

## **THE PROPHET OF JUSTICE, PART 1**

### **Amos 1:1-3:8**

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Amos 1:1-3:8 (NIV)

“The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—what he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel. He said: ‘The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.’ This is what the LORD says: ‘For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth, I will send fire upon the house of Hazael that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad. I will break down the gate of Damascus; I will destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven and the one who holds the scepter in Beth Eden. The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir,’ says the LORD. This is what the LORD says: ‘For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom, I will send fire upon the walls of Gaza that will consume her fortresses. I will destroy the king of Ashdod and the one who holds the scepter in Ashkelon. I will turn my hand against Ekron, till the last of the Philistines is dead,’ says the Sovereign LORD. This is what the LORD says: ‘For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, disregarding a treaty of brotherhood, I will send fire upon the walls of Tyre that will consume her fortresses.’ This is what the LORD says: ‘For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because he pursued his brother with a sword, stifling all compassion, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked, I will send fire upon Teman that will consume the fortresses of Bozrah.’ This

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is what the LORD says: ‘For three sins of Ammon, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders, I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah that will consume her fortresses amid war cries on the day of battle, amid violent winds on a stormy day. Her king will go into exile, he and his officials together,’ says the LORD. This is what the LORD says: ‘For three sins of Moab, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because he burned, as if to lime, the bones of Edom’s king, I will send fire upon Moab that will consume the fortresses of Kerioth. Moab will go down in great tumult amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet. I will destroy her ruler and kill all her officials with him,’ says the LORD. This is what the LORD says: ‘For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because 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, I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem.’ This is what the LORD says: ‘For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines. I destroyed the Amorite before them, though he was tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks. I destroyed his fruit above and his roots below. I brought you up out of Egypt, and I led you forty years in the desert to give you the land of the Amorites. I also raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazirites from among your young men. Is this not true, people of Israel?’ declares the LORD. ‘But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy. Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain. The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength, and the

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warrior will not save his life. The archer will not stand his ground, the fleet-footed soldier will not get away, and the horseman will not save his life. Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day,' declares the LORD. Hear this word the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel—against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt: 'You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.' Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? Does a lion roar in the thicket when he has no prey? Does he growl in his den when he has caught nothing? Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground where no snare has been set? Does a trap spring up from the earth when there is nothing to catch? When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it? Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken—who can but prophesy?"

I've indicated that during the summer months I would give a series on the Minor Prophets.

They're not called minor within the Scripture itself. The name "minor" simply derives from the fact that they did not write as much as the Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. The message, however, is by no means minor.

Today we'll simply look at chapter 1:1 through 3:8 which constitutes the first sermon that Amos preached. There are some three sermons and an epilogue in the book. In the first verse he simply introduces us to himself, who he was, where he came from, and when he lived or prophesied. He is identified as Amos who was among the shepherds of Tekoa. In chapter 7 he will identify himself also as a dresser of sycamore trees. That is probably a particular tree that is not equivalent to the sycamore today but gave forth rather poor figs that were eaten by rather poor persons. He was therefore an agriculturist and a shepherd. He therefore was not a person who

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had been schooled formally for ministry. He is a layperson who is called by God to bring a message to a nation.

He identifies himself as being from Tekoa. This bears importance on Amos' message, for Tekoa was a small place about 10 miles south of Jerusalem and the center of Amos' ministry took place at Bethel. In Amos' day he lived in a period of time when the kingdoms of Israel to the north and Judah were divided. Amos was brought up in the southern part, the country of Judah. His prophecy would take him north to Bethel, which was called "the king's sanctuary." It was the place where the king of the north, Jeroboam, had caused a golden calf to be built. And the worship of false gods and the worship of God were intertwined. To this spot, perhaps, at a time of great pilgrimage when masses of pilgrims came to the area to offer sacrifices and worship—at this particular time Amos is summoned to come from the south and to preach to the north.

It was no easy thing to do. Much like an American going to Canada and saying, "The judgment of God is coming upon Canada." There's enough problems in America without telling Canada what's going to happen to it. So Amos is a person who will be ministering—I would call him a charismatic prophet who was resisted by an ecclesiastical priest. The encounter really comes to a head in Amos 7 where in this "king's sanctuary" the upholder of the establishment, a man by the name of Amaziah, tells Amos to get out of town. Amaziah represents ecclesiastical ideas or the institution of the church. Or the institution of religion where a priest or minister owes his appointment not to God but to man. Where he speaks not to please God but to please man.

