

Read Amos 1

He said, "The LORD roars from Zion and from Jerusalem He utters His voice; And the shepherds' pasture grounds mourn, and the summit of Carmel dries up." Amos 1:2

Lions are pretty amazing creatures. When I think of lions I think of huge predators with a ferocious roar. But that's not all that lions are about. In fact, lions are highly compassionate creatures. After a kill, male lions will allow the cubs of their pride (pack) to come in and eat as well. Lions often communicate with each other through nuzzling and purrs. But, when the hunt is on, lions take every advantage when intimidating their prey or enemies, and the roar of a lion is a distinctive sound meaning "your day is about to be very bad."

God's voice is described as a roar in this passage. In fact God's voice is described in many ways. It came as a still small voice to Elijah. Isaiah described it as the rushing of many waters. And Joel says that the Lord roars. God is so patient and compassionate, as any believer can attest to. Despite all our times of failure and disobedience, God continues to work through us when we come in repentance to Him. In this case, God is moving to action. These nations are receiving the consequences for their actions, and God is making it clear exactly why He is bringing judgment. God doesn't just abstractly punish people, but His punishment always comes with a purpose. **Is this your usual view of God? Do you see Him as the great punisher, or a great provider? God loves you, but you need to be obedient to His commands. His plans are for your good, but if you aren't choosing the God, then you may think that God is simply a God of judgment. In reality, God desires to bring good things into your life, but He will roar in your life if needed.**

Read Amos 2

But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and you commanded the prophets saying, 'You shall not prophesy!' Amos 2:12

There was a country music dance hall just outside the town I went to high school in. I had never gone there, because I really wasn't into country music dancing. But I had several friends who begged me to go with them, and I finally gave in. I knew the place didn't serve alcohol, but they clearly didn't mind people bringing it in. So several of my friends had beer and they kept pressing me to drink. Not only was I not a drinker, but I had told them this several times. One of them said, "But Heath, you'd be so funny drunk!" Needless to say, I spent the rest of my night driving my friends safely home.

The Nazirites were men who made a pledge of service to the Lord (Samson was one) and took on many restrictions in order to prove that pledge. Included in their call to service, was their choice to abstain from wine. But in God's judgment upon Israel, the Lord says that Israel made the Nazirites drink and also told prophets not to prophesy. Why? For the same reason my friends wanted me to drink...they felt better when everyone was in the same leaky boat together. They knew that they weren't making the best choice, but if a strong Christian was willing to compromise, then maybe they weren't so bad after all.

Israel's actions were much the same, trying to eliminate the zealous among them (Nazirites) and trying to eliminate God's messages to them (the prophets). **Are you leading people around you to compromise in their lives? Does the testimony of their life lead you to embarrassment? Or are there people around you pushing you towards compromise? Then you may need to do what I did that night...care for your friends, but make the conscious choice to not put yourself into those positions again. Compromise is fine for pizza toppings, but that's about it.**

Read Amos 3

Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment? Amos 3:3

My greatest childhood paradox was this: I don't like the dentist, but sometimes he gets me out of school. I had a plethora of dental problems (mainly from not brushing) so the dentist was rarely a good experience for me. But, there were those occasions when I got to miss school in order to go to an appointment. And in all my years of going to the dentist, I don't ever remember going there without an appointment. My mom never swung the car into the dentist's office just to say hi. We needed to have an appointment.

Here in Amos, God is speaking about His relationship to Israel, and mentions the necessity of an appointment in verse 3. Does this mean that I can only pray or seek God at certain times of the day or week? The Bible is clear that we have constant access to the Father by the blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:16). The meaning is that we should schedule appointments with God. In the morning, I have an appointment to hear His words from the Bible, and in the evening I have an appointment to speak to Him through prayer. I also take other times throughout my day to enjoy the relationship I have with God, but those are my main times. When we fail to have any appointments, then we are less likely to honor God. We find ourselves never praying for wisdom beforehand, but hurriedly throwing a prayer up during a moment of trial that we were unprepared for. God is capable, and often willing to answer us in those hurried moments, but if we have failed to keep or make any other appointments with him, the answers may be slow in coming or not make much sense to us. **Do you have regular appointments you keep with God? You have them with work or school, setting times and places that you must be. Why not do the same thing in your relationship with God. Commit right now to set appointments with the Bible and with prayer.**

Read Amos 4

Offer a thank offering also from that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, make them known. For so you love to do, you sons of Israel," declares the Lord GOD. Amos 4:5

I'm amazed at the sacrifices that Christians make...to put their children in recreational sports. I've seen kids who are gone every single weekend, never attending church, but attending tournaments with 2-3 games of baseball, basketball, or football in a day. I see the zeal that these parents pursue sports with, and I wonder what their families would be like if they gave that energy towards spiritual things. God calls us as parents to present our children as offerings to the Lord, that we would train them to serve Him. But how can

they take that call seriously, if the only goal they've been pushed towards is the fleeting glory of athletics?

