

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

The Prophecies of Amos

Readings: *Amos 1:1-4:13*

Reflections:

- God's hatred of religion comes out with a vengeance in the prophecies of Amos. Here we see once again in the unfolding story of "what doesn't work" the clear declaration against Israel for all of their sins and the ongoing reality of God's punishment for their complete disobedience and depravity. It is painful to read over and over again how the dire consequences of Israel's sin simply do not bring about lasting heart change. They are punished severely and yet they do not change. Again, we may think of God as a tyrant for doing this but in fact He was very clear on the terms of the covenant with Israel and offered them every opportunity to live in dependence on him. What we see is not God unjustly bringing judgment of a nation, we see rather how deeply committed the human heart is to its own willful, self-centered independence and rebellion of God, regardless of the consequences. Again, this shows beyond any shadow of doubt that punishment and harsh consequences will not bring lasting heart change.
- Amos begins with the perfect set up to hook his hearers. We must remember that these prophecies were spoken to people rather than read by people. Amos begins by listing all the enemies of Israel and declaring God's judgment against them. The people of Israel no doubt were drawn in as each new enemy is announced and declared to be under God's judgment. Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moah...all these nations are declared to be under God's judgment. With each new enemy announced the listeners grow in excitement. "Yes! God, you judge those evildoers!" Until finally the next nation is announced. "For three sins of Judah..." What? Judah and then Israel are counted in this list and in fact Israel's list is the longest? No doubt this would have blown away Amos' listeners.
- Although Israel was chosen from all of the earth and they have agreed to walk together with God ("Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?") God's people are faced with the stark consequences of their persistent rebellion.
 - Israel's sin is horrible and widespread (2:6-10): They sell the poor into slavery, trample down those in need and deny them justice, sexually abuse

young women (probably slave girls), demand payments and fines through the Baal temple worship and then use them for their own comforts and pleasures.

- God is clearly announcing it. “Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”
- And what is the message? Although God has warned them through judgment, a new and much harsher judgment is coming. “You will be taken away with fishhooks...” The image is of Israel being taken away as an entire nation to become slaves of another nation. Amos in the coming chapters will make this plain. A nation that was at one time slaves and rescued from slavery (“I brought you up out of Egypt”) is now going to be led away again into slavery. And this is all after:
 - Receiving the law (clear rules and detailed outline of what is right and wrong);
 - Receiving the tabernacle and later, temple (a way to be forgiven, to connect with God and to hear him speak);
 - Entering the promised land (safety and security to be free to worship God without anyone to interfere);
 - Having a king, prophets and priests (spiritual leaders);
 - Experiencing the terrible consequences of rebellion (practical life experience to show that what God has said always comes true);
- Israel had all they needed to live a life devoted to God minus one thing— hearts that were humble and broken. They had everything external a person could want and yet none of it worked and now they were visibly going back into slavery. We will see one more flash of hope, one more brief season of Israel trying to get it right, almost like an alcoholic's last attempt to clean themselves up. But again, this won't last and within a short time, the prophets will go silent and Israel will end up as virtual slaves to the Roman Empire. From slavery to slavery is the life whose heart is bound by sin and self-centeredness. True freedom can only come when our heart is freed from its own selfish bent to “know - decide for myself - what is good and evil.” (Genesis 3:5)