Where the anointing for his task has not come from the hand of God, but he simply exists to serve whomever it was who appointed him.

That conflict has been a part of religious experience and the church for all these many centuries: the institution—the ecclesiastic—and the person upon whom the Lord has breathed His Spirit—

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the charismatic, the one who is endowed by the Spirit of God to speak and owes his message not to man's voice but to God's call.

It is to this place of Bethel, the house of God, where Jacob had long ago met with God at the ladder that ascended to heaven, this ancient shrine that had now become perverted, this place where Amos comes to minister in the days, he says, of Uzziah and Jeroboam. This would place him at mid-eighth century before Christ. That's 2,800 years ago.

In this period of time in which he lived his country and the country to the north, Israel, were in relative prosperity and political stability. For a period of about seven decades Assyria, the great threat to the north, had been not exercising its influence in the field of Palestine because it had political problems at home. As a result, this Northern Kingdom of Israel which Amos has ministered to has been able to enlarge its borders under King Jeroboam, who brought great prosperity and riches and peace to his country. But Jeroboam's heart, as we learn from Kings, was far from God. For he worshipped idols and followed in the ways of his forefathers in not seeking to serve God with all his heart.

In this time of what appeared to be temporal success there was a warning on the horizon in the message of Amos. At the time Amos ministers, Jonah, if he were still living, would be now an old man. Living also in Israel at this time would be a young man by the name of Hosea who had not yet prophesied. Living to the south in Judah would be two other young men, Isaiah and Micah, who had not yet prophesied. Amos would be the first of these great eighth-century prophets who would speak forth the Word of God in such a way that they are still remembered and revered.

Amos also indicates that his message came two years before the earthquake. An earthquake, by the way, that was so severe that three and a half centuries later people were still talking about it.

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For the prophet Zachariah, writing around the year 500, says that the coming of the Lord when He stands on the Mount of Olives and that the shaking of the Mount of Olives will be like the earthquake in the day of Uzziah, king of Judah. When you remember that in those days they didn't write history books and publish them freely like they do now, and also much of history was communicated orally from generation to generation, you have to know that he prophesied at a time when there was an earthquake so great that people were still talking about it three and a half centuries later.

I think there's something dramatic also in Amos' identifying himself as two years before the earthquake because when he first gave his prophecy it was verbally or orally. Later when he returned home he had probably reduced it to writing. It may have been that between the oral giving of the message and the writing of it down there was the earthquake. And since Amos has a great phrase which says, "The lion roars and the Lord roars," it's not hard to imagine that he has associated this earthquake as a preliminary roaring or judgment from God.

In 1:2 through 3:8 is his first sermon—"The Lion's Roar" we might call it, or "God's Judgment on the Nations." It begins by saying, "The LORD roars from Zion," and the sermon ends in 3:8 by saying, "The lion has roared—who will not fear? The LORD God has spoken—who can but prophesy?" The Lord roars and the lion roars.

In this verse, too, which is at the outset of the judgment of the nations, Amos is indicating the imminence of the judgment of the Lord. It is a continuous present tense which he is using. The Lord is roaring from Zion. Amos is a shepherd. He knows something about a lion's roar and what it means. We don't know a great deal about being struck really much about a lion's roar because most of us have seen lions either on television where they're relatively harmless (we don't get too scared watching that) or we've seen them at the zoo. It's quite a frightful thing

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however to be alone out in the field where there are a pack of lions and to hear the lion roar.

Nothing could be so destructive on the human mind than being caught out in the field with a lion roaring. Shepherd that he was, Amos knew that the sign of the lion's roar meant that he was springing to a prey. His roar was the roar immediately before the kill. Because there was the roar, there would be the kill. Therefore he is saying, "The Lord roars." It is the roar before His judgment.

What Amos was also saying is that whenever and wherever these same crimes are committed the Lord is roaring again.

Amos has been given a unique gift by God to work himself into the heart of the people. God gives a tremendous degree of wisdom to His prophets and to His apostles. Amos has come up from the south to preach to the north. He is a foreigner, a southerner. His message is not going to be too well received. So he starts out with a review kind of a roll call of the nations around Israel. He talks about seven of them on which God's judgments are going to occur. The first three he speaks of are not related ethnically to Israel at all. Then nations four, five, and six are relatives, cousins of Israel. And nation seven, Judah, is the brother of Israel.