God tells Israel, who should be offering up to Him, to keep doing what they're doing. They have been offering up not just offerings, but freewill offerings to foreign gods. These offerings are above and beyond what they would normally give. And yet to God, they don't give even a fraction of what they owe Him. And these people don't just give, but they do so in a way to receive recognition. But is being recognized for temporal things ever going to bring satisfaction? There is nothing wrong with excelling in what we do, but when we concentrate on excelling in the world instead of in the Kingdom of God, we have missed the boat. **What offerings are you giving to your idols? Just look at the way you spent your time today? What or whom did you place in priority over God? What benefits do you think you received? Because whatever we think we gain from our idols, pales in comparison to the riches that God wants to bestow on those who truly embrace a life of single-heartedly following Jesus. Are you giving above and beyond to everyone/thing other than the Lord of your life?**

Read Amos 5

Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, for what purpose *will* the day of the LORD *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light; Amos 5:18

Teenagers preparing for graduation always takes me back to the end of my own high school years. I was fairly sure of what I wanted to do and made a plan for how I wanted to go about it. And I see these kids, whether they have plans for after school or not, ready to be done with high school. For those who have planned their next steps, it makes sense that they would be anxious to start the next chapter of their lives. But what about the kid who has no idea what he's going to do next? Despite having no plan, he's just as anxious for the end of high school, even though it won't bring any great benefit. He'll have to decide on continuing school, getting a job, and keeping his parents off his back for sitting around the house. Suddenly, the prize of graduation becomes a nightmare.

Just as an unprepared graduate shouldn't be too anxious for graduation, these Israelites weren't prepared for God's return, yet were waiting on Him. Amos warns them that waiting on God without serving Him is worthless. Who knows why these unbelievers were watching for God's return. Maybe they wanted to see if He was really going to show up, or maybe they did so just to embarrass believers who were waiting on a God who had not returned. Peter wrote of this in 2 Peter 3:8-9 that there were people saying God doesn't exist because He hadn't returned. Peter said it's not that God doesn't exist, but He is patient waiting for more people to come to repentance. **When unbelievers make fun of believers waiting on the return of Jesus, how do you react? My dad once told me, "God doesn't need you to defend Him." While I certainly share my faith and reason for my hope, I don't have to get into a shouting match with those who do not believe. If they don't hear of the hope of salvation, then the return of Jesus that will be light to us, will be darkness to them. When people challenge your faith, don't write them off. We all resisted God at one time, just some more vigorously than others. Pray that God gives you words and patience to deal with such people.**

Read Amos 6

Do horses run on rocks? Or does one plow them with oxen? Yet you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood, Amos 6:12

When I got my first knife as a kid, I thought it was possibly the greatest moment of my life. I took that thing and used it constantly. Eventually I moved up to using it on small sticks and trees, and sometimes even stabbing it into the ground (it doesn't have to make sense...I was probably 9 or so). Over time I began to notice that my knife wasn't working as well as it used to. There were some real uses I had for it, like cutting hay bales open or opening feed sacks to feed our horses. Pretty soon, it took twice as long to cut things with it, and that's when I first learned that you could dull a knife.

Here in Amos we see a wide variety of misuses. Horses were not used on rocks, because unlike today, they didn't wear iron shoes. And while the hoof of a horse is pretty tough, running it on rocks is going to injure the animal. Any of these instances: an ox plowing rocks, justice being poison and righteousness being bitterness, are all examples of unexpected results. While my knife was intended for cutting, it was not intended to be used as an ax. In the same way, justice is not revenge, but they can often be confused for one another. Someone wrongs us, and so we look for how we can hurt them back. Righteousness becomes bitterness when people aren't living for the Lord, but living good lives for the recognition of men. We become dulled by the ungodly reactions of people, which often lead us to the same actions if we are not discerning. **What is being misused in your life? Is your prayer time a time of selfishness, or do you remember to lift up others? Do you seek to live a righteous life to please God, or to gain the adoration of people? Good things can often be used in a bad way. Let us today examine our motives for why we are doing what we are doing? Are we serving God or serving ourselves?**

Read Amos 7

The LORD changed His mind about this. "It shall not be," said the LORD. Amos 7:3

Politicians have it tough. Especially in our day and age of Youtube and cell phone videos, you can't say anything without someone having a recording of it. I've heard many politicians make statements, only to have a video played of themselves which contradicts what they've just said. But if the video is four years old, isn't there a chance that the person had a genuine change of heart? Are we not permitted to change our minds? I know there are issues that I changed or altered positions on over the last four years of my life.

