

June 20

Amos 1-4

Hey hey hey and welcome to June 20<sup>th</sup> installment of Project 4:4. My name is Lisa Ashton and I am back to bring you the accelerators over none other than Famous Amos. And I have with me a box of Famous Amos cookies to commemorate this special day. I noticed that on the box this cookie was perfected in 1975...well rewind about 2700 years and we have the book of Amos that was written in about 750/760 BC. Now if you are like me, up until this point you didn't know much about the book of Amos. My hope is after the next 3 days you will have a good handle on some key points from this minor prophet...and I say minor not because he isn't important but because the book is much shorter in length than some of our other prophetic books, such as Isaiah.

Today you read Amos chapter 1-4. And to give you some background info on Famous Amos, he was from the hometown of Takoa which was in Judah about 6 miles south of Bethlehem. This is an interesting point to make because he actually prophesied to the Northern Kingdom while Uzziah was reigning in Judah, and Jeroboam II was on Israel's throne.

What is also unique about Amos is that he wasn't a full blown prophet per say like Isaiah, but the text says that he was a shepherd! And not only did he tend sheep but he took care of sycamore-fig trees as well. We will talk more about this on day 3, but for now suffice it to say, God called him out of his regular job to prophesy in His name.

To begin today I wanted to bring your attention to the strategy Amos used in speaking against the iniquities of the people of God in Israel. He got their attention and even their approval by first delivering a message of God's judgment against their traditional enemies.

### **Show map**

Before heading into a brief description of each of their wrongs I, also wanted to address the literary formula Amos used to introduce each set of judgments. You may ask, "What's up with the repetitive "three sins and even four"? What this literary pattern seems to be suggesting is that Israel's neighbors had committed enough wrongs against the Lord and had been given ample opportunities to repent that God was just to finally intervene and bring judgment upon them. "I gave you three chances to repent and you didn't and now you've sinned the fourth time..."

Alright so our first nation Amos pronounces judgment upon is Syria. He is speaking against Damascus, its capital, and recalling the evil committed by Hazael and Ben Hadad, those perpetual adversaries of Israel. The brutalities of the Syrian kings were well known -- they had "threshed" Israel -- and God had seen. Threshing was a process by which flint-studded platforms would be pulled over the crop as a way to separate the chaff from the grain. It was a method to extract profit. Whether literally, or figuratively still implied that Syria was mistreating people as things to get a profit.

Next came the Philistines. Gaza was their principal city. Their participation in the slave trade -- selling whole communities full of people was the crime for which they are here indicted. God's pronouncement of judgment on the slave traders is a clear indication of what he thinks of the institution of slavery.

There is next in the list of Israel's enemies who have earned the wrath of an angry God who Amos compares to a roaring lion, Tyre. Tyre had been Israel's ally in Solomon's time and even later during Ahab's reign. But Tyre had ignored the treaty of brotherhood -- It had broken its word to Israel. The involvement of this city/state in the slave trade was also reprehensible to God.

Edom comes next. The object of Obadiah's dire prophecies and the recipient of all of the slaves from Philistia and Tyre. Whether Edom had acquired an unquenchable thirst for slaves -- perhaps to build those rock fortresses or, as is more likely, because she sat upon the trade routes and served as the middleman selling off the slaves to nations is unclear. But Edom also is implicated in the slave trade. The final straw of judgment against Edom, however, according to Amos, was the hatred which Edom cherished against Israel and the actions which Edom periodically engaged in to vent that hatred against the people of God.

Ammon and Moab were also enemies of Israel and they round out the neighbors against whom God's judgment is pronounced. The city of Rabbah -- is today known as Amman, Jordan. War crimes do not go unnoticed by God and Ammon and Moab are condemned for their actions.

Through all of these pronouncements you can almost hear the Israelites cheering the prophet on. "This is great! God is going to take care of our enemies with a powerful display of His holy wrath against their sins! This is great!" They deserve it all! But Amos isn't finished.

Judah is up next. They have disobeyed God and worshipped false gods...an indictment not on their inhumanity like the other cities but on their violation of the law of the Lord...and more specifically the law of the Lord that they swore by oath to keep.

By now the cheers are gone as the pronouncements of God's judgments continue, Israel realizes they are up next. Amos mentions greed as a big problem in Israel. Greed that is coupled with a willingness to oppress the poor and weak if only the price is right. In other words the rich get richer at the expense of the poor. Sexual immorality, drunkenness and idolatry are here as well.

Moving on to the end of chapter 3 we see it was a time of great prosperity in Israel. We read about winter and summer houses -- apparently a significant proportion of the population was affluent enough to maintain more than one residence. Houses adorned with ivory. And peaking ahead in chapter 5 we read stone mansions have been constructed and lush vineyards are common.

Affluence then is a way of life and we see that social concern for the poor and even basic respect for truth and justice are totally lacking here. The women "oppress the poor and crush the needy." The righteous are oppressed and justice is denied by the giving and taking of bribes. This is what Israel is like when Amos comes to call.

Not only is their disregard for social justice a problem but the Lord was furious over their empty religiosity. They loudly proclaimed themselves to be worshippers of the God of Israel. They paid Him regular lip service. But, the Lord saw the reality of their hearts.

Let's take a look again at Amos 4:4-5 (Read) and I'll show you what I mean.

"Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings – boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do," declares the sovereign Lord.

Do you hear the bitter sarcasm in Amos' voice? You may remember that Jeroboam I had set up high places in Samaria for the worship of Jehovah. They were at Bethel, which means house of God, and Gilgal - two highly revered places in Israel. So in the days of the Divided Kingdom, if you wanted to worship the one true God in Samaria, you went to Bethel or Gilgal. They went there to pay their respects to the one true God, the God of Israel. They sacrificed and they tithed and they gave freewill offerings over and above their tithes. That means they did what was required and they even did more than was required in the area of sacrifices. And they sang hymns and songs of praise -- they had in short a very proper and -- in terms of form -- very excellent worship service. But God was not pleased, in fact God was not even interested by what they did. He was disgusted!! And despite the many warnings he had sent to them to get their attention God says, "YET, you have not returned to me." God was so zealous to have his people return to him. And we read he gave them multiple chances.

Well we covered a lot today. What sticks with me from our lesson in Amos are two things. One, God wants justice for the oppressed and demands compassion for the poor. And two, religious observances are empty and ineffective when loving actions are not present. Israel was all about the "religious show". They boasted and bragged and yet their hearts for all people did not reflect God's.

Let's be people of God who pursue justice. And let's be people whose hearts are wholly devoted to him....boasting in the Good News of Jesus...and not our religious good works.

Thanks for joining me today. See you tomorrow...and I think I am going to have another Famous Amos cookie.