He goes in that order. It would be equivalent of someone coming to a modern audience in America and saying, "God is going to judge Russia. God is going to judge China. God is going to judge Cambodia." And on and on through the list. We're applauding—"They're going to get it!" That's kind of what Amos does with this crowd. His real message is for Israel, but to get to the message he begins to state some true things about what God is going to do to the nations round. So by using this very tactful approach he gets the ear of the people. And, in effect, God allows him to set the people up for a real thunderous message to their own hearts. They who

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cheered that God would bring His judgment on others must also reckon that God will bring His judgment on us.

A continual refrain, therefore, that Amos uses through this message is “for three transgressions and for four I will not revoke the punishment.” For each nation he repeats that. It is a poetic or prophetic device that is used to say, “Three transgressions would have been enough to incur God’s judgment. Three transgressions would have been enough to make the judgment certain.

But there are more than three. There are four. That makes the judgment beyond question.”

Also, the fact that God has waited until there are four transgressions manifests the fact that when God acts in judgment He never acts in haste. Nor does He ever act without cause. God always is deliberate and God is always on time. “For three, for four.”

As Amos, therefore, starts in his roll call of the nations he first selects Syria (1:3–5) represented by its headquarters city, Damascus. Syria is to be judged because of its primary sin of threshing Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. Gilead was the part of Israel to the east of the Jordan. The reference to threshing sledges is represented by the fact that in the agriculture of the day these threshing machines were made of curved slabs drawn rapidly by horses over heaped corn.

Attached as part of the curved slabs were studded sharp iron teeth that threshed out the grain and chopped the straw into little bits.

The reference of Syrians threshing Gilead is not simply to the crop harvest. It is the fact that they used the threshing device to tread over human beings. For as Elisha had prophesied, Hazael, the king of Syria some years before—he said of Hazael that he would slay Israel’s young men with a sword and dash in pieces their little ones and rip up women with child. So what Syria’s being judged for is its barbaric war machine which had no thought of innocent life, which had no



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thought at all but to commit atrocities. Amos cries out the message that God will judge nations who engage in atrocities. That wherever atrocity occurs the Lord is roaring again.

He comes next to talk about Philistia, represented in its chief city Gaza (verses 6–8). Its crime is that it carried into exile a whole people and delivered them to Edom. Its crime was not against Israel. Its crime was against humanity and its crime was participating in slave trading and slave traffic. Therefore we learn that the judgment of God is called forth. When one person uses another person for his own material advantage and gain, that is the essence of slavery. To simply use another person without consideration of their needs or rights as a human being. To use them and abuse them for one's own personal profit.

He comes next to Phoenicia to the north, represented by the headquarter city of Tyre (verses 9-10). Its crime is like that of Philistia, for it is also engaging in slave trading. The judgments promised by Amos all came to pass within a couple of centuries after the writing of this prophecy. Tyre is to be judged. And what is true of all the nations is represented in Tyre. Fire will come out against them and devour them. The fire here is a poetic phrase describing war. Or invasion or the conquering of another army.

The next three nations recounted by Amos are cousins to Israel: Edom, who is really descended from Esau; Ammon and Moab, who are the children of Lot by the incestuous relationship with his daughters.

Against Edom (verses 11-12) there would be judgment because in its warfare it cast off mercy and blazed with hostility and uncontrolled anger. Against Ammon, in chapter 1:13–15, that judgment would be because of its atrocity. It ripped up pregnant women in order to enlarge its borders for the sheer reason of territorial aggrandizement. The adding to the geographical area

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that one nation owns. For that reason it thought it had the right to rip up women with child. For that atrocity the nation would be judged.

And for Moab, in 2:1–3, it would be judged because of desecration of the dead. “He burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom.” Here we see that Ammon is judged for war on unborn babies, but Moab is judged because it made war on a corpse. Either idea was reprehensible to the normal kinds of decencies that are required of mankind.

In these first six nations we see demonstrated universal war principles which, when violated, will incur God’s judgment. These nations did not have the written revelation of God. But they had the moral revelation of God written in their hearts. Their sins are different from Judah and Israel which the prophet will go on to enunciate. For the sins of these first six nations are sins of foreign relations, sins of breaking of treaty, sins of war and atrocity. While Israel and Judah’s sins are civil and domestic sins, the sins of the first six nations are the atrocities of barbarianism, wanton war, massacre, sacrilege. But Judah and Israel’s sins are the sins within society itself. The rich abusing the poor, justice being bribed, the innocent being seduced, personal impurity and the abuse of resources. We may be sure when we look at these six nations that when God moves in judgment upon the world He will let no nation stand who has violated basic moral principles. The atrocities committed merit the judgment of God. As strong as particular nations seem to be, because atrocities are committed and violation is given against basic humane laws written in the heart of man, God will move against the nation and that nation cannot stand.

