who punishes sinners according to their sins. However, the Bible frequently refers to fire when describing God Himself, who appears to the people of Israel in flames of fire (Ex 13:21,22, 40:38). The theme of judgement by fire is also found elsewhere in the Old Testament, where it refers to purification, and this implies an intent on God's part to deal with Tyre and Edom with judgement, but perhaps not with total destruction. Note that Amos prophesies that each of them will be *'consumed'* by God's judgement, and no more. In comparison with the punishments meted out to the other states in this series of prophecies, this

seems less strident than the punishments given, for example, to Ammon (see next). This may be because Tyre was not regarded as a long term enemy of Israel, and Edom was Israel's brother, despite the enmity.

There is a clear difference between the punishment by fire pronounced on Tyre and Edom, and the more extended punishment pronounced for Ammon. God's abhorrence at the violence of Ammon is more pronounced, because this was an attack on the integrity of Israel herself. Violence leading to the death of pregnant women and unborn children was no mere war atrocity; it compromised the future of Israel in the entire region. Indeed, these actions were taken precisely to try and put a stop, practically and symbolically, to the population of the area with Israelites. This is the punishment;

So I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it will consume her strongholds amidst the clamour of battle and with raging anger on the day of judgement. Their king shall go into exile, he and his princes together,' says the LORD (1:14, 15)

Along with sending fire (in common with the punishments of other nations), Ammon is punished with a clear threat of war and battle, after which the king of Ammon will 'go into Exile' (1:15). Moreover, the exile of the King of Ammon, together with his princes, suggests a wholesale destruction of Ammonite society as then known.

It would be many decades before Israel herself was carted off to exile in Assyria and a century and a half before Judah was exiled to Babylon, but it is interesting to see that Amos here prophesies exile as a general punishment for the sins of the nations. Later prophets (such as Isaiah) also spoke about exile as a punishment for Israel's sins, and by the time Isaiah used the idea, it is reasonable to think that he did indeed believe that Jerusalem would be exiled one day because of her sins (Isaiah 39). I say this because in recent years, the idea that Isaiah could have foreseen the exile of Judah has been scorned as improbable. It is in fact quite feasible.

Application

It is easy to read through this passage of Amos quickly, knowing that it is part of a sequence of prophecies building up to something more important. The temptation is to sit lightly to what it says while waiting for the more important material still to come. While it is right to understand how the prophecy of Amos works to build up to a climax, it is wrong to say that these prophecies have little value of themselves. Together with those against Gaza and Damascus, they are a reminder that although God is primarily concerned with His plan of salvation and the people through whom He works, His eyes are always on the world.

In the same way as He did centuries ago, God looks out on the world today and watches while evil happens, and He stands ready to judge. We must watch too and see what He sees; women who are abused and children who are massacred, whether in war or through the domination of demagogues whose oppression slaughters millions in their own homes without war being declared, or through social oppression even within so-called 'rich' countries. The devil always seeks new ways to reach the same ends; unhappiness, oppression, depression and death. He is the enemy of humanity and the enemy of God, and God alone is our Saviour.

After tomorrow's reading, Amos will thrust us back into the world of God's relationship with His people, where Christians today feel that they can comfortably relate to what Scripture says. Here in this passage, we stand at the edges of faith, looking at how God relates to the world. It may seem to us today that the rest of the world goes on without any interest from God, while the devil plays his games with the godless, in a manner that is of little concern to the church (that is, unless people are converted). God's people are called to more, and it is wise of us to appreciate Scripture's revelation that God is always concerned about what happens in the world.

Much of the time, events unfold in our world in what seems to be a godless manner. But from time to time, if our eyes are open, we will notice that God is in fact deeply involved and interested in the fate of all His creation. We might like Him to intervene in this or that circumstance, but God's interest goes far deeper than 'fixing things' in a simplistic sense. He wants us to be involved with Him in influencing what happens in the world for good, just as parliamentarians in the UK and US have worked to ban all forms of slavery and prejudice over decades, perhaps centuries. Such work can be the true beginning of large scale evangelism, instead of church-based schemes, let us interaction with the world as we know it, personally, honestly and with our faith held high. Then, our God will use us.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss the features of these prophecies which most speak of world life today.
2. These prophecies describe God acting directly in judgement. Can you give examples of how God does this same thing today?
3. Is it possible for us to rid the world of war and inhumanity by operating good national and international politics? If not, why do people try?

Personal comments by author

When I read about the terrible wars and war crimes in Old Testament times, I am reminded that although we have the benefits of so much technology, science and education today, we still cannot avoid confrontation and war. On any day, life might seem very peaceful for many of us who live a comfortable lifestyle in the West, but it does not take much of a search on the internet to discover the truth about the atrocities happening in our own lifetimes, and I often ask the question, where is God in all this? In my experience, I do not always perceive what God is doing, but I know I must always look. The real dangers come when I cease to be aware of the world and ignore the fact that God is deeply concerned about it.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Try making a list of the injustices you see around you in your own country. Imagine you are Amos, try to imagine what God must think of each situation and write down a prophecy of God in the style of Amos, which addresses each situation. You may find this exercise taxing, but it will make you think carefully about how God responds to injustice in His world.*
- *Pray for those who seek to work for justice in countries of the world where there is little respect for law. Pray for changes that will bring freedom and justice to countries that need to hear the Gospel.*

Final Prayer

Dear Lord and Father. Keep us safe from the dreadful injustices which exist in our world, even within apparently safe nations which seem to be at peace. Give us ears to hear what You would say about these, and voices to declare Your Word about them. We ask this in Your name: AMEN