Some people find these two instances of God changing His mind in Amos 7 as very confusing. The other place we saw this in Scripture was when Moses asked God to change His mind when He threatened to destroy Israel and start over with Moses in Exodus 32. However, I see a similar situation here in Amos. God makes a true declaration about what would happen to the people in a given situation. And then the prophet of the people (Moses and in this case Amos) makes a strong declaration for the

worthiness of God's people to be spared. The better reading of the Hebrew writing is not that God changed His mind, but that He "relented." It means He intended a punishment to occur as a result of behavior. But, as a result of repentance, God relented. It doesn't mean He didn't know what was happening. In each case, I believe He was making a forceful declaration in order to get His prophets to attach themselves to the people, and not to abandon them...just as God wasn't. **Do you pray on behalf of other people to God? Do you seek for God to do something different in your life? I realize that many times things didn't change in my life until I asked. God was aware of what I wanted to do, and obviously aware of how I was to be used. But, He was waiting on me to ask Him. God's mind isn't changed. He is simply patient enough to wait on us to catch up to His way of thinking.**

Read Amos 8

Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "When I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the LORD. Amos 8:11

Not a day goes by that I don't check sports scores or major news of the day. I'd like to consider myself well read and up to date with the world, but I also like knowing if my favorite sports teams won. When I go on my summer mission trips, and find myself without news for a week. There just isn't much time to find a newspaper or a tv, and I end up getting news overload when I get back to my normal routine. It's strange to realize the world keeps going on, even when I'm completely unaware of it.

After much reading, I'm convinced Amos prophesied very early in Israel's history, even before Judah was carried off to the land of Babylon. And at this time, Amos is prophesying that a famine will come when God's words will be unheard. Some think this happened during the time they were off in Babylon, but this seems more severe than even that. It seems to represent the time between the last prophet, Malachi, and the coming of John the Baptist 400 years later (the time between the Old and New Testaments). God knew what He was doing. He was dealing with a people who were barely hearing the message anyway, and so He cut it off so that the people would be desperate and ready to hear from God when John came. And John didn't just bring the words of God, but the announcement of the coming Messiah. This led to many people being ready to hear the teaching of Jesus, because they hadn't heard such powerful teaching in generations. And we have the Bible all around us, with several copies in our homes, and we find ourselves going through droughts of Bible reading. **Even as you started this study, there have been times you have been unfaithful to read every day. I know this, because I have had those same days. We get busy, and commit to get back to it tomorrow. But what if we didn't miss those days? What if we went about everyday, filled up on the words of God? We don't forget to eat physical food, so why spiritual? Laziness or we forget the value that comes from it. Let us be diligent so that we can lead others to the same diligence and close relationship that comes by the Word of God.**

Read Amos 9

Though they hide on the summit of Carmel, I will search them out and take them from there; And though they conceal themselves from My sight on the floor of the sea, from there I will command the serpent and it will bite them. Amos 9:3

Guy Smiley is a great name for a comedian, and that just happens to be his gig. Guy is from Texas and one of my favorite stories is when they used to play hide-n-seek as kids. He said that in that area of western Texas, the land was pretty desolate. Their town had a school, a store, and a tree. So when they'd play hide-n-seek, the person who was it would count, "...8...9...10...There you all are." There was nowhere to hide, so the games were somewhat pointless.

Here in Amos 9, as God's judgment comes, everyone tries to hide. Some go to the highest part of Mount Carmel to hide from God, but He finds them there. Some go to the floor of the sea, but He finds them there. Now clearly people weren't living on the ocean floor, but I believe that God was giving the people a very clear reminder from the book of Psalms. Psalms was the hymnbook of Israel, so those were the 150 chapters that people were most familiar with. And David writes in Psalm 139:7-9 that he cannot flee from the presence of God. God is with him if he ascends to the heights of heaven, or if he dwells in the remotest part of the sea. We cannot hide from God, and yet we attempt it. Just like Adam and Eve when they knew they had sinned hid from God, we often do the same thing. I'm not saying we should be proud of our sin, or live as if it's no big deal, but hiding from God is futile. He is everywhere! There is nowhere that I can be separate from Him, whether I am in righteousness or in sin. **Have you been hiding from God deliberately? Are you fearful of speaking with Him in your current sinful condition? Or have you been hiding without much thought to it? Have you been ignoring your prayer life or staying away from the fellowship of your church? If we have sin, it's no time to hide. We only build up guilt as we wait for the inevitable conversation with our Lord. But if we go right to Him, we find that He is a God of mercy and forgiveness. He will never condone our sin, but He is glad when we make the choice to come to Him in repentance. Stop hiding and believing the lies of the Devil...there's nothing you could ever do that would cause God to stop wanting you.**