It must have seemed difficult for those hearing Amos’ message to imagine a time when Syria, Philistia, and the other countries would have their backs broken. But God rules the nations of the world. He will not let go unpunished these horrible atrocities and acts of violence. He will deal with terrorism in the world.

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To Judah there is a different message. By now Amos' audience is on the edge of their seats. They are ready for God to sentence Judah—their blood brother enemy. Somehow you always feel the strongest if you turn against someone who is close to you. And against Judah, Amos pronounces the judgment that they have sinned in attitude, sinned in action, and become alienated from God. In attitude they have rejected the law of the Lord. In action they have broken His statutes. In alienation they have walked astray following lies, as did their fathers. This nation which had the law of Moses and the Psalms of David and the Temple of Solomon, in attitude, action, and alienation, went away from God. Therefore fire or invasion would come upon Judah as well. Now Amos' audience hoped for the conclusion of his sermon. They find, instead, that it is only the beginning. The rest of his message pertains to them. To Israel and to their shrine at Bethel the house of God. In 2:6–16 Amos prophesies against Israel. He prophesies against their sins (verses 6–8.) Their sins which involve both moral sins and spiritual sins. What are the moral sins? The moral sins are that they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes. It may refer to one of two things. It may be referring to the bribery of justice of the cause of the haves against the cause of the have-nots. It's so small a thing as a pair of shoes would be weighty enough to turn the eyes of a judge blind so that he would determine the case by virtue of the graft. Or it may simply be a reference to the fact that trading in human slavery, brother to brother, was so great that a poor person was counted only worth as much as a pair of shoes. Against this moral sin God would act. They trampled the head of the poor into the dust of the earth. One commentator has said, "So lustful were the haves toward the property of the earth that they even wanted the dust that was on the poor man's head because that amount of dust they wanted as their property also."

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The moral sins are also seen in the fact that a man and his father go into the same maiden and defile the holy name of God. This is a reference to the kind of religious prostitution that occurred in the shrine of Bethel with its golden calf and with its borrowing of pagan practices.

Their spiritual sins in verse 8—they lay themselves down beside every altar upon garments taken in pledge. The striking phrase coming from Old Testament law written during the time of Moses which said that you cannot take as security a man's coat. It was a wise provision because a coat in biblical days was worn both in the daytime as an overcoat and at night as a blanket. The most expensive thing a poor person had was his coat. Therefore it could not be taken as security for a loan. If it was taken it must be returned in the day it was taken because the poor man will need it at night. But here is a person so callus and indifferent to the needs of others that he can sleep around the altar of God on the coat that he has taken from another person and not even be bothered by the fact that that person is spending the night cold and shaking and hurting while he is on his coat. And all of that in the place of worship. Callus disregard for God and for man.

Furthermore, the moral sin is seen in that they drink in the house of God the wine of those who had been fined. They even take the holy things and use them for their own personal satiation.

Moral and spiritual sins. Augmented by sacrilege. Verses 9–12 of Amos 2 speak of the sacrilege of the people. God starts off in verses 9–11 by reviewing what He has done for Israel. He has brought them from Egypt, and the first people they conquer—which is representative of all their enemies—were the Amorites. Once they were safe in the land, God gave them Nazirites, persons who had certain vows including abstinence of the drinking of strong drink or wine. These Nazirites were given to feed the stream of purity and the holiness within the nation. God gave them prophets that the Word might ever be living to the people. But what had the nation done?

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They made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets saying, “You shall not prophesy.” Complete sacrilege.

They make the Nazirites to sin and break their vows and make the prophets to shut up.

Therefore, Amos says, the judgment of God is certain. Verse 13 describes the divine action of that judgment: “I will press you down in your place as a cart full of sheaves presses down.” Here is the image of a huge hay wagon loaded to the hilt. That’s Israel. It is piled high and it’s piled heavy for destruction. When the destruction of God comes, Amos indicates in verse 14, that natural ability will be useless. In verse 15, military equipment will be useless. And in verse 16, courage will be useless. All the things that normally win wars are now useless. Natural ability—the ability, for example, to run and the ability to be strong. Those have now fled. The ability to use military equipment, like using a bow or riding a horse or being swift on foot. These are gone. The man who has courage, the warrior who is kind of a superman, he will find no power because when the divine judgment comes it is inevitable and nothing can stay it.

Therefore, in 3:1–8 Amos speaks of the certainty of the lion’s roar and the certainty of the judgment against Israel. He indicates in verses 1 and 2 that privilege brings responsibility when he declares, “Oh people of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt...” This now embraces Israel and Judah because all were the redeemed people “...you only have I known among the families of the earth.” “You only have I known”—this is not to say that God does not intellectually take cognizance of the other nations. He does. But this idea of “known” is “known” in terms of relationship. Israel had the living Word of God coming through it that it might bless the nations. It chose to make that living Word stagnant within its midst. “You only have I known.” Why? “Then will you be judged. I will punish you for your iniquities.” The phrase that is key is the fact that privilege brings responsibilities. That being

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known of God means, therefore, not some kind of easy, cheap grace, an easy believism, an easy security. A kind of religion as a crutch or religion as a byword. But God was calling for a vital one-to-one experience and relationship, and the nation had parted from it. Privilege brings responsibility, and the responsibility had not been accepted.

In verses 3–8, Amos, in the certainty of the lion’s roar, traces a series of rhetorical questions which show a relationship between cause and effect. His whole purpose is to show that when calamity falls upon a city it is caused by God. And when a prophet speaks it is caused because God has spoken to him first. Therefore, through some of the most incredible literary devices and imageries he sets before us a picture. For example, he says, “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” The effect is that two are walking together. The cause is that they agreed to walk together. The fact that Israel and God are not walking together must be traced back to the cause—who decided not to walk with God? It was Israel. He traces the cause-and-effect relationship in terms of predators. What is the cause of a lion roaring? It is because he has prey. What is the cause of a young lion crying out in the den? It is because he has taken something. What is the cause of a bird falling into a snare on the earth? It is because there was a trap. What is the cause of a trumpet being blown in the city summoning the people to war and defense? It is because the people are afraid. Why does evil befall a city? Evil, here, not in the moral sense but in the sense of calamity. Why does calamity come? It is because, Amos is saying, the Lord has done it.

“Surely the LORD God does nothing without revealing his secrets to his prophets. The lion has roared. Who will not fear? The LORD God has spoken. Who can but prophesy?” (verses 7-8).

With this certainty of cause and effect, Amos is prepared at that moment to confront the people who have gathered with his essential message—prepare to meet thy God.

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We've done a great deal of historical sketching and looking at the stuff that makes up Amos' message. But we would be neglectful if we did not attempt to apply Amos to our life situation and where we are at in this present moment. The four strong applications that this passage makes to my own life, and I trust to yours as well. Four ways I have asked the Holy Spirit to give me wisdom to be able to take this message and break it for your life and mine.

#### **I. One of the ways God speaks to us is with tough confronting love.**

God has various ways in which He speaks to us. Sometimes through the tender message of a Hosea who is winning us and wooing us with words of love. Sometimes the message of Jesus who sets the children on His lap and speaks tenderly to them. But sometimes, as well, the stern message of a father who cares enough about us that he's willing to confront us with some tough conditions and some tough terms and some unequivocal demands which call for change in us. It is a fantastic thing in life to come against the reality of God and to be confronted by the toughness of His love. Not a weak, namby-pamby love, but a love that has requirements because it seeks our best welfare. If God is confronting us from time to time with His tough love it is also necessary that from time to time we confront one another with tough love. In the home with a mate or with children. In family relations. In employer-employee relations. In church relations. There are occasions when "It doesn't matter" is of no account. Or where simply ignoring a situation is no good. That the wrong which is being done needs to be met with the courage of a prophet, of a person upon whom there is the love of God but who says to the offending party, "You are wrong. And you cannot continue. You cannot continue being pleasing to God with the shallowness that is in your heart, with the bitterness that is in your life, with the unforgiving spirit which you have towards someone else. With the unhealed kind of conditions which are in your life which are festering because of sin and disobedience." A tough love which God

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confronts us with in order to precipitate change in our lives. For God's message to the prophet is not simply to announce judgment but to give us the opportunity before the judgment comes to avoid it. It's the whole impact of the prophetic word.

### **II. Another application which comes to me from the Book of Amos: Is anyone hurting because of me?**

Am I selling the needy for a pair of shoes? That is to say, am I trampling on someone? Is there someone close to me whose freedom and whose needs I have been violating and walking upon? They are still hurting because I have not taken the time to be with them or taken the time to see the healing of the situation with which have been involved. When I stand before my God, am I at the same time prepared to stand before the closest other to me, the closest person to me, the persons near me, and say with good conscience before them and God, "All is well"? Or am I a cause of hurt? Am I a cause of stumbling and grief?

### **III. Is my relationship with the Lord a relationship in name only, or is it a relationship of vitality?**

Israel for centuries knew its traditions and knew its laws and knew its God. It became so familiar with the religious things that, over a period of time, its relationship to God became lip service in name only. One of the real dangers of a spiritual life, a walk with God, that over a period of years, unless we are careful to renew the streams of vitality and service and spirituality, we find that we wind up having a profession of God but no active faith. There are things that come along which cause us to embrace a relationship with the Lord in name only as in ancient Israel and not in spirit and in truth.

One of the relationship things that I have found happen sometimes in the body of Christ is a thing that is very deep and very severe and very regretful. That is, sometimes among believers



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there are hurts. Sometimes persons come and say, “In a previous church situation I was hurt. Something happened to me. I determined that I’ll go on walking with the Lord in my own way, but never again do I want to become involved in His work or in His body.” If that kind of thing is allowed to develop it will over the course of the years gradually build such a layer of isolation around our soul that we wind up wondering what happened to our joy, what happened to the lilt of our service with God. And gradually and slowly—it didn’t happen overnight but it happened over a period of time—a relationship with God has become a relationship of verbalisms only and not of life and reality and service.

Through the prophet God speaks to us and says, “Much privilege brings much responsibility. If I’ve given you blessings, it’s that they might flow from you. If I’ve given you opportunities, it’s that you might serve. If I’ve given you the Spirit, it’s that you might rejoice and be empowered. I’ve given you My blessings not to just simply sit, but I’ve given you My blessings to participate with Me in My work.”

#### **IV. The last thing I see coming from Amos by way of application is that God’s discipline or God’s judgment are always preceded by warning.**

The Lord is not capricious but, in His great patience, gives us time and gives us warning. That is the burden of Amos. His real burden is not simply to say to Israel, “Judgment is coming.” Amos does not seem to be enjoying this word. Anyone who has ever had to confront anyone in love knows that it is no fun to confront. It is no fun to announce that discipline is coming. The reason why the message is announced is that there might be repentance, for that is the hope within every prophet. And the test by which all prophecy, even current prophecy, should be judged. If prophecy leaves out any opportunity for repentance and the change of conditions, I question its value as a real prophetic word from God.

## **THE PROPHET OF JUSTICE, PART 1**

### **Amos 1:1-3:8**

Thus we come this morning to hear and be influenced by the Word of God. It may be that while you're here today you're in this position. We seek to induce no false guilt. The church has had enough of persons trying to make people feel guilty. It may be that it is so that, as I am preaching and you've looked over your life and you say, "Praise God, there's no one I can think of that is being hurt because of my life of carelessness or abusiveness. My relationship with the Lord is not inactive; it's active. And the Lord has given to me a relationship which is sacred and wonderful and my heart is right." I say thanks be unto God.

But I say also that if you can't say those things, God has sent me to you this morning with a message and a warning. And with an admonition to come right and come clean and build your life in the presence of God so that in the day when He judges you may stand.

### **Closing Prayer**

Father, You know my heart and my nature and what I'm normally about. Before You I can honestly say that as I have closed sermons I have sought to leave people with a word of hope rather than a word of condemnation. You've come to save the world. We have proceeded this morning—your Spirit has taken us—in a direction which has sought out to root out indifferences, callousness, broken relationships in our life. We would not simply end with the convicting work of Your Spirit. We would be grateful that You care enough about us to confront us. That You love us so deeply You will yet speak to us. That we have not gone beyond the day of grace. And that there is beautiful restoration that awaits us as Your children if we will heed Your voice and respond to Your call. Lord, Thou knowest. Thou who gave the Word. Thou who didst inspire it art now taking that Word and breaking that Word and making it living to each of our hearts so that we know within our inner man what is there of You. And what may be there that is not of You. That we might look at it and confess it and, in doing so, be healed and forgiven and

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renewed. Let us be renewed in Your Spirit today and built up in our faith that we might be found as people who do Your will and who walk with